Should Yorba Linda's city hall display, "In God We Trust"?

City Council is expected to discuss the idea Sept. 16.

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Yorba Linda may follow other Orange County cities by displaying the national motto, "In God We Trust," and most likely without a special election.

City staff is putting together a report, which will propose several different sites in the city for the motto to be displayed and how much it will cost. The plan is to present the report at the City Council's next meeting Sept. 16, said interim City Manager Bill Kelly.

While the report will be available for the public to review before the meeting, there is a very good chance the council will approve the motto without a special election, officials say.

"This is a decision that can be made by the council and most likely will be," Councilwoman Jan Horton said. "We'll have to wait for people to come back with bids … but there is overwhelming support for this to happen."

Resident Greg Gillaspy approached the council about getting "In God We Trust" displayed at City Hall during a Town Hall meeting. After the council's discussion of the motto at its last meeting in August, Gillaspy said his experiences as a Vietnam vet make him appreciate shows of patriotism.

"It was adopted by Congress as the national motto," he said. "By adopting that, our city would be showing our support for the nation."

Locations for the motto proposed during the council meeting were: in City Council Chambers, in the lobby area or somewhere inside City Hall.

All the council seems to be in favor of the putting the motto somewhere in City Hall.

"I'm ready to vote right now," said Councilman Allen Castellano after Councilman John Anderson made a motion to approve the motto.

"It's something that's gone on in other cities in Orange County," Anderson said. "I think that it is our heritage…it's the entire history of our country…It's our national motto and there's no shame in displaying it."
Horton said: "I think people forget sometimes that it's not just us making the decisions – it's a higher power…We are making a patriotic statement…we bow to a higher power and that we support our country and what the country was developed on."

In recent months, several Orange County cities – including Huntington Beach, San Clemente, Mission Viejo, Tustin, Cypress and Westminster – have chosen to display the motto. The Villa Park City Council voted in April to let residents decide the question on the November ballot.

But it's up to the City Council to place such an item on a ballot, Kelly said.

"Basically we're going to make sure we have it legally set up and there are no loose ends," Kelly said about the report staff is working on. "At this point, the council instructed us to prepare a resolution. Residents could vote on this, but it won't be in November … maybe a special election, but that's up to the council."

At their last meeting in August council members wanted to approve the agenda item, but Kelly asked the council to refer back to staff before voting on the motto.

"I think it's important," Horton said during the discussion on displaying the motto. "It's not specific to a god. It's your God, believing in a higher power. … It would be great to show a little patriotism in our community. I'm in support of putting this up anywhere we can."

"In God We Trust" first started appearing on U.S. coinage during the Civil War, when citizens petitioned then-Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase to recognize a higher power on the country's money. Most modern coins have shown the inscription, uninterrupted, since the early 20th century. Congress made the statement the national motto in 1956.

And what about those who say such a statement is violating the Constitutionally-mandated separation of church and state?

"If you're promoting a particular god – yes – but this is very generic," Gillaspy said. "This isn't forcing a belief on anybody."

Mayor Jim Winder added during discussion at the meeting that the city seal was not on display at City Hall. That item will also be considered by staff, to be brought forth at the council's Sept. 16 meeting.

Councilman Allan Castellano and Winder did not return phone calls for comment.

The City Council will meet at 6 p.m. Sept. 16 in Council Chambers at City Hall at 4845 Casa Loma Ave.

Reporter Michael Mello contributed to this report.