



## American city flag redesign: a welcome change

Edward B. (Ted) Kaye

### Abstract

*American cities are experiencing a wave of flag adoption and redesign, spurred by a 2015 TED Talk by Roman Mars, with dozens of initiatives springing up across the country. Resulting flags mainly show strong improvements in design, but the political process poses another major challenge. As Peter Ansoff, former president of NAVA, has opined: 'Designing the flag is the easy part ...'. This paper inventories recent US municipal flag-change efforts, evaluates their results, and explores the reasons for their successes or failures. The author compiled NAVA's flag-design guidebook *Good Flag, Bad Flag* and has advised many of the flag-change campaigns.*

### Introduction

Vexillologists generally study flags *after* their design and adoption. Seldom do we have clear insights into the design and adoption processes. Even less often do we have the opportunity to participate in or influence those processes.

NAVA, the North American Vexillological Association, published *American City Flags* in 2003,<sup>1</sup> followed by an Internet-based survey rating the design qualities of the 150 flags in the book.<sup>2</sup> While subsequent news coverage in nearly every city spurred discussion, only a handful of cities re-examined their flags, and even fewer actually changed them.

Soon afterwards, NAVA published *Good Flag, Bad Flag* in a redesigned web-friendly and hard-copy format.<sup>3</sup> That brought the basic principles of flag design to a mass audience for the first time.

But in 2015 a TED Talk by radio and podcast host Roman Mars triggered a wave of city flag design and redesign in the United States (and beyond). Titled 'Why city flags may be the worst-designed thing you've never noticed', the talk has been viewed well over 4 million times.<sup>4</sup> In it, he described the basic principles of

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1 John M. Purcell with James A. Croft and Rich Monahan, *American City Flags, 150 Flags from Akron to Yonkers*, in *Raven, a Journal of Vexillology*, 9-10 (2002-3), <https://nava.org/raven-volume-9-10>

2 Edward B. Kaye, 'The American City Flag Survey of 2004', *Raven*, 12 (2005), pp. 27–62, <https://nava.org/raven-volume-12>

3 Ted Kaye (comp.), *Good Flag, Bad Flag, How to Design a Great Flag* (North American Vexillological Association, 2006), [http://nava.org/digital-library/design/GFBF\\_English.pdf](http://nava.org/digital-library/design/GFBF_English.pdf)

4 Roman Mars, TED Talk (Vancouver, BC), March 2015, [https://www.ted.com/talks/roman\\_mars\\_why\\_city\\_flags\\_may\\_be\\_the\\_worst\\_designed\\_thing\\_you\\_ve\\_never\\_noticed](https://www.ted.com/talks/roman_mars_why_city_flags_may_be_the_worst_designed_thing_you_ve_never_noticed)



flag design as presented in *Good Flag, Bag Flag*, showed examples of successful and unsuccessful city flags, and concluded with a call for cities to improve their flags.

Mars asserted: 'There is a scourge of bad flags — and they must be stopped. That is the truth and that is the dare. The first step is to recognize that we have a problem.'<sup>5</sup> He continued:

I've seen first-hand what a good city flag can do in the case of Chicago. The marriage of good design and civic pride is something that we need in all places. The best part about municipal flags is that we own them. They are an open-source, publicly owned design language of the community. When they are done well, they are remixable, adaptable, and they are powerful. We could control the branding and graphical imagery of our cities with a good flag, but instead, by having bad flags we don't use, we cede that territory to sports teams and chambers of commerce and tourism boards ... But a great city flag is something that represents a city to its people — and its people to the world at large. And when that flag is a beautiful thing, that connection is a beautiful thing.<sup>6</sup>

As we move more and more into cities, the city flag will become not just a symbol of that city as a place, but also, it could become a symbol of how that city considers design itself, especially today, as the populace is becoming more design aware. And I think design awareness is at an all-time high. A well-designed flag could be seen as an indicator of how a city considers all of its design systems: its public transit, its parks, its signage. It might seem frivolous, but it's not.<sup>7</sup>

In my crusade to make flags of the world more beautiful, many listeners have taken it upon themselves to redesign their flags and look into the feasibility of getting them officially adopted. If you see your city flag and like it, fly it, even if it violates a design rule or two. I don't care. But if you don't see your city flag, maybe it doesn't exist, but maybe it does, and it just sucks, and I dare you to join the effort to try to change that.<sup>8</sup>

Over 70 US cities so far have answered that call. Watching, advising, and interacting with those efforts can provide vexillologists with an active laboratory of flag design and adoption.<sup>9</sup>

After NAVA published the results of its 2001 survey of US and Canadian state,

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5 Ibid., 8:03.

6 Ibid., 16:25.

7 Ibid., 16:34.

8 Ibid., 15:04.

9 Portland Flag Association, 'Municipal Flag Improvement', June 2017, <https://portlandflag.org/municipal-flag-improvement/>



provincial, and territorial flags,<sup>10</sup> I asserted a theory of state flag adoption which can be adapted to cities as well:

... the steps to actually getting a city flag changed to a successful design are:

- 1) Create public discontent with the flag or enthusiasm for change;
- 2) Get city government agreement that a change is necessary;
- 3) Create a process to receive designs;
- 4) Name a proper committee to judge them;
- 5) Have the city council vote yes/no.

Recent experience in US cities supports this theory.

### Status

This analysis is a dynamic process — new developments occur monthly — so any quantitative assessment is necessarily just a snapshot in time. However, we can generalise:

Currently, about half of the cities examined have flag-design efforts in the *idea* stage. In a sense, they don't count, as they have not found traction for progress. But they show who might initiate the process — sometimes a media figure, often a designer or an activist, and sometimes elected officials. These instigators often propose alternative designs.

Of the rest, about a quarter have active efforts *under way*, some with and some without the endorsement of the city government. The sponsors are sometimes individuals, a new group or an existing organisation (such as an arts commission, a community promotion agency, or a school), or even a city department.

Another quarter have nearly reached the end of the process — selecting a flag design — but have *stalled* at the finish line. These mostly reflect a lack of political groundwork, with minor exceptions.

But about half have succeeded, with flags *adopted*.

### Idea

The call for creating or redesigning a city flag can come from many directions.

Sometimes the idea comes from the media — often a newspaper reporter or columnist.

*Boston Globe* correspondent Ruth Graham called out the flag of **Boston, Massachusetts**, as a 'seal on a bedsheet' in a 2015 article published on Flag Day, titled 'Improving Boston's city flag'.<sup>11</sup> She cited NAVA's survey, *Good Flag, Bad*

10 Edward B. Kaye, 'Good Flag, Bad Flag and the Great NAVA Survey of 2001', *Raven*, 8 (2001), pp. 26–7, <https://nava.org/raven-volume-8>

11 Ruth Graham, 'Improving Boston's city flag', *Boston Globe* (Boston MA), 14 June 2015, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2015/06/13/improving->



Flag, and quoted three NAVA leaders. Then she called on readers to offer suggestions, providing a do-it-yourself guide sheet.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, blogger Tom Acitelli renewed the call for a new Boston flag, saying 'So many municipal flags are excruciatingly bland.'<sup>13</sup>



Boston MA: *existing flag*

In November 2015 Jeffrey Bradshaw wrote an opinion piece in the *University Star*, the student daily of Texas State University in **San Marcos, Texas**, calling the flag 'A banner of boringness'.<sup>14</sup> The following year, the city adopted a commemorative flag bearing the logo that became popular in the aftermath of the devastating Memorial Day flood, raising it on the first anniversary.<sup>15</sup> That flag will now fly alongside the city flag from May to October each year, in memory of the flood victims.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the city is considering a branding strategy that may examine updating the city flag.



San Marcos TX: *left, old flag, adopted 1989; right, new flag, adopted 2016*

Kyle J. Smith, a digital intern at radio station KCUR in **Kansas City, Missouri**, wrote online in April 2016: 'We redesigned Kansas City's flag — now pick your favorites.'<sup>17</sup> He posted the results of a podcast party — ten prospective redesigns of the city's flag. He was apparently unaware of a similar effort

[boston-city-flag/pSGLpo3Ef1jNiK4Ejtk8oL/story.html#](https://www.boston-city-flag.com/pSGLpo3Ef1jNiK4Ejtk8oL/story.html#)

12 'DIY: New Boston flag', *Boston Globe* (Boston MA), 14 June 2015, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2101855/diyflag.pdf>

13 Tom Acitelli, 'Boston's flag: How would you redesign?', Curbed.com website, blog post, 14 June 2017, <https://boston.curbed.com/2017/6/14/15799668/boston-flag-design>

14 Jeffrey Bradshaw, 'San Marcos flag a banner of boringness', *University Star*, (San Marcos TX), 11 November 2015, <https://star.txstate.edu/2015/11/11/san-marcos-flag-a-banner-of-boringness/>

15 Max Gorden, 'San Marcos unveiling commemorative flood flag', *Spectrum News* (Austin TX), 16 May 2016, <http://www.twcnews.com/tx/austin/news/2016/05/16/san-marcos-unveiling-commemorative-flood-flag.html>

16 'City to hold flag raising ceremony on flood anniversary', 13 May 2016, <http://www.sanmarcostx.gov/index.aspx?page=34&recordid=4271>

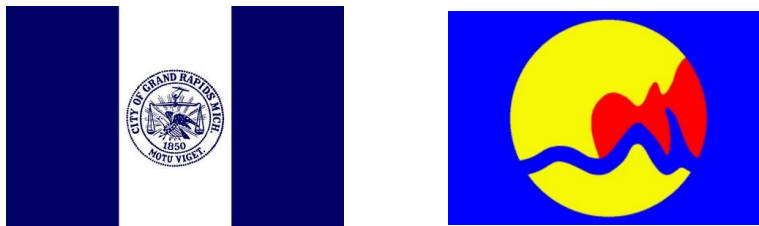


sponsored in 2005 by the *Kansas City Star*. (That posting apparently inspired a separate 2017 initiative, 'One City. One Flag' to create a single flag for the entire region: both Kansas Cities — Missouri and Kansas — and 14 counties.)<sup>18</sup>



Kansas City MO: *existing flag, adopted 1992*

In **Grand Rapids, Michigan**, *Grand Rapids Press* columnist Matt Vande Bunte asked in a 2015 post, 'Is this Grand Rapids flag one of the planet's "worst vexillological offenders?"'<sup>19</sup> He was actually referring to the city's banner, depicting the iconic Alexander Calder sculpture (*La Grande Vitesse*), and described by one observer as 'Ms. Pac Man after a bender'. He went on to quote John Purcell, lead author of *American City Flags*, describing the city's real flag as 'a traditional-type flag that doesn't do much for people'.



