



Staff Report

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Date: 2/14/2022

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TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Steve Powers, City Manager

FROM: Salem Planning Commission

SUBJECT:

Planning Commission recommendation to consider adopting 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 Planning Commission is recommending that the City Council consider adopting a new City flag.

ISSUE:

Information Only.

RECOMMENDATION:

Information Only.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

The Salem Planning Commission is forwarding their recommendation to the City Council regarding the City's flag. The Planning Commission is recommending that the City Council consider adopting a new City flag. According to vexillology (flag) standards, Salem's flag ranks lower than many city flags in the United States because it does not fully adhere to the five basic principles of good flag design. A specific design is not recommended at this time; however, Commissioner McKinley is providing the City Council with the top four flags from a contest he held over the last year.

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 logo, prior to the adoption of *City of Salem At Your Service*.

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 group's final report, Salem Flag Handbook, is included as **Attachment 2**.

The Executive Training Program's final report references the 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 3**).

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, 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 all over the flag enthusiast world. Vice President McKinley took the top three finalists from the NAVA ratings and added the original judges favorite to come up with the four finalists (**Attachment 4**). 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 as **Attachment 5**.

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 50th 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.

Lisa Anderson-Ogilvie, AICP
Deputy Community Development Director

Attachments:

1. City of Salem Flag
2. *City of Salem Flag Handbook*, 2017 Executive Training Project
3. NAVA *Good Flag, Bad Flag* Pamphlet
4. 2021 Salem Flag Project Finalists
5. Statesman Journal Flag Poll Results