

The Kansas City Star

CITY FLAG DESIGN CONTEST



A Report from the

North American Vexillological Association

January 2005

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SUMMARY

The NAVA committee has given the following five flags the highest scores among 20 finalist designs chosen by the *Kansas City Star* as potential successors to the current city flag. The committee recommends that the *Star* present to a vote of its readers five flag designs, either the highest-scoring flags, or a more diverse range—perhaps #5, #7, #8, #12, #18, or #19. Each design would rank among the best U.S. city flags.



#18 8.8 points



#4 8.3 points



#2 8.3 points



#3 8.2 points



#12 8.2 points

CURRENT FLAG



In NAVA's recent American City Flags Survey, announced in October 2004, NAVA members rated the current Kansas City flag at 3.4 points on a 0-10 scale, ranking it 103rd out of the 150 flags rated. This low score likely reflects the flag's relative complexity, use of lettering, and gradient color.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) conducted an Internet-based survey rating the designs of 150 U.S. city flags, comprising the 100 largest cities in the country, all 50 state capitals, and at least two cities per state. On a scale of 0 to 10, Washington DC's ranked the highest with a score of 9.2; Pocatello, Idaho's ranked the lowest with 1.5, and Kansas City's ranked 103rd with a score of 3.4—equivalent to a “D+” grade.

Kansas City has had more flags in its history than any other of the 150 cities surveyed: five in all. The most recent was adopted in 1992; the earliest was a pennant adopted in 1913. The current flag suffers from its large white space, complex design, use of lettering, and gradient coloring, which combine to make it expensive to manufacture and difficult to decipher at any distance. Furthermore, it bears a ® symbol. Still, it utilizes a highly recognizable symbol evoking the city's nickname “City of Fountains” and colors from the Missouri and U.S. flags.

With 450 members in the U.S., Canada, and abroad, NAVA brings together people interested in the study of flags (vexillology), publishes a newsletter and a scholarly journal, hosts a website (www.nava.org), and holds annual meetings. NAVA's guide to flag design, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, is available on its website.

CONTEST

In December 2004 the *Kansas City Star* ran an article in its FYI (features) section on the NAVA survey and the ranking of the Kansas City flag. Alongside the article, FYI announced a flag contest under the headline “Design a New Kansas City Flag”, offering \$100 to the winner and \$50 each to two runners-up, as selected by a committee of NAVA. The article listed NAVA's five basic flag design principles: simplicity, meaningful symbolism, few colors, no lettering/seals, and distinctiveness. The deadline was 10 days later; readers submitted more than 250 entries, one per person.

FYI staff members culled the entries using the five basic flag design principles and submitted 20 finalist designs to NAVA for review. The most common symbols in the finalists included a fountain, the river, and map-like images. All of these have compelling symbolic meaning for Kansas City. *Star* staff excluded the many designs with an image of a heart (reflecting another city nickname on the current flag—“Heart of the Nation”). All 20 finalist designs would make successful city flags; judging was therefore difficult and no one “winner” should be identified.

JUDGING

At the request of the *Star*, NAVA assembled a panel of judges representing a broad spectrum of flag-design expertise:

- **Peter Ansoff**, NAVA president, Alexandria VA, expert on the First Navy Jack.
- **Deveraux Cannon**, attorney, Nashville TN, author of numerous books and articles on Civil War flags.
- **Lee Herold**, flag dealer, Rochester MN, promoter of the proposed new Minnesota flag.
- **Mason Kaye**, college student, Los Angeles CA, winner of NAVA's 1999 Driver Award for flag scholarship.
- **Ted Kaye**, financial executive, Portland OR, author of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*.
- **Peter Orenski**, lapel-flag manufacturer, New Milford CT, organizer of New Milford's flag design contest.
- **John Purcell**, retired professor of Spanish education, Cleveland OH, principal author of *American City Flags*.

The Portland (Oregon) Flag Association also provided a composite vote. The identities of the designers were not disclosed to the judges, nor were the explanations accompanying the flags (of course, when the final flag flies, neither the designer's name nor his intentions will be apparent...only the flag, so a "blind" judging is appropriate).

Judges awarded each design a score on five criteria, with the results converted to a 0-10 scale for comparability to city flag scores from the 2004 NAVA survey. In the tradition of the Olympics, the highest and lowest score for each design were discarded, with the average of the central scores determining the overall score.

CRITERIA

The judges scored the flags following the five basic flag design principles from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* (but substituting “attractiveness” for the fourth principle [“no lettering or seals”] since none of the finalists had lettering or seals). They give each flag a score, a maximum of 10 points, by awarding up to 2 points on: Simplicity, Symbolism, Color, Attractiveness, Distinctiveness.

- 1) **Simplicity:** Scalability—from large flag down to lapel pin; Ease of drawing from memory; Appearance when limp, flapping, or at a distance; Reversibility—doesn’t look “funny” on the reverse (but need not be symmetrical).
- 2) **Symbolism:** Representing KC—the symbols “say” KC to the viewer; Recognizable treatment—the symbolism can be easily identified; Significant, not a minor symbol; Colors, if carrying meaning, count here in symbolism.
- 3) **Color:** Colors come from the standard color set, number 2 to 3; Rule of Tincture is honored: lights don’t border lights, darks don’t border darks; Design “works” in black & white version.
- 4) **Attractiveness:** Overall aesthetics—attractiveness to viewer; Balance; Timelessness—the design is not “trendy”.
- 5) **Distinctiveness:** Not easily confused with other existing flags, especially other US city or state flags; If similar to another flag, that should be purposeful.

RESULTS: TOP TWENTY

The following designs were rated by the judges. The consensus scores on a 0-10 scale are listed for each.



#1: 7.4 points



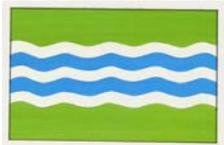
#2: 8.3 points



#3: 8.2 points



#4: 8.3 points



#5: 7.9 points



#6: 7.4 points



#7: 6.9 points



#8: 7.1 points



#9: 8.1 points



#10: 6.0 points



#11: 7.1 points



#12: 8.2 points



#13: 7.5 points



#14: 7.2 points



#15: 7.9 points



#16: 7.7 points



#17: 6.9 points



#18: 8.8 points



#19: 7.9 points



#20: 7.7 points

All of these are exemplary designs; all but one would have placed among the top 20 U.S. city flags in NAVA's 2004 survey (the cut-off was 6.8 points).

CONCLUSION

NAVA is pleased to have helped the *Kansas City Star* promote the design, selection, and adoption of a new flag for Kansas City. However, NAVA has neither designed nor selected a new flag: that role belongs to the citizens. A vote by readers of the *Star* on a few final designs may well be the best way to determine the final flag.

NAVA commends and encourages the *Star* to work with city officials to pursue a change in the official flag design. It notes that Assistant City Manager John Franklin has said that there is currently no budget to change the flag, however, a simpler design will save taxpayers money with the first run of new flags. (Portland, Oregon adopted a simplified design in 2002 but recognized the old flag as still official through 2005, allowing for attrition of current stocks—Kansas City could do the same.) NAVA cautions against allowing legislative additions or deletions to any proposals, which can often detract from the design and run counter to the wishes of the citizens (some other cities that have embarked upon flag redesign have encountered last-minute and unfortunate changes). The best course will be to poll readers on the flag, and then present the winning design “as is” to the city for adoption.

The *Star* can be proud of its readers’ commitment to the city’s history, enthusiasm for its symbols, and strong sense of good flag design. NAVA wishes Kansas City luck with its new flag. Congratulations!

JUDGING CONTACTS

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