Grand Rapids MI: *left, old flag, adopted 1915; right, logo flag adopted 1982*

Jack Brubaker, a retired *LNP* staff writer, called for a review of **Lancaster, Pennsylvania's** flag in his column 'The Scribbler'.<sup>20</sup> He then learned of an effort under way at a design centre, Discerning Eye Center for the Arts, to hold a competition to redesign the flag.<sup>21</sup> That group is working with the Lancaster

17 Kyle J. Smith, 'We redesigned Kansas City's flag – now pick your favorites', *KCUR 89.3 (Kansas City MO)*, blog post, 1 April 2016, <http://kcur.org/post/we-redesigned-kansas-citys-flag-now-pick-your-favorites#stream/0>

18 'One City. One Flag', <http://www.oneflag.co/>

19 Matt Vande Bunte, 'Is this Grand Rapids flag one of the planet's "worst vexillological offenders"?', *MLive/Grand Rapids Press (Grand Rapids MI)*, 5 September 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/09/is\\_this\\_grand\\_rapids\\_flag\\_one.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2015/09/is_this_grand_rapids_flag_one.html)

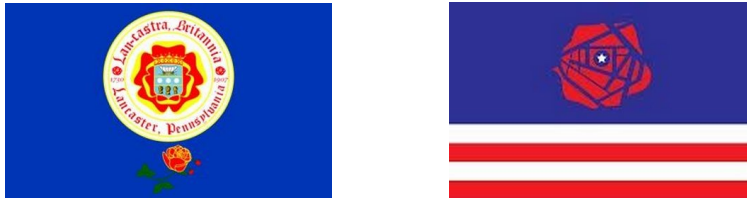
20 Jack Brubaker, 'Lancaster's grand — and complicated — old flag (Part 1 of 2)', *LancasterOnline (Lancaster PA)*, 17 November 2015, [http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/the-scribbler-lancaster-s-grand-and-complicated-old-flag-part/article\\_b900d9cc-8c77-11e5-b352-1bc75cc9d562.html](http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/the-scribbler-lancaster-s-grand-and-complicated-old-flag-part/article_b900d9cc-8c77-11e5-b352-1bc75cc9d562.html)

21 Jack Brubaker, 'Seeking a grandly simple new flag for Lancaster', *LancasterOnline (Lancaster PA)*, 20 November 2015,



Office of Promotion at city hall. It held a preliminary design round, receiving ten entries from graphic arts professionals, with a goal of a final flag in 2017.

Tracy Beyl, the city's public art manager, supported the venture, but said that none of the new designs will replace the 1907 flag for 'historical and official reasons'.



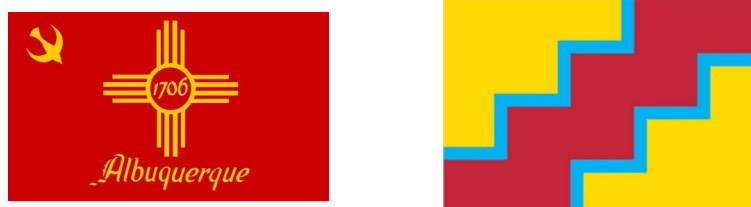
Lancaster PA: *left, existing flag, adopted 1907; right, 2015 proposal*

Sometimes the inspiration for flag redesign comes from a designer or artist, often with a proposed alternative.

For example, Gabe Re, an art director and graphic designer in **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, published a pitch for a new flag on his website in 2015.<sup>22</sup>

He identified the challenges with the current flag, saying 'We can do better' and proposed a stunning alternative.

However, after his initial excitement, he has put the effort on hold after finding no enthusiasm from city officials.



Albuquerque NM: *left, existing flag, adopted 1969; right, 2015 proposal*

In **Bryan, Texas**, minister and graphic designer Matthew Ortega challenged the current flag, which had been designed by a creative firm in Austin, and proposed a new design on his blog after seeing the TED Talk in 2015.<sup>23</sup>

He has apparently not pursued it further.

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[http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/the\\_scribbler/the-scribbler-seeking-a-grandly-simple-new-flag-for-lancaster/article\\_9b66a46c-8ec7-11e5-adaa-a353aa777117.html](http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/the_scribbler/the-scribbler-seeking-a-grandly-simple-new-flag-for-lancaster/article_9b66a46c-8ec7-11e5-adaa-a353aa777117.html)

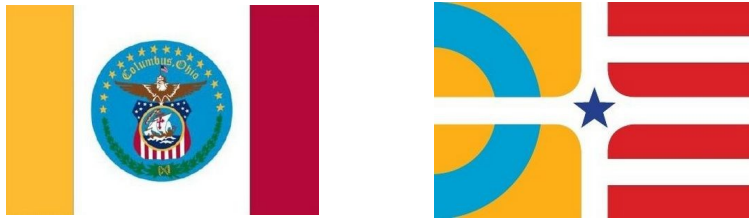
22 Gabe Re, 'Albuquerque is better than this', <http://www.gabere.com/Albuquerque-Flag-Redesign>

23 Matthew Ortega, 'Would you fly this flag?', *MOD BLOG*, blog post, 27 November 2015, <http://www.matthewortegadesign.com/my-blog/2015/11/27/would-you-fly-this-flag>



Bryan TX: *left, existing flag, adopted 2004; right, 2015 proposal*

Ohio State University design professor Paul J. Nini posted 'A ten-page proposal for a new flag for the city of **Columbus, Ohio**' on scribd, a subscription reading website, outlining his design process.<sup>24</sup> He quoted one supporter: 'Columbus deserves a flag as vibrant, innovative, and thoughtful as its citizenry', and promised to follow up with the mayor's office and members of the city council to advance his proposal.



Columbus OH: *left, existing flag, adopted 1929; right, 2015 proposal*

In **Bowling Green, Kentucky**, director and writer Nate Morguelan designed a new flag and promoted it extensively on Facebook, on 'The New Bowling Green Flag' page.<sup>25</sup> He printed up stickers and made t-shirts. The recent Trump-era 'fake news' reference to the 'Bowling Green Massacre' stimulated more flag use. Bowling Green Mayor Bruce Wilkerson said that Morguelan was welcome to make a presentation to the City Commission about the flag during the period for public comment at regular scheduled meetings.<sup>26</sup> He has not done so, but instead ran for city commissioner in 2016.



Bowling Green KY: *left, existing flag, adopted 1996; right, 2015 proposal*

24 Paul J. Nini, 'A proposal for a new City of Columbus Flag', <https://www.scribd.com/doc/288792895/Columbus-City-Flag-Proposal>

25 Nate Morguelan, 'The New Bowling Green Flag', June 24, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/newbgflag/>

26 Katie Brandenburg, 'Man proposes new Bowling Green flag', *Bowling Green Daily News* (Bowling Green KY), 1 August 2015, [http://www.bgdailynews.com/news/man-proposes-new-bowling-green-flag/article\\_6d08c826-3a8b-5f6b-a0c5-2c6eec8fbb86.html](http://www.bgdailynews.com/news/man-proposes-new-bowling-green-flag/article_6d08c826-3a8b-5f6b-a0c5-2c6eec8fbb86.html)



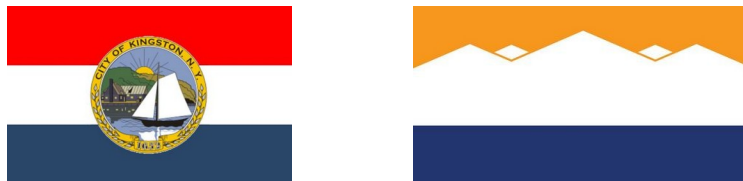
James Reyes, of **El Paso, Texas**, used Tumblr to propose a simplification of the city flag's existing design.<sup>27</sup> He wrote,

I eliminated the text, the seal elements like scrolls and wreaths and reduced it down to the sun and star that are right at the heart of the seal of the city. I further simplified the star design and then enlarged the sun and star. I felt the sun was a very appropriate symbol for the 'Sun City' and the star at the center represents El Paso's iconic star on the mountain as well as Texas's lone star. The blue background could represent El Paso's blue skies and/or the Rio Grande.



El Paso TX: *left, existing flag, adopted 1962; right, 2015 proposal*

In **Kingston, New York**, graphic artist and animator Shay Krasinski felt that 'people are desperate for a symbol of their city', and proposed a design for a new flag and promoted it on Facebook.<sup>28</sup> The city's director of communications responded, 'As always, the mayor appreciates community input and feedback ... if the flag were to be changed in any way, the mayor would implement a community-sourced design approach to ensure that the changes reflected the entire community's vision.'



Kingston NY: *left, existing flag, adopted 1984; right, 2016 proposal*

Graphic artist Michael Kriegshauser created a new flag concept for **Austin, Texas**, explicitly referencing the principles of flag design, 'something that's related to the state ... and yet still very unique and stands on its own'.<sup>29</sup> He posted it to the Austin sub-reddit under 'A better flag for Austin' and collected

27 James Reyes, 'A proposed redesign of the flag of the City of El Paso', 2015, <http://jamesreyes.tumblr.com/post/120409320491/a-proposed-redesign-of-the-flag-of-the-city-of-el>

28 Paul Kirby, 'Newcomer to Kingston proposes new flag for city', *Daily Freeman* (Kingston NY), 15 June 2016, <http://www.dailyfreeman.com/general-news/20160615/newcomer-to-kingston-proposes-new-flag-for-city>

29 Emilie Mutert, 'Could this become Austin's new city flag?', KUT 90.5 (Austin, TX), blog post, 25 August 2015, <http://kut.org/post/could-become-austins-new-city-flag>





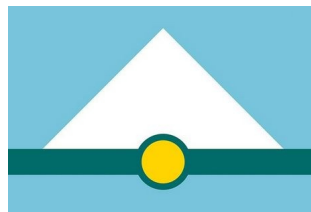
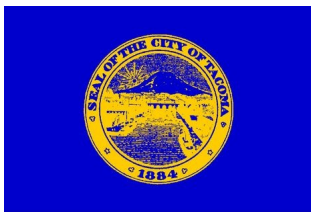
94 comments, mostly positive. University of Texas graphic design student Alec Rios also redesigned the city flag and reaped television coverage of his effort.<sup>30</sup> The mayor of Austin did not respond to media inquiries.



Austin TX: *left, existing flag, adopted 1919; below left, a 2015 proposal; below, a second proposal*



Graphic designer Chandler O'Leary, of **Tacoma, Washington**, developed a design for his city's flag for 'Union Tac', a 2012 group art show to develop community symbols, sponsored by the Fulcrum Gallery and the City of Tacoma Arts Commission.<sup>31</sup> In 2015 he posted the design on his website, explaining his creative process.<sup>32</sup>



Tacoma WA: *left, old flag, adopted 1991; right, new flag, adopted 2012*

**Los Angeles, California**, graphic designer Ian Williams launched a change.org petition calling on Mayor Eric Garcetti and members of the Los Angeles City Council to change the city's flag.<sup>33</sup> He urged support for 'a flag we can all be proud to fly, a flag to promote and represent our city, and unite millions of Angelenos throughout Los Angeles and around the world'. He has received 315 signatures since July 2015; although he has had little success in engaging city officials, he has not given up.

30 Claire Ricke and Kate Weidaw, 'Locals redesign City of Austin's flag', KXAN-TV (Austin TX), 15 September 2015, <http://kxan.com/2015/09/18/redesigning-the-city-of-austins-flag/>

31 Fulcrum Gallery, 'Union Tac', 18 October 2012, <http://www.fulcrumtacoma.com/shows-2/union-tac/>

32 Chandler O'Leary, 'Raise the flag', 21 May 2015, <http://chandleroleary.com/raise-the-flag/>

33 Ian Williams, 'A new flag for a new L.A.', 15 October 2015, <http://www.losangelesflag.org/>



Los Angeles CA: *existing flag, adopted 1931*

Sometimes activists advance the cause of redesign.

