



# CITY OF SALEM

585 Liberty St SE  
Salem, OR 97301

## Staff Report

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File #: 22-156

Version: 1

Date: 7/11/2022

Item #: 5.c.

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**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**THROUGH:** Kristin Retherford, Interim City Manager

**FROM:** Norman Wright, Community Development Director

**SUBJECT:**

Selecting a new City flag.

Ward(s): All Wards

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

Result Area(s): Welcoming and Livable Community

**SUMMARY:**

The City Council will consider selecting a new City flag.

**ISSUE:**

Shall the City Council select a new City flag from the four flags submitted for consideration?

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Consider selecting a new City flag from the four flags submitted.

**FACTS AND FINDINGS:**

The Salem Planning Commission forwarded their recommendation to the City Council that a new City flag be selected. The City Council considered the Planning Commission's recommendation at their February 14, 2022 meeting and requested that the item return as an action item at a future date.

*Salem City Flag*

The City of Salem's flag was adopted in 1972 after a public design contest (**Attachment 1**). The City flag flies in Peace Plaza and hangs in Council Chambers. For decades it was also used as the City

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logo, prior to the adoption of *City of Salem At Your Service* and appears on many lampposts downtown. It is also the same design used for the Salem City Seal.

### *Salem Flag Project*

In 2020, Planning Commission Vice President Brian McKinley (2014-2021) created the Salem Flag Project. The purpose of the Salem Flag Project was to create and adopt a new flag for Salem through a flag contest. Flag submissions were accepted from September 2020 through July 2021. A total of 175 submissions were received from local and international submissions. A submissions committee made up of residents, North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) members, and national judges reviewed the submissions and evaluated them based on the NAVA design guidelines. Four finalists were sent to NAVA for a 1-10 judging and had about 110 ratings from flag enthusiasts all over the world.

Mr. McKinley took the top three finalists from the NAVA ratings and added the original judges favorite to come up with the four finalists (**Attachment 2**). The four finalists were presented to the Salem Planning Commission on November 16, 2021. The Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council consider adopting a new flag.

The Statesman Journal ran an online poll on the four finalists; the poll results are included in **Attachment 3**. Design A was overwhelming selected as the preferred new flag, with 51.95% of the vote. No information was provided regarding how many people voted.

### *Salem City Seal*

The Salem City seal is currently the same design as the City flag (SRC Chapter 1.210). The City seal is not required to be the same design and could remain as is, if a new flag is selected. Alternately, the City seal could be updated to match a new City flag for an estimated cost of \$300 - \$700.

### *Consideration of New Flag*

In 2017, a group of employees participating in the City's Executive Training Program (a management training program) were assigned to research the City flag and provide a recommendation regarding updating the City flag. The group reviewed standards for good flag design, interviewed a vexillologist (flag expert), interviewed members of the public about the existing flag, and provided recommendations on the process the City could use to update the flag.

The Executive Training Program's final report references North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), an international, non-profit, scholarly organization dedicated to vexillology, the study of flags, and their cultural, historical, political, and social significance. NAVA describes the principles of good municipal flag design for rating existing flags or designing new flags. Those design principles are:

1. Keep it Simple

2. Use Meaningful Symbolism
3. Use 2-3 Basic Colors
4. No Lettering or Seals
5. Be Distinctive or Be Related

NAVA uses these flag design principles to rate flags on 1-10 scale with 10 being the highest score. Salem's flag has a score of 4.71. NAVA's pamphlet "Good Flag, Bad Flag" is attached for reference (**Attachment 4**).

## **BACKGROUND:**

The City of Salem's flag was adopted in 1972 after a public contest. The new Vern Miller Civic Center, which is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, also opened in 1972. The adoption of a new City flag appears to have been intended to usher in a new era of Salem civic pride.

The flag contest, including radio and television advertising, was paid for by the Salem Federal Savings & Loan Association. A design consultant, Arvid Orbeck, was also hired to review the design submittals. Mr. Orbeck decided to combine features of several of the submitted designs to create a final design. Mr. Orbeck described the design as symbolizing the essence of the City of Salem through the star and capitol at the center. The four broad lines converging at the star are meant to represent how decisions made in Salem flow out of the city throughout Oregon. The colors symbolize the colors of the seasons: summer is blue/water; autumn is golden yellow; white is the winter but also peace and honor; and green reflects spring and eternal hope.

Mr. Orbeck's final design was submitted to a joint meeting of the Mayor's Flag Committee and City Council on May 4, 1972 and in August 1972 the Salem City Council adopted Ordinance 104-72 adopting the current flag as Salem's official municipal flag.

## **ALTERNATIVES:**

The City Council may take any of the following actions:

1. Select a new flag.
2. Conduct a new flag contest.
3. Take no action.

Lisa Anderson-Ogilvie, AICP  
Deputy Community Development Director

## Attachments:

1. City of Salem Flag
2. 2021 Salem Flag Project Finalists
3. Statesman Journal Flag Poll Results
4. NAVA *Good Flag, Bad Flag* Pamphlet

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