In 2016 Gregory Kula, a self-described 'passionate Clevelander', launched a change.org petition calling on Cuyahoga County and **Cleveland, Ohio**, to change Cleveland's flag.<sup>34</sup> He said, 'At a time where the city is attempting to go through a resurgence, the flag does not represent anything the city stands for.' He received 14 signatures.



Cleveland OH: *existing flag, adopted 1896*

In **Santa Clarita, California**, the 'I Heart SCVA' blogger with the nom-de-net of 'A Santa Claritan' decried 'The Abomination that is Santa Clarita's flag' in a 2015 post: '... we need a groundswell of support for a new flag. I think the easiest way to accomplish this is to (1) Obtain a copy of Santa Clarita's flag, and (2) Show it to people. The outrage will be immediate, visceral, and invigorating ... we just need to start opening residents' eyes to the horrors of the banner that is supposed to represent them and their fair city. To all those who heart [love] Santa Clarita, let us find a flag worthy of her name.'<sup>35</sup> He offered one design.



Santa Clarita CA: *left, existing flag, adopted 1996; right, 2015 proposal*

Jared Benckert, a student at Wake Forest in **Winston-Salem, North Carolina**, went straight to the city council in February 2017 and testified on why the city's

34 Gregory Kula, 'Help change Cleveland's flag!', petition, June 2016, <https://www.change.org/p/cleveland-and-cuyahoga-county-help-change-cleveland-ohio-s-flag>

35 A Santa Claritan, 'The abomination that is Santa Clarita's flag', blog post, 14 May 2015, <http://iheartscv.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-abomination-that-is-santa-claritas.html>



flag should be changed.<sup>36</sup> He said the flag looks like 'a blue mess with something in the middle'. He highlighted the city's WS logo, which appears on trash cans, saying that it was 'a shame how a trash can could invoke more feeling of pride in his city than its flag'. He and a colleague offered an example of a new design, to 'start conversations' in the city.<sup>37</sup>



Winston-Salem NC: *left, existing flag, adopted 1936; right, 2017 proposal*

Robert Creighton, now a graduate student out of state, proposed redesigning the flag of **Tampa, Florida**, in 2016, and followed up with a change.org petition and a website, where a survey showed 92 per cent support for flag change.<sup>38</sup>

Tampa city council member Mike Suarez said 'It has been bugging me for 10 years. Every time I see it, I think, what a god-awful ugly flag.' But Mayor Bob Buckhorn is not interested in change: 'The mayor has more pressing things to focus on than the flag right now,' said spokesperson Ashley Bauman.<sup>39</sup>



Tampa FL: *left, existing flag, adopted 1930; right, a 2017 proposal*

The appropriately-named Dallas May, a professional engineer, proposed a new

36 Wesley Young, 'Winston-Salem native calls for new city flag to replace "a blue mess with something in the middle"', *Winston-Salem Journal* (Winston-Salem NC), 23 February 2017, [http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/winston-salem-native-calls-for-new-city-flag-to-replace/article\\_88b2a7e4-88fd-5219-be03-82365b773c4b.html](http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/winston-salem-native-calls-for-new-city-flag-to-replace/article_88b2a7e4-88fd-5219-be03-82365b773c4b.html)

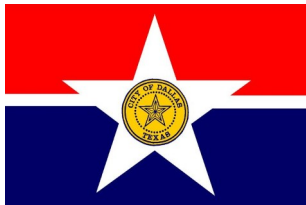
37 Amanda Wilcox, 'Students work to create a new Winston-Salem flag', *Old Gold & Black* (Wake Forest, Winston-Salem NC), 16 March 2017, <http://wfuogb.com/2017/03/students-work-to-create-a-new-winston-salem-flag/>

38 'Tampa: Every Great City Deserves a Great Flag', website, October 2015, <http://tampaflag.com/>

39 Christopher Spata, 'Did you know Tampa's flag is a "monstrosity"? No one else does, either', *Tampa Bay Times* (Tampa FL), 23 April 2017, <http://www.tampabay.com/features/humaninterest/did-you-know-tampas-flag-is-a-monstrosity-no-one-else-does-either/2321074>



flag for **Dallas, Texas**, through a Facebook page called 'Your Dallas Flag'.<sup>40</sup> *Dallas Magazine* evaluated it against the basic principles of flag design, under the title 'Why the Dallas City flag sucks'.<sup>41</sup> Exxon, successor to Mobil, objected to the use of its former logo, the pegasus, and the effort stalled. However, press coverage did lead to the rediscovery of the original 1916 Dallas flag, which a columnist promoted as an attractive alternative to the current flag.<sup>42</sup>



Dallas TX: left, existing flag, adopted 1967; right, 2015 proposal

William-Jose Velez, a biomedical and industrial engineer in **Miami, Florida**, drew inspiration from Milwaukee's 2016 contest and proposed redesigning Miami's flag. He offered one design and called for proposals on a Facebook page, 'A New Flag for Miami'.<sup>43</sup> He has received 40 submissions. His goal 'isn't necessarily to get the city to adopt his designs as much as it is to spark a debate about what Miami's flag should look like'.<sup>44</sup>



Miami FL: left, existing flag, adopted 1933; right, 2016 proposal

Roman Mars himself took on the **San Francisco, California**, flag in his TED Talk and then in a subsequent website, saying 'Every great city deserves a great flag,

40 Dallas May, 'Your Dallas Flag', October 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/YourDallasFlag/>

41 Jason Reid, 'Why the Dallas City flag sucks. But is there a better alternative?', *Dallas Magazine* (Dallas TX), 1 October 2015, <https://www.dmagazine.com/frontburner/2015/10/why-the-dallas-city-flag-sucks/>

42 Robert Wilonsky, 'Oh, Dallas, I found our long-lost, never-before-seen, 100-year-old city flag', *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas TX), 22 December 2016, <http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2016/12/22/oh-dallas-found-long-lost-never-seen-100-year-old-city-flag>

43 William-Jose Velez, 'A New Flag for Miami', June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/newmiamiflag>

44 Tim Elfrink, 'Does Miami need a new city flag?', *Miami New Times* (Miami FL), 29 June 2016, <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/does-miami-need-a-new-city-flag-8560177>



but this isn't it.<sup>45</sup> He offered a simplified version as an example.



San Francisco CA: *left, existing flag, adopted 1900; right, 2015 proposal*

Sometimes the initiative comes from a distance.

In 2016 an Italian admirer, under the pseudonym 'Xaphedo', proposed a flag for **Huntsville, Alabama**, posting on Reddit: 'Dear Huntsville, I want to give you a flag.' The design references the space industry there.<sup>46</sup>



Huntsville AL: *left, existing flag; right, 2015 proposal*

And at times it's city officials themselves who propose change.

For example, Councilman Bonner Gaylord in **Raleigh, North Carolina**, said: 'What we have is not a flag: It's the city seal on a piece of fabric. It doesn't really tie into the city or represent who we are as a community—Raleigh deserves better.'<sup>47</sup>

That prompted local tech designer Jon Nemargut to offer a proposal via Twitter.<sup>48</sup> However, the *Raleigh News & Observer* quickly editorialised, 'Fold the new Raleigh flag idea', and the effort disappeared.<sup>49</sup>

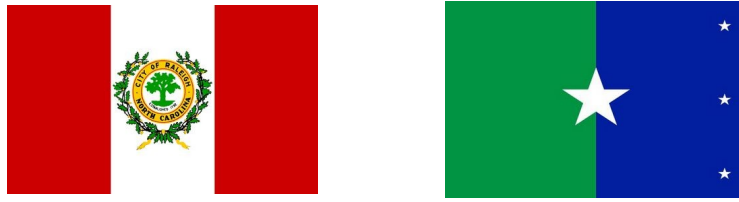
45 Roman Mars, 'San Francisco Flag Redesign', website, May 2015, <http://www.sanfranciscoflag.com/>

46 Xaphedo, 'Dear Huntsville, I want to give you a flag', 6 January 2016, [https://www.reddit.com/r/HuntsvilleAlabama/comments/3zqmwv/dear\\_huntsville\\_i\\_want\\_to\\_give\\_you\\_a\\_flag/](https://www.reddit.com/r/HuntsvilleAlabama/comments/3zqmwv/dear_huntsville_i_want_to_give_you_a_flag/)

47 Paul A. Specht, 'Raleigh flag may get a facelift', *News & Observer* (Raleigh NC), 22 October 2015, <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/counties/wake-county/raleigh-report-blog/article40969020.html>

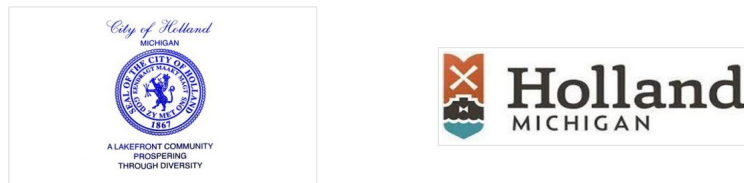
48 Jon Nemargut, 'I made a new Raleigh flag', 14 October 2015, <https://twitter.com/jontomato/status/654346972812460032>

49 'Fold the new Raleigh flag idea', *News & Observer* (Raleigh NC), 26 October 2015, <http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/editorials/article41495580.html>



Raleigh NC: *left, adopted 1899; right, 2015 proposal*

In **Holland, Michigan**, assistant to the city manager Matt VanDyken and the city's communications team yearned for an updated flag that better reflected the city's 2014 brand standards.<sup>50</sup> He proposed a flag contest to city council, in which city staff would narrow down the entries to five and the public would vote on its favourites. The top two designs would go to the city council for their final pick, with the winner receiving \$500. However, he was instantly rebuffed by council members; one said 'Every design process we've done in the past two years has been a major headache.'



Holland MI: *left, existing flag, adopted 2002; right, logo, adopted 2014*

To summarise, the idea of flag change can come from the media, often a newspaper reporter or columnist; an artist, often with a proposed alternative; an activist; or a government official.

But in all of these cities, flag redesign has stopped at the idea stage.

### Under way

In many cities, however, formal efforts are currently under way to design or redesign the flag.

Some efforts are driven by activists or artists, without support from city government.

In 2015 in **Lowell, Massachusetts**, graphic designer Mark Van Der Hyde launched a very professional effort to redesign the city flag, creating a sophisticated website with an engaging worksheet.<sup>51</sup> He offered some design ideas and recruited some compatriots. Despite no interest expressed by the mayor or city council, he continues his efforts.

50 Amy Biolchini, 'Holland officials consider public contest to redesign city flag', *Holland Sentinel* (Holland MI), 29 September 2016, [http://start.tv.Toshiba.com/news/read/category/Lifestyle/article/holland\\_sentinel-holland\\_officials\\_consider\\_public\\_contest\\_to\\_redes-tca](http://start.tv.Toshiba.com/news/read/category/Lifestyle/article/holland_sentinel-holland_officials_consider_public_contest_to_redes-tca)

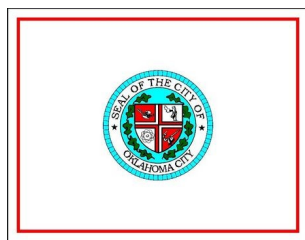
51 Mark Van Der Hyde, 'A Better Flag for the City of Lowell', July 2015, <http://lowellflag.com/>



Lowell MA: *left, existing flag, adopted 1960; right, 2015 proposal*

In **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**, the Oklahoma City Flag Project launched in 2015, and has been receiving design submissions on its website and support via a change.org online petition.<sup>52</sup>

The effort followed a 2014 initiative by John Bratt, who teaches geography and Oklahoma history at Dove Science Academy, and has since collected over 30 designs.<sup>53</sup> However, it appears to have lost momentum, perhaps because, as it cautions, 'The OKC Flag Project is not officially affiliated with the City of Oklahoma City (but it could be).'



Oklahoma City OK: *left, existing flag, adopted 1994; below, proposals*



In **Atlanta, Georgia**, in 2016, activist Matt Potts launched a website examining the current flag and calling for submissions of new designs.<sup>54</sup>

His work is slow and he has yet to contact the city council, although he has collected 40 designs.

An unscientific poll on the website showed 94 per cent of respondents in favour of redesigning the current flag.

52 'The OKC Flag Project', March 2016, <http://www.okcflag.org/>

53 William Crum, 'Flag designs lead to civics lesson for Oklahoma City students', *Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City OK), 14 May 2014, <http://newsok.com/article/4818409>

54 Matt Potts, 'Atlanta City Flag', April 2016, <https://atlantacityflag.com/>



Atlanta GA: *left, existing flag;*  
*below, proposals*



**Rochester, Minnesota** is home to Lee Herold, NAVA's secretary and a flag-store owner. After 30 years trying to change the state flag, he turned to his city's flag.<sup>55</sup> In March 2017 he launched the Rochester Flag Project and immediately faced criticism from those who resisted change.<sup>56</sup> The effort has the support of some individual city council members, but it is currently unofficial.



Rochester MN: *existing flag,*  
*adopted 1980*

Sometimes those efforts gain support from city government

In **Manchester, New Hampshire**, graphic designer Adam Hlasny spent a year lining up support from the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, the Manchester Arts Commission, the Manchester Historic Association, and the New Hampshire Institute of Art, which led the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to approve a contest. He created a professional website and a clear public process.<sup>57</sup> A panel of seven judges narrowed down the 288 submissions with expert guidance. The three finalists—subject to the approval of the Board — will appear on the city's November 2017 ballot.

55 Rochester Flag Project, 'A Symbol of Rochester; a Symbol for Its People', March 2017, <https://www.rochesterflag.com/>

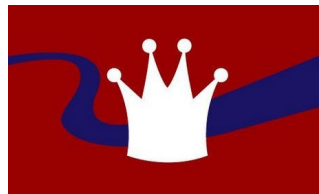
56 Catharine Richert, 'Replacing Rochester's city flag design may be harder than it sounds', Minnesota Public Radio News (St Paul MN), 6 March 2017, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/03/06/replacing-rochesters-city-flag-design-may-be-harder-than-it-sounds>

57 Adam Hlasny, 'Manchester Waves. A New Flag Design for NH's Largest City', April 2016, <https://www.mhtflag.com/>





Manchester NH: *left, existing flag; below, the three 2017 proposals*



In **Tulsa, Oklahoma**, Joey Wignarajah and Jacob Johnson launched a redesign effort, with a timeline that started in November 2016 and planned to finish in June 2017.<sup>58</sup>

Local press covered the project's start extensively as the organisers received city council approval of the process.<sup>59</sup> The concept even drew a humorous editorial cartoon showing 'rejected designs'.<sup>60</sup> With a professional website, snappy videos, and a Facebook campaign funded by local foundations and their own resources, it received 378 responsive submissions, had an independent panel narrow them down, and then offered three finalists for the public to vote for two weeks via text.

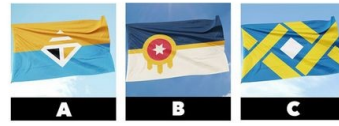
Of the 8,200 votes, 51 per cent favoured design 'B'. One city councillor explored returning to a version of the 1924 flag, until it was pointed out that 'TULSA' read on the reverse as 'ASLUT'. Meanwhile, a rival activist in the UK seized on the large number of negative Facebook comments about the finalists, and conducted his own competition, receiving over 200 entries. He conducted a series of run-offs, and narrowed them down to 20.<sup>61</sup>

58 '#TULSAFLAG', website, November 2016, <http://tulsaflag.com/>

59 Jarrel Wade, 'Tulsa group wants to re-design Tulsa's flag', *Tulsa World* (Tulsa OK), 3 November 2016, [http://www.tulsaworld.com/homepagelatest/tulsa-group-wants-to-re-design-tulsa-s-flag/article\\_a7324633-5689-55be-a8d8-399b5294cea5.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/homepagelatest/tulsa-group-wants-to-re-design-tulsa-s-flag/article_a7324633-5689-55be-a8d8-399b5294cea5.html)

60 Bruce Plante, 'New Tulsa Flag', editorial cartoon, *Tulsa World* (Tulsa OK), 6 November 2016, [http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/bruceplante/bruceplante-cartoon-new-tulsa-flag/article\\_f63b8c93-a10b-59ce-b02f-dc64679ccdc5.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/bruceplante/bruceplante-cartoon-new-tulsa-flag/article_f63b8c93-a10b-59ce-b02f-dc64679ccdc5.html)

61 Alan Hardy, 'Tulsa City Flag—'Tulsa Flag Take 2'', 9 June 2017, <http://www.strawpoll.me/13146713>



TO VOTE TEXT A, B, OR C TO  
(918) 376-5690

Tulsa OK: left, existing flag, adopted 1973; right, 2017 finalists

And in several cases, efforts are actually driven by city government (often spurred by artists or activists promoting change).

In early 2017, **Burlington, Vermont**, mayor Miro Weinberger asked Burlington City Arts to develop a process to design a new flag for the city.<sup>62</sup> Vermont native and college student Kiernan Nicholls had reached out to the city about updating the flag. The BCA's director, Doreen Kraft, wants to 'bring as many people as possible into the public process' and hopes to have a new flag flying over city hall by the end of 2017, saying, 'I'd like to create as much excitement in this town about a new flag as is possible.'



Burlington VT: existing flag,  
adopted 1991

**Columbia, South Carolina**, the state capital, has suffered negative flag publicity around the Confederate Battle Flag, which has recently been removed from the capitol grounds, so it is eager for positive news. In the spring of 2017, the Columbia Design League, in partnership with One Columbia for Arts and History, secured city council approval to collect ideas and designs from the public for a new city flag, offering a \$2,500 prize.<sup>63</sup>

A total of 547 designs were submitted and a team of nine NAVA members served as judges to narrow them down to ten finalists plus nine alternates.<sup>64</sup> Under the leadership of Lee Snelgrove (executive director of One Columbia), the CDL committee removed one of the finalists as too closely resembling the Confederate Battle Flag, substituting another design. It then found that one student submission had been plagiarised from a Kentucky state flag design

62 Rachel Aragon, 'BCA proposes process to design new Burlington flag', 27 March 2017, <http://www.mychamplainvalley.com/news/bca-proposes-process-to-design-new-burlington-flag/681541891>

63 Columbia Museum of Art, 'Design a Better Columbia Flag!', January 2017, <https://www.columbiamuseum.org/support/become-member/affiliates/columbia-design-league/design-better-columbia-flag>

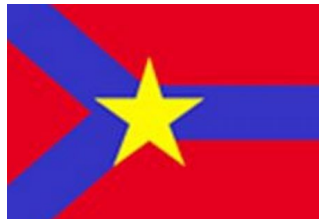
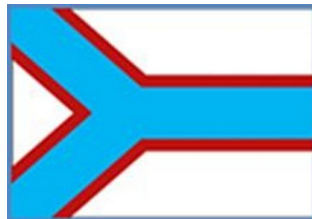
64 Julie Turner, 'Out with the old; in with the new', *Columbia Star* (Columbia SC), 23 June 2017, [http://www.thecolumbiastar.com/news/2017-0623/Front\\_Page/Out\\_with\\_the\\_old\\_in\\_with\\_the\\_new.html](http://www.thecolumbiastar.com/news/2017-0623/Front_Page/Out_with_the_old_in_with_the_new.html)



proposal, so that was removed. The public will rate 18 finalists on a 0–10 scale during the summer of 2017, and a team of experts will then make a final proposal to the city council. One Columbia functions as the city's arts commission, making the process semi-official.



Columbia SC: *left, existing flag, adopted 1912; below, 2017 proposal finalists*

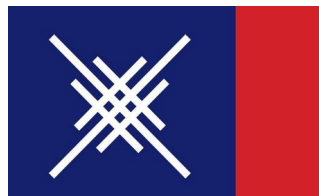


The logo of **Pocatello, Idaho** was never intended to serve as its flag, which apparently flies only at the municipal sewer plant. Stung by its flag's rating as the worst in the country by NAVA's 2004 survey and the negative publicity spurred by the Roman Mars Ted Talk, several community members approached

Mayor Brian Blad asking for change.<sup>65</sup> Logan McDougal, the city's public information officer, led an effort which brought in 709 entries, categorised as Professional, Ages 18+, Ages 13–17, Ages 7–12, and Ages 1–6.<sup>66</sup> The City of Pocatello Flag Design Ad Hoc Committee narrowed the submissions to 330, then to 19, making changes to some of them.<sup>67</sup> It presented the final six to the public, asking the public to rate them on a scale of 1–10 (actually, a scale of 0.5 to 5.0 stars in increments of one-half) before 30 June 2017.<sup>68</sup>



Pocatello ID: *left, existing flag, adopted 2001; below, 2016 proposal finalists*



Dan Dunne, a member of the city council of **Liberty Lake, Washington**, launched an effort via Facebook, coordinated by the Spokane Valley Arts Council, to design a flag for the city and its surrounding community, with a prize

65 Cyndey McFarland, 'Pocatello residents team up to change worst flag in the nation', *Idaho State Journal* (Pocatello ID), 8 January 2016, [http://www.idahostatejournal.com/members/pocatello-residents-team-up-to-change-worst-flag-in-the/article\\_f73f955e-6583-5d50-9527-b9cebf4924ed.html](http://www.idahostatejournal.com/members/pocatello-residents-team-up-to-change-worst-flag-in-the/article_f73f955e-6583-5d50-9527-b9cebf4924ed.html)

66 City of Pocatello Flag Design Committee, 'City of Pocatello Flag Redesign', January 2017, <http://flag.pocatello.us/>

67 Misty Inglet, 'Pocatello city flag one step closer to new design', KIFI/KIDK-TV (Pocatello ID), 21 January 2017, <http://www.localnews8.com/news/pocatello/pocatello-city-flag-one-step-closer-to-new-design/284979010>

68 Mayor's Office (Pocatello ID), 'City of Pocatello Flag Design Rating Form', 15 June 2017, <https://pocatello.seamlessdocs.com/f/MOfagballot>



of \$300.<sup>69</sup> He received 46 entries. The council narrowed them down to 14 semi-finalists and asked several designers to make minor changes. It plans to select three finalists and put them to a public vote.

### Stalled

Several other cities have seen flag redesign projects go through a full process, only to stall at the finish line—failing to achieve adoption by the city government.

Again, most had proceeded without formal or complete city support.

**Sioux Falls, South Dakota**, was one of only three cities that had no flag when *American City Flags* came out. In April 2014, after a visit by Roman Mars, the Committee to Establish a Suitable Flying Banner for the City of Sioux Falls convened, collaborating with OTA, AIGA-South Dakota, and the Sioux Falls Design Center to organise and lead the process of education, engagement, and community empowerment.<sup>70</sup> Led by designer Hugh Weber, the group hosted a community town hall on the principles of flag design, received over 90 flag designs, worked through a two-stage panelled jury voting process, and engaged over 3,000 public voters on six finalist designs. A clear winner emerged. However, despite formal proposals to the city council, no action toward adoption has been taken.<sup>71</sup>



Sioux Falls SD: 2014 proposal

To coincide with Design Week Birmingham 2015, the BHM Flag Project held an open competition to reimagine the city flag of **Birmingham, Alabama**.<sup>72</sup> It received more than 180 submissions. A panel of ten judges voted independently on the flags, and then organisers tallied the votes to determine three finalists.<sup>73</sup> Voting on the finalists closed in October 2015; however, no further action appears to have been taken.

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69 Dan Dunne, 'Libertylakeflag', 26 March 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/LibertyLakeFlag>

70 'Committee to Establish a Suitable Flying Banner for the City of Sioux Falls' website, May 2014, <http://www.siouxfallsflag.com/>

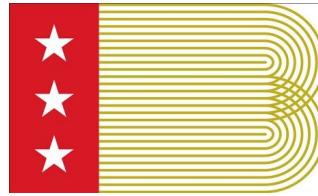
71 'Sioux Falls flag design headed to council', video, *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, SD), 2 September 2014, <http://www.argusleader.com/videos/news/local/2014/09/02/14966825/>

72 Michael Huebner, 'Here's your chance to design Birmingham's new flag', *Birmingham News* (Birmingham AL), 8 September 2015, <http://www.artsbham.com/5717-2/>

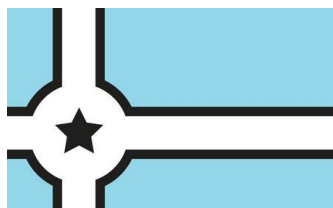
73 'BHM Flag Project announces finalists in flag competition', 2 October 2015, <http://bhmflagproject.com/bhm-flag-project-announces-finalists-in-flag-competition/>



Birmingham AL: *left, existing flag, adopted 1925; below, 2015 proposal finalists*



In July 2016 Jeremy Haun, a Joplin-born artist and comic book illustrator, launched an effort to redesign the flag of **Joplin, Missouri**.<sup>74</sup> After holding a series of community flag design workshops across the city, it received over 70 entries. A panel of five judges selected five finalists for community response, where each flag was ranked on its design and representational merits. With over 1,000 responses, 'Crossroads' by Shane Ross won and was presented to the community as the 'People's Flag' on 20 October 2016. While the contest was supported by the Downtown Joplin Alliance as positive branding for the city, it was vigorously opposed by former mayor Richard Russell.<sup>75</sup> Haun presented the winning flag design to the city with no expectation that it would be adopted, but is now selling Joplin flag merchandise.



Joplin MO: *left, existing flag, adopted 1977; right, 2016 proposal*

A favourite example of terrible design, the flag of **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, certainly deserves an update. Graphic designer Steve Kodis led a long effort, bringing together the city's design and activist communities. Under the umbrella of 'Greater Together', he connected AIGA-Wisconsin, Ink to the

74 Jeremy Haun, 'Joplinflag: A Symbol of Pride and Hope for Joplin', July 2016, <http://www.joplinflag.com/>

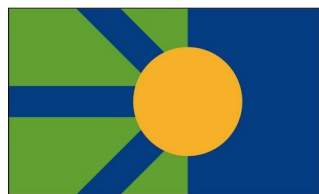
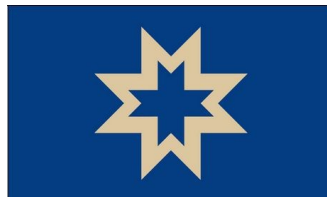
75 Debby Woodin, 'Flag contest meant to show love for Joplin, but former mayor opposes plan', *Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City OK), 21 August 2016, <http://newsok.com/article/feed/1060500>



People, and 89.9 Radio Milwaukee.<sup>76</sup> They held several community workshops on flag design and drew interest from aldermen and the mayor. After a competition that received 1,006 submissions, five judges narrowed them down to 50 semifinalists and five finalists.<sup>77</sup> The judges—three design professionals, a historian, and a vexillologist—made changes in each one. The public rated the finalists on a 0–10 scale; there were over 7,000 responses and some campaigning by the designers. 'Sunrise over the Lake' won and was unveiled in a large public event on 14 June 2016. While some aldermen and the mayor had been supportive, and many people simply call it 'the new flag', it has not yet been adopted. Meanwhile, Kodis has promoted it as the 'People's Flag of Milwaukee', calling on the citizenry to 'contact your alderperson' and posting vector artwork and full specifications (including Pantone numbers) online.



Milwaukee WI: left, existing flag, adopted 1954; below, 2016 proposal finalists



Left, the winner

**Naperville, Illinois**, has copyrighted its flag and forbids it to be flown anywhere but government buildings. A group of six students from Neuqua Valley High School started The Campaign for a Better Naperville Flag in March 2016.<sup>78</sup> It

76 Steve Kodis, 'The People's Flag of Milwaukee', July 2015, <http://www.milwaukeeflag.com>

77 Mary Spicussa, 'Five finalists unveiled for new Milwaukee flag', *Journal Sentinel* (Milwaukee WI), 14 May 2016, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/five-finalists-unveiled-for-new-city-flag-b99725121z1-379541551.html>

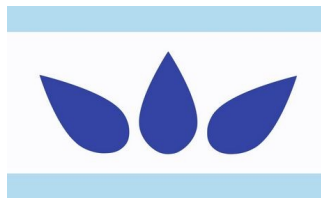
78 Campaign for a Better Naperville Flag, 'Naperville Is a Great City That Deserves a Great Flag', March 2016, <http://napervilleflag.org/>



solicited designs, receiving 130. A large committee — comprising city council members, school principals, local business owners, vexillologists, artists, and community members — narrowed them to five finalists. They then asked the public to choose online, using ranked-choice voting. The winner was unveiled at TEDxNaperville 2016, where stickers and 400 4'x6' flags were distributed. However, a city spokesperson said that adopting the flag would bring a cost, and 'we don't have any resources identified to make a change'.<sup>79</sup>



Naperville IL: *left, existing flag, adopted 1974; below, 2016 proposal finalists*



*Above, the winner*

In **Portland, Maine**, the flag-change initiative came from two directions. In 2015, Benjamin Coursey, a high school senior, called on the city council to improve the flag, and local press columnists Seth Koenig and Dan MacLeod, of the *Bangor Daily News*, described the challenge and launched a competition.<sup>80</sup> Eighty-five designs came in, from forty designers. A panel of three judges, including Ben Coursey and two vexillologists, narrowed the field to ten semi-

79 Erin Hegarty, 'Winning Naperville flag design unveiled but won't be official, city says', *Naperville Sun* (Naperville IL), 11 November 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/naperville-sun/>

80 Seth Koenig, 'Portland's city flag included in a rogues gallery of bad flags. Is it time for a redesign?', *BDN Maine Network* (Bangor ME), 30 Dec 2015, <http://sethkoenig.bangordailynews.com/2015/12/30/politics/portlands-city-flag-included-in-a-rogues-gallery-of-bad-flags-is-it-time-for-a-redesign/>

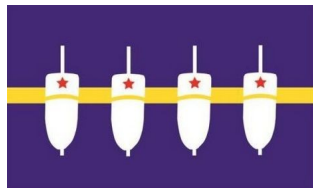
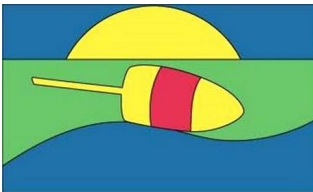




finalists.<sup>81</sup> A first-round online public vote identified three finalists, a second-round vote then picked the winner.<sup>82</sup> However, although MacLeod asked, 'Who wants to take the next step and make this Portland's next flag?', the city council took no action.



Portland ME: *left, existing flag; below, 2016 proposal finalists*



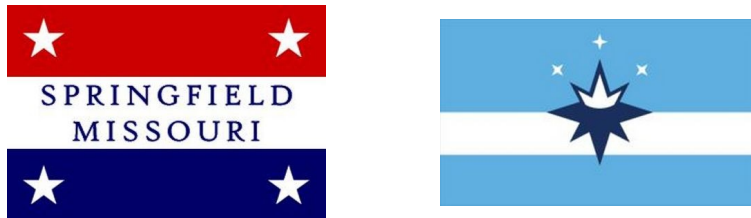
*the winner*

81 Dan MacLeod, *BDN Maine Network* (Bangor ME), 25 April 2016, <http://bangordailynews.com/2016/04/25/news/portland/here-are-the-10-semifinalists-for-the-portland-flag-contest/>

82 Dan MacLeod, *BDN Maine Network* (Bangor ME), 29 July 2016, <https://portland.bangordailynews.com/2016/07/29/news/heres-your-pick-for-the-best-design-in-our-portland-flag-contest/>



In **Springfield, Missouri**, in late 2015, editor Eric Olson at the *Springfield Business Journal* called for an update of the city's flag.<sup>83</sup> Independently, in May 2016 the Springfield Identity Project, a ten-person committee of engaged artists, entrepreneurs, marketers, and communicators, tackled the task, saying, 'Our city deserves an iconic symbol to represent its unique identity.'<sup>84</sup> They studied principles of flag design, researched local history, and discussed Springfield's essential identity. Collaborating with Springfield Creatives, a 365-member network of local designers, they then chose a direction and solidified a design. They created a petition, had the flag printed, and are selling merchandise showcasing the design around town. However, a city spokesperson said 'at this point, there is no formal effort to have the design adopted in an official capacity by the city'.<sup>85</sup> As a bit of an excuse, one committee member/designer said, 'Our desire the whole time is that this kind of becomes something that Springfield adopts on its own, its citizens, instead of being handed down to them from the government. It's kind of the people's flag at this point.'



Springfield MO: *left, existing flag, adopted 1938; right, 2016 proposal*

**Fargo, North Dakota**, also has no flag. In 2015 an initiative to create one, led by local arts activist and college student Jackson Ridl, received the institutional backing of the Arts Partnership of Fargo, which hosted a design competition on its servers.<sup>86</sup> It accepted submissions from residents and former residents of Fargo, Moorhead, and West Fargo through August 2015 and posted all 78 submissions for a month-long public vote. The 15 designs with the most votes were to be submitted to the Arts Partnership and the Arts and Culture Commission to select a winner.<sup>87</sup> While Taylor Homoky's design won the most votes and the \$250 prize, the city's Arts and Culture Commission has so far failed to act. Reportedly the city is undergoing a rebranding effort and may want

83 Eric Olson, 'Calling all designers to raise their flags', *Springfield Business Journal* (Springfield MO), 7 December 2015, <http://sbj.net/Content/ENEWS-ARTICLES/ENEWS-ARTICLES/Article/Opinion-Calling-all-designers-to-raise-their-flags/29/82/103433>

84 Springfield Identity Project, 'A Visible Symbol of Invisible Bonds', December 2015, <http://sgfflag.org>

85 Emily Wood, 'Springfield group proposes city flag redesign', *KY3 News* (Springfield MO), 8 March 2017, <http://www.ky3.com/content/news/Springfield-group-proposes-city-flag-redesign-415717673.html>

86 Helmut Schmidt, 'A flag for Fargo: Voting underway for city flag design', *INFORUM* (Fargo ND), 16 September 2015, <http://www.inforum.com/news/3839746-flag-fargo-voting-underway-city-flag-design>

87 The Arts Partnership (Fargo ND), 'Fargo Flag', August 2015, <http://theartspartnership.net/fargo-flag/>



to include the flag in that.



Fargo ND: left, a montage of some of the 2015 proposals;  
right, winning proposal, 2015

And in rare cases, city support for redesign has not been sufficient for success.

In June 2016 Bree Henderson, the 28-year-old owner of an old-timey barbershop and shave parlour on Main Street in **Laconia, New Hampshire**, started an effort to redesign the city's flag.<sup>88</sup>



Laconia NH:  
left, existing flag, adopted 1965;  
below, 2016 proposal finalists

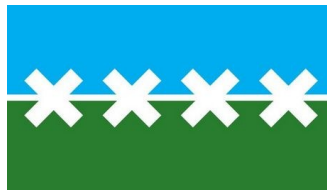


88 Sam Rabuck, 'Committee announces public contest to design new Laconia city flag', NH1.com (Concord NH), 26 July 2016, <http://www.nh1.com/news/committee-announces-public-contest-to-design-new-laconia-city-flag/>

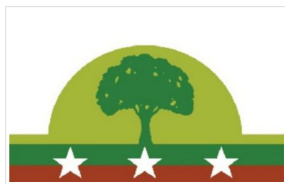


The 1965 design showed the local lake, which the radio station described as resembling 'roadkill'. Over 100 submissions came in, which the flag committee narrowed down to six finalists. The city, which had supported the process, offered \$1,000 in prize money, split among the top three designs. While the committee included a city council member, the mayor proved ambivalent, hoping for a choice between the current flag and one proposal. In November 2016, after seeing the finalists, the city council reversed its position and voted 5–1 to retain the current flag.<sup>89</sup> Undeterred, Ms Henderson decided to run for city council, saying, 'I'm hoping that in the coming years Laconia will begin to realize the important role marketing plays in the success and prosperity of a city, and how effective a simple flag can be at spreading pride and connection beyond its borders.'

Mayor Matt Powell of **Cedar Park, Texas**, asked the community in April 2016 to submit designs to replace the current flag. Over 250 submissions arrived and three public hearings took place, then a subcommittee of three city council members chose two finalists, from which the full city council selected a winner in September.<sup>90</sup>

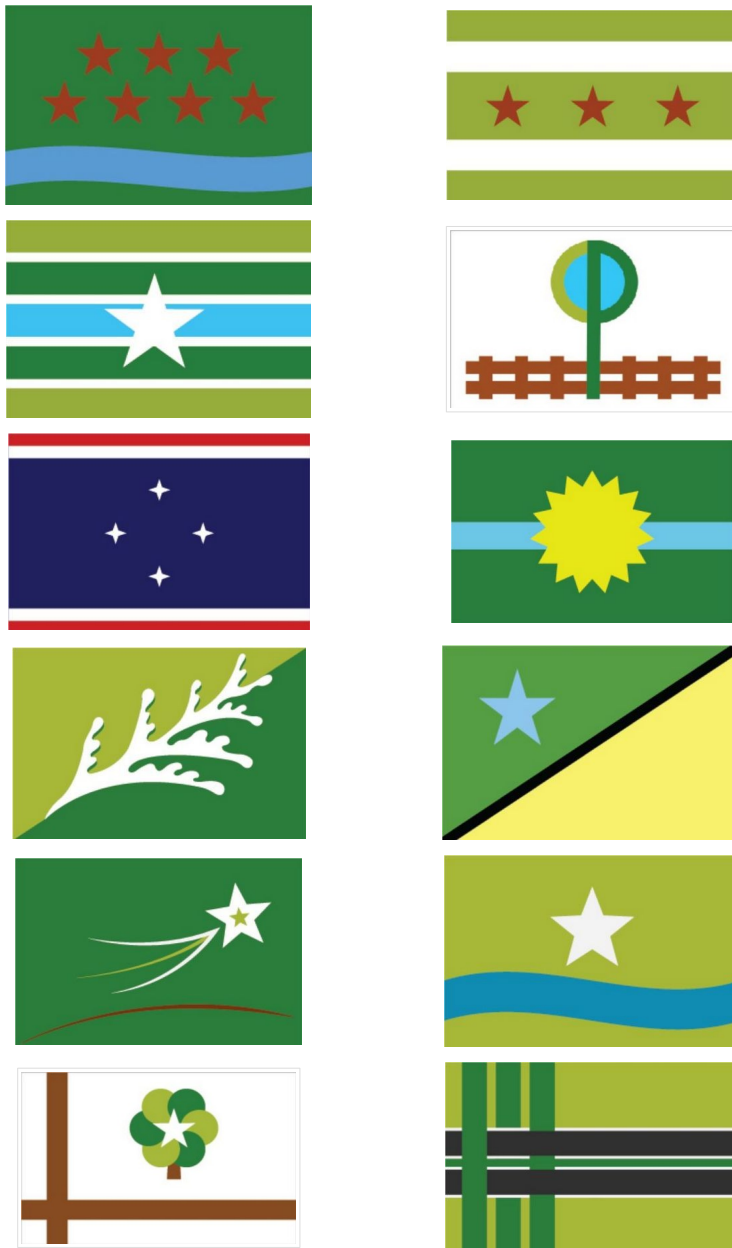


*Cedar Park TX: top left, existing flag, never officially adopted; top right, winning proposal 2016, later withdrawn; below, finalists in the new competition*



89 Todd Bookman, 'After crowdsourcing new options, Laconia will keep its old flag—thank you very much', *New Hampshire Public Radio* (Concord NH), 1 December 2016, <http://nhpr.org/post/after-crowdsourcing-new-options-laconia-will-keep-its-old-flag-thank-you-very-much#stream/0>

90 'Be Part of the #CedarParkWave', April 2016, <http://flag.cedarparktexas.gov/flagdesign/index.html>



After the flag was unveiled in a large public event in December 2016, a Facebook-driven public backlash ensued, protesting the lack of a vote by the public and resistance to the barbed-wire imagery.<sup>91</sup> Still, the flag was soon flying at ten city locations, including Veterans Memorial Park, City Hall, the Police Department, the city's four fire stations and the city library; the city spent \$6,985 for the flags at the city facilities as well as some desktop flags. But the city council quickly took those flags down and sent all 250 original submissions to the city's Parks, Arts, and Community Enrichment Board, asking it to narrow

91 Claire Osborn, 'Cedar Park might reconsider new flag', *American-Statesman* (Austin TX), 5 January 2017, <http://www.mystatesman.com/news/local/cedar-park-might-reconsider-new-flag/8u5kj8IH9og92bFSGUNGN/>



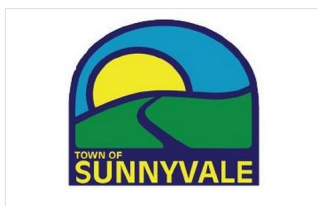
down the designs in anticipation of a public vote.<sup>92</sup> It selected 16, not including the initial winner. A vote has not yet taken place.

### Adopted

Up to this point, none of the new designs shown have been officially adopted by the cities they hope to represent. These efforts have not gone beyond the idea stage, are still under way, or have stalled. But dozens have succeeded.

In rare cases, an activist brings a flag to the city and has it adopted as presented.

**Sunnyvale, Texas**, had used an unofficial flag for many years until resident Ross Miracle proposed a new design in March 2015. Over the next year he persisted. The town staff posted it online and polled residents. The council directed staff to conduct a two-month competition — two other designs were submitted. With the advice of a NAVA member, the town distributed a poll in residents' utility bills calling for a vote among three proposals and the current flag. While 67 per cent voted for the current flag and only 30 per cent favoured Ross Miracle's, after much debate the town council adopted Miracle's design on 25 July 2016.<sup>93</sup>



Sunnyvale TX: *left, unofficial flag; right, flag adopted 2016*

Because **Aberdeen, Washington**, had no flag, local resident John Barclay approached the city council in 2015 to propose the concept. With its encouragement, and the support of the Aberdeen Revitalization Movement, he created a design and brought it for approval a year later. His presentation included a discussion of the basic principles of flag design. The council voted to adopt the flag as the city's official flag, with one dissenting vote from councilwoman Tawni Andrews, who said the design reminded her of Alvin and the Chipmunks.<sup>94</sup>

92 Caitlin Perrone, 'Cedar Park reopens city flag design process', *Community Impact Newspaper* (Cedar Park TX), 13 January 2017, <https://communityimpact.com/austin/leander-cedar-park/city-county/2017/01/13/cedar-park-reopens-city-flag-design-process/>

93 Town of Sunnyvale, 'Resolution 15-10, Resolution of the Town Council of the Town of Sunnyvale, Texas Designating an Official Town Flag; and Providing an Effective Date', *Meeting Agenda*, pp. 267–9, 27 April 2015, <http://www.townofsunnyvale.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/04272015-403>

94 'City of Aberdeen adopts resident's design for city flag', *Newstalk KBKW* (Aberdeen WA), 1 July 2016, <http://kbkw.com/city-of-aberdeen-adopts-residents-design-for-city-flag/>



Aberdeen WA: *flag adopted 2016*

Sometimes a key to success is involving schools and students.

In **Liberty, Texas**, which had no flag, Liberty Middle School art teacher Dee Humber had his students create designs for a city flag during 2014/15. Twelve designs were presented to the city council at the end of the school year. A selection committee deliberated over them, with 'some tense discussion', and voted on a winning design. The city council adopted the design in August 2015, honouring Ms Humber and the designer, Lark Walker.<sup>95</sup>



Liberty TX: *flag adopted in 2015*

High school students in **Albany, Oregon**, learned that their city had no flag. Forming GUAVA (the Greater Unified Albany Vexillological Association) under the guidance of teacher Cole Pouliot, they created a design and took it to the city council, which recommended they conduct a community competition.<sup>96</sup>

Public information officer Marilyn Smith created a page on the city website, which drew media attention and 40 submissions.

A review committee of seven community leaders narrowed the field to five finalists, which were then offered for the public to rate, on the city's website and on ballots at the local library and city hall.

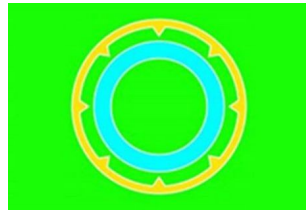
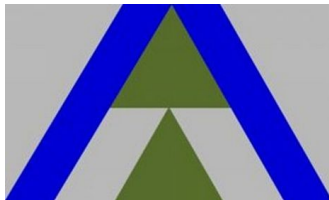
The city council considered all five finalists, and on 10 August 2016 ultimately adopted the design rated most highly by the public—the design originally proposed by GUAVA.<sup>97</sup>

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95 Casey Stinnett, 'Liberty has chosen a city flag ...', *Houston Chronicle* (Houston TX), 11 August 2015, <http://www.chron.com/neighborhood/dayton/news/article/Liberty-has-chosen-a-city-flag-and-a-new-city-9730346.php>

96 Cole Pouliot, 'How Albany, Oregon, Got a Flag', *Vexilloid Tabloid* (Portland Flag Association), October 2016, <https://portlandflag.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/vexilloid-tabloid-060-oct16.pdf>

97 'Albany City Council Chooses Design for Municipal Flag', 12 August 2016, <https://www.cityofalbany.net/flag>



Albany OR:  
*above, unsuccessful finalists;  
left, flag adopted 2016*

**Harrison, Ohio**, had no flag. The Harrison High School Flag Club approached the city council in October 2015, secured approval for a process, and created and presented three finalist designs for public voting in April 2016.

Residents went online to vote for their favourite, which the council adopted in May 2016 and dedicated in a ceremony in July 2016.<sup>98</sup>



Harrison OH: *flag adopted 2016*

**Janesville, Wisconsin**, had no flag. The City of Janesville and School District of Janesville held a design contest held among Janesville's students and school employees.

A panel of representatives of those entities narrowed the 350 submissions to twelve finalists, and the city's common council and the board of education voted on the winning design.<sup>99</sup> Three weeks after the close of the contest, the

98 Travis Thayer, 'New city flag set to fly high above Harrison', *Eagle Country 99.3* (Lawrenceberg IN), 16 May 2016, <http://eaglecountryonline.com/local-article/new-city-flag-set-fly-high-harrison/>

99 Nick Crow, 'Craig students sweep city's flag contest', *GazetteXtra* (Janesville WI), 16 March 2015, [http://www.gazettextra.com/20150316/craig\\_students\\_sweep\\_citys\\_flag\\_contest](http://www.gazettextra.com/20150316/craig_students_sweep_citys_flag_contest)





common council adopted the flag on 23 March 2015.<sup>100</sup>



Janesville WI: *flag adopted 2015*

**Brandon, South Dakota**, had no flag. Zach DeBoer, a Brandon Valley High School graduate and owner of Exposure Gallery & Studios in Sioux Falls, spearheaded a flag-design project, which was funded through his residency at Robert Bennis Elementary School and was part of the South Dakota Arts Council's Artists in Schools & Communities program. He received city council approval of the project in January 2017.<sup>101</sup> The Brandon City Flag Design Committee—which included the mayor, city council members, the chamber of commerce director, and local educators—narrowed the 39 submissions to 8 finalists for an online public vote via SurveyMonkey. The winning design received 34 per cent of the 515 votes cast, and was adopted by the city council on 22 May 2017, along with a flag pledge written by 4th-grade students.<sup>102</sup>



Brandon SD: *left, logo; right, flag adopted 2017*

As noted, sometimes activists or local organisations drive the redesign effort.

**Bellingham, Washington**, had no flag, so in early 2016 the Downtown Bellingham Partnership organised an unofficial contest to design one. Brad Lockhart, a popular local graphic designer, created the winning design.<sup>103</sup> Over the apparent opposition of the mayor, he secured the endorsement of the Port of Bellingham and the Nooksack and Lummi Tribal Councils, had the flag flown

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100 'History of Janesville', May 2015, <http://www.ci.janesville.wi.us/about-janesville/history-of-janesville>

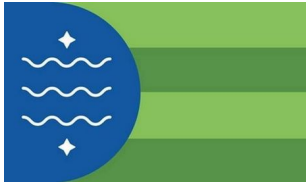
101 Micha Bader, 'Green light given for city flag', *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls SD), 9 January 2017, <http://www.argusleader.com/story/news/brandon/2017/01/10/green-light-given-city-flag/96335362/>

102 Micha Bader, 'City approves flag winner and pledge', *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls SD), 22 May 2017, <http://www.argusleader.com/story/news/brandon/2017/05/23/city-approves-flag-winner-pledge/102006924/>

103 'Bellingham City Flag', 1 April 2016, <http://bellinghamwins.com/bellingham-city-flag/>



by dozens of local businesses and hundreds of citizens, and secured 1,200 supporters on Facebook. After a year in limbo, the flag was officially adopted by the city council on 24 April 2017.<sup>104</sup>



Bellingham WA: *flag adopted 2017*

**Elk Ridge, Utah**, a city of 2,500, had no flag. In early 2017, activist Dallin Millington secured permission from the mayor and city council to assemble an ad hoc committee to run an official city flag design competition. It ran online for six weeks, receiving 81 submissions—most having an elk, of course, or stars/stripes. The committee narrowed them down to six finalists. The public then chose their first and second choices among those six. Then, in a top-two run-off, the winning design (coincidentally by Sarah Millington, Dallin’s wife) received 63 per cent of the vote and was adopted officially on 9 May 2017.<sup>105</sup>



Elk Ridge UT: *above, unsuccessful finalists 2017; bottom right, flag adopted 2017*

**Bath, Maine**, had no flag. A local heraldist and amateur graphics/web designer,

104 Jim Donaldson, 'Letting it fly: Bellingham adopts an official flag', *Bellingham Herald* (Bellingham WA), 25 April 2017, <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article146664504.html>

105 Elk Ridge City Flag Design Committee, 'Voting Process', May 2017, <http://www.elkridgecityflagcontest.org/voting-process/>



Jeremy Hammond, worked with his high-school classmate, a city council member, to propose that the city adopt a flag. Then, working with the city's flag committee as the lead designer, he created a design and consulted with the American Heraldry Society and the New England Vexillological Association.<sup>106</sup> The council adopted it on 3 July 2013 in time for the annual shipbuilding festival, and two years later launched a Kickstarter campaign to manufacture flags for the city.<sup>107</sup>



Bath ME: left, seal; right, flag adopted 2013

**South Bend, Indiana**, adopted a seal-on-a-bedsheet for its centennial in 1965. As part of its 150th anniversary festivities, in late 2015 the organising group South Bend 150 conducted a contest to redesign the flag.<sup>108</sup> Two hundred submissions came in, and a flag design committee of professional designers, marketing professionals, city officials, and SB150 representatives proposed three finalists for public input.<sup>109</sup> Over 1,000 comments were collected in person and online, and the committee produced a design integrating elements from all three finalists. The city council adopted the flag on 14 March 2016.<sup>110</sup>



South Bend IN: existing flag, adopted 1965

106 Alex Lear, 'Proposed Bath flag reflects seafaring tradition', *Forecaster* (Falmouth ME), 26 June 2013, <http://www.theforecaster.net/proposed-bath-city-flag-reflects-seafaring-tradition/>

107 Alex Lear, 'Kickstarter campaign begins for Bath flags', *Forecaster* (Falmouth, ME), 31 March 2015, <http://www.theforecaster.net/kickstarter-campaign-begins-for-bath-flags/>

108 'City of South Bend Flag Design Contest', October 2015, <http://www.sb150.com/city-south-bend-flag-design-contest/>

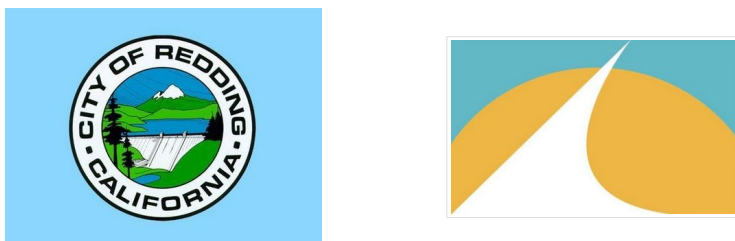
109 Dan McGowan, 'South Bend unveils new flag finalists', *Inside INdiana Business*, WFYI (Indianapolis IN), 7 December 2015, <http://www.insideindianabusiness.com/story/30683242/south-bend-unveils-new-flag-finalists>

110 'SB150 leaders, elected officials unveil new South Bend city flag', 9 March 2016, <https://www.southbendin.gov/residents-business-government-students/news/2016-3-9/sb150-leaders-elected-officals-unveil-new-south>



South Bend IN: winner (bottom right) and other finalists

In **Redding, California** in February 2017, Catalyst Redding Young Professionals launched an effort sanctioned by the City of Redding, saying 'the city flag needed a refresh to truly represent Redding'.<sup>111</sup> The concept had been sparked by Councilwoman Francie Sullivan. Volunteers led a design contest offering a \$1,000 prize, publicising it on Facebook,<sup>112</sup> and holding a flag-drawing event at a local brewpub.<sup>113</sup> After receiving 386 submissions from Shasta County residents, a panel of fifteen judges hosted by the Shasta County Arts Council narrowed them to five finalists. A graphic designer put all into consistent format before they were offered for a public vote. Voting was online, and limited by IP address to reduce multiple-voting. Over 26,000 votes came in and the winner was announced on Flag Day, 14 June 2017.



Redding CA: left, old flag, adoption date unknown; right, flag adopted 2017

And sometimes the city itself takes on redesign, sometimes with a competition, sometimes not.

The flag of **Golden, Colorado**, used an outdated logo, so in 2012 the city held a flag contest in conjunction with the Golden History Museum. Twenty-three flag designs were submitted and then the public voted online. Thousands of votes

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111 Catalyst Young Professionals, 'Redding City Flag', March 2017, <http://reddingcityflag.com/>  
 112 'Redding City Flag', <https://www.facebook.com/ReddingCityFlag/>  
 113 Jenny Espino, 'Catalyst to launch contest to design new Redding flag', *Record Searchlight* (Redding CA), 27 February 2017, <http://www.redding.com/story/news/local/2017/02/27/catalyst-launch-contest-design-new-redding-flag/98509732/>



came in and the top six designs were presented to the city council, which adopted the top vote-winner as the new flag on 7 June 2012.<sup>114</sup> Its designer is an artist and graphic designer at the Denver Art Museum.



Golden CO: *left, old flag, adopted 1996; right, flag adopted 2012*

The Office of Cultural Affairs in **Columbia, Missouri**, held a city flag design contest in 2014, receiving 84 entries.<sup>115</sup> After a public voting on all submitted designs, the Commission on Cultural Affairs and city staff reviewed entries and chose a group of finalists. In September 2015, the city council reviewed the finalists and selected its top three.<sup>116</sup> After a public comment period the city council evaluated the feedback, which favoured one design overwhelmingly, and adopted that winning design on 2 May 2016. The public can now purchase the flag at the Office of Cultural Affairs.<sup>117</sup>



Columbia MO: *left, old flag, adopted 1988; right, flag adopted 2016*

At the direction of Mayor Buddy Dyer of **Orlando, Florida**, Michele Brennan, Director of Communications and Neighborhood Relations, oversaw a flag redesign effort in 2017. Her team created a contest that included a comprehensive website with detailed process information.<sup>118</sup> That brought in 950 submissions, narrowed down to ten semi-finalists by a ten-person

114 'Golden Celebrates Flag Day with a Brand New City Flag', 27 June 2012, <http://www.cityofgolden.net/golden-celebrates-flag-day-with-a-brand-new-city-flag/>

115 'Columbia announces flag-design contest', *Columbia Daily Tribune* (Columbia MO), 16 September 2014, <http://www.columbiatribune.com/3583b93d-f23b-53e0-9d88-39ccb75e4f87.html>

116 Chris Gothner, 'Columbia seeks comment on city flag design finalists', KOMU 8 (Columbia MO), 20 October 2015, <http://www.komu.com/news/columbia-seeks-comment-on-city-flag-design-finalists/>

117 'City Flag', May 2016, <http://www.como.gov/arts/programs-and-services/city-flag/>

118 'Let's create Orlando's flag together', February 2017, <http://www.cityoforlando.net/flag/>



committee, which then made some design alterations.<sup>119</sup> After public online voting on those ten, four finalists were altered by their designers and exhibited around the city in a 'Final Four Flag Tour' and offered for another online vote.<sup>120</sup> The Flag Design Review Committee then altered and chose the winning design. It is scheduled for adoption by the city council on 24 July 2017.



Orlando FL: *left, old flag, adopted 1980; right, flag adopted 2017*

The 1991 flag of **Republic, Missouri** included the Christian fish symbol, the *ichthus*. In 1999, after losing a case in US district court backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the city removed the symbol, leaving a bizarre 'this space intentionally left blank' in its civic heraldry. With a new logo adopted in 2009, and running low on its inventory of flags, the city explored an update in 2016. City staff and city council developed eleven alternatives, and on 25 April 2016 adopted one—retaining the seal with the blank space.<sup>121</sup>



Republic MO: *left, old flag adopted 1991, revised 1999; right, flag adopted 2016*

In **West Hollywood, California**, over 40 per cent of the population is gay. On 3 February 2014 the city council responded to growing criticism over its removal of a rainbow flag from atop City Hall by creating a variant of the city flag depicting the 1986 city logo in rainbow colours.<sup>122</sup> This has been a very exciting

119 Jeff Weiner, 'Fountain flag wins Orlando vote, but council has final say', *Orlando Sentinel* (Orlando FL), 19 April 2017, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/>

120 Monivette Cordeiro, 'Finalists modify designs for Orlando's city flag contest', *Orlando Weekly* (Orlando FL), 1 May 2017, <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2017/05/01/finalists-modify-designs-for-orlandos-city-flag-contest>

121 Thomas Gounley, 'Republic's city seal has had a blank space for 17 years—and it just survived a redesign', *Springfield News-Leader* (Springfield MO), 8 August 2016, <http://www.news-leader.com/story/news/2016/08/08/republics-city-seal-has-had-blank-space-17-years-and-just-survived-redesign/87677760/>

122 Hailey Branson-Potts, 'West Hollywood agrees to fly new city flag with rainbow colors', *Los Angeles Times*, (Los Angeles CA), 7 February 2014,



debate,' said Mayor *Pro Tem* John D'Amico. 'I think flying a rainbow flag at City Hall is perhaps not as interesting as flying the City of West Hollywood adopted flag that has the rainbow on it.' The new flag and old flag now have equal status as official flags, although the new one flies at city hall.



West Hollywood CA: *left, logo adopted 1986;*  
*right, flag adopted 2014*

The very low rating of the flag of **Provo, Utah**, in NAVA's 2004 survey eventually led Mayor John Curtis to launch an effort in 2013 to create and adopt a new flag, under a three-person committee, comprising vexillologist and NAVA member Jason Bates, a former councilwoman, and a current city council member— incredibly, the designer of the flag to be replaced, Stephen Hales. But the press reported that after a 'full year-and-a-half [...], many discussions, resident comments, blogs, and more vetting ... the municipal council has yet to figure out just what long-term symbol could represent Provo on the city's flagpole'.<sup>123</sup> The city had held a public contest, receiving 51 submissions then asking for public response to them in an online poll. Two finalist designs were presented to the city council by the mayor, with poor public feedback. Ultimately Hales prevailed with his own redesign, using the new city logo. The council adopted it unanimously on 6 January 2015.<sup>124</sup> Ironically, Hales died of cancer two weeks later.



Provo UT: *left, old flag, adopted 1985; right, flag adopted 2015*

Mayor Cathy Carlat of **Peoria, Arizona**, unveiled the city's new flag on 5 April 2017.<sup>125</sup> The design began a year earlier when the city began incorporating the colours and patterns into its visual brand, 'See Yourself in Peoria'. Based on positive reaction, the brand translated into the flag. The branding materials, including the flag, were designed in-house to save money. A Redditor opined, 'this is a good flag with a bad watermark', while an older city council member

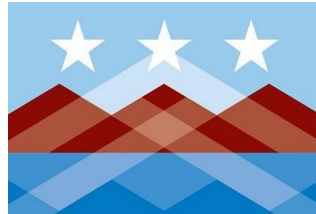
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<http://articles.latimes.com/2014/feb/07/local/la-me-in-west-hollywood-rainbow-flag-20140207>

123 Genelle Pugmire, 'Will Provo ever get a new city flag?', *Daily Herald* (Provo UT), 2 September 2014, [http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/central/provo/will-provo-ever-get-a-new-city-flag/article\\_d83ad7cf-229c-53eb-a214-07d5fe342452.html](http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/central/provo/will-provo-ever-get-a-new-city-flag/article_d83ad7cf-229c-53eb-a214-07d5fe342452.html)



asserted that the new flag should have had input from the citizens of Peoria and be voted on by city council, and recommended that the city seal be added to it.<sup>126</sup>



Peoria AZ: left, unofficial, flag, used from 1954; right, flag adopted 2017

Several more city governments are in the exploratory stage of flag redesign but have not yet made their plans public.

### Lessons

What can vexillologists learn from these efforts, and share with those who are interested in city flags and their redesign?

The most important lesson: the work is less about flag design than it is about political process.<sup>127</sup> In fact, as past NAVA president Peter Ansoff has pithily observed: 'Designing the flag is the easy part ...'. While we vexillologists have articulated and publicised basic design principles as they apply to flags, we continue to learn about the pitfalls and best practices in the flag-adoption process. Those have more to do with group decision-making, public relations, political considerations, and democracy.

In fact, Roman Mars observed that some cases of poor city flags are 'discouraging enough to make you think that good design and democracy just simply do not go together'.<sup>128</sup>

When we examine the efforts that have not advanced beyond the idea stage, it appears that it is counterproductive to argue to retire the current flag AND propose a new design at the same time. That is, the decision to change a flag can be undermined by the distraction of considering a new design. So it seems

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124 'Council to Vote on New Provo City Flag', 1 January 2015, <http://www.provocitycouncil.com/2015/01/council-to-vote-on-new-provo-city-flag.html>

125 'Peoria gets official city flag for 1st time in 63 years', 12 News KPNX (Phoenix AZ), 6 April 2017, <http://www.12news.com/news/local/valley/peoria-gets-official-city-flag-for-1st-time-in-63-years/429347793>

126 Carlo Leone, 'Bring back original Peoria flag', *Peoria Times* (Peoria AZ), 12 May 2017, [http://www.peoriatimes.com/opinion/article\\_2d06b986-35aa-11e7-b3ed-eb8c1f928ad1.html](http://www.peoriatimes.com/opinion/article_2d06b986-35aa-11e7-b3ed-eb8c1f928ad1.html)

127 Malcolm Gay, 'Stiff winds at city halls for would-be flag designers', *Boston Globe*, 13 June 2017, [https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2017/06/13/stiff-winds-city-halls-for-would-flag-designers/Pk7ryXTsUgaUMZVAHxcRDJ/story.html?p1=Article\\_Recommended\\_ReadMore\\_Pos1](https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2017/06/13/stiff-winds-city-halls-for-would-flag-designers/Pk7ryXTsUgaUMZVAHxcRDJ/story.html?p1=Article_Recommended_ReadMore_Pos1)

128 Mars, 'Why city flags', 12:57.





imperative to seek and obtain city agreement to change a flag *before* advancing any new design.

In fact, nearly all of the stalled efforts omitted the important initial step of lining up political support for flag-change. Some of them reflect a naïve belief that a good redesign will be self-evident and once elected officials see it, they will embrace it. Others believe that the weight of public opinion after a design is selected will sway elected officials. But while flag *design* is an *artistic* process, flag *adoption* is clearly a *political* process.

The common objections to flag change include: the city faces more important issues (why is a city flag important?); we lack resources for new flags; the current flag is part of our history (the designer was a good person); there's no compelling reason for change; a new flag might be unpopular or non-representative of the city. Counter-arguments to these objections centre on: the costs are minimal, especially since most current flags are rarely flown widely; the to-be-retired flag will be honoured as part of the city's history; the new flag can be part of the city's 'brand'— a tool of economic development; and the flag can inspire civic pride and community cohesion.

So, among the lessons we can learn from examining these 70+ efforts:

- *Advance approval* of the concept and process from elected officials greatly increases the likelihood of the successful adoption of a new flag design. Without it, the likelihood of success is significantly lower.
- Although this may be obvious, attempts to create a flag for a city *without a flag* fare better than efforts to replace an existing flag. (There is one less obstacle to overcome.)
- It is *counterproductive to propose a new design* before obtaining agreement to change the current flag. Most efforts that began with asking a city to adopt a single proposed design have not proceeded past the idea stage.
- City officials must *be prepared for negative reactions* (to change and to proposed designs). They are often surprised by the volume and magnitude of criticism.
- Providing *guidance on flag design* principles leads to better designs and stronger winners—nearly all efforts cite the basic principles presented in *Good Flag, Bad Flag*.
- *Organisations* can be more successful than individuals acting alone—creating a group to promote flag-change, or recruiting existing organisations to sponsor the effort, significantly increases the chances of success. (This is a natural reflection of the political process; it demonstrates to city decision-makers that there is broader support for flag change.)
- *Involving students* advances the cause — whether they drive the effort or are simply assured inclusion in it, their involvement can induce political support.
- *Public voting is not always necessary* — half of the flags were adopted by city councils without a public consultation or vote, relying instead on committees or the council itself to decide.
- *Smaller cities* seem to have more success. Nearly all of the cities adopting new flags have populations below 150,000. Perhaps the complexity of



politics in larger cities makes flag-change more difficult.

- It helps to consider the process from a *public-relations* perspective, and to plan a campaign to build public support — first for flag change and then for the design adopted.
- Most contemporary flag-change efforts employ *social media* to reach, influence, and hear from the public, actively using websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, scribd, change.org, Straw Poll, and SurveyMonkey.
- The *process can take much longer* than people expect. (While some efforts have taken as little as two months, start-to-finish, most take much longer and some have gone on for more than two years.)

### **Conclusion**

In examining over 70 recent US municipal flag-change efforts, we vexillologists can identify major factors contributing to their success or failure. By documenting these efforts and systematising our learning, we can contribute to future flag design and adoption efforts in the US and beyond. Just as vexillology helped to improve the *quality* of flag *design* in recent years by articulating the basic principles of flag design, it can now help to improve the *success* of flag *adoption* in the coming years by articulating the basic lessons of flag change.