

Kuether-Steele, Molly

From: Witte, Sally
Sent: Friday, October 12, 2018 4:27 PM
To: artsboard
Cc: Grote, Terri; Kuether-Steele, Molly
Subject: FW: Input about People's Flag Initiative

FYI

PLEASE DO NOT REPLY TO ALL

Any discussion of arts board business whether electronically or in person by a quorum of members (9) is subject to Open Meetings regulations.

From: Rebecca Silber Design [mailto:rebecca@rebeccasilberdesign.com]
Sent: Friday, October 12, 2018 12:40 PM
To: artsboard
Subject: Input about People's Flag Initiative

October 12, 2018

Dear members of the City of Milwaukee Arts Board,

I am writing to you in regard to the People's Flag of Milwaukee initiative about which you are currently holding meetings. I have been working as a freelance graphic designer in the City of Milwaukee since January 2006. I am a member of Local First Milwaukee, Milwaukee Artist Resource Network (MARN), the Chicago Chapter of the AIGA—the professional association for design, and I am certified with the City of New York as a WBE. As a professional graphic designer who adheres strictly to the industry's ethical and professional standards, I want to speak out against the People's Flag Initiative.

As we all know, the City of Milwaukee is made up of over 600,000 residents—all different walks of life, colors, income levels, education levels, etc. In creating design for any branch of government, whether it is on a national level or a local level, the public is the client. Not the public in an abstract sense, but the actual public. You may have read this and thought to yourself that it is impossible to please everybody. And I would agree with that. However, as a designer, it is absolutely critical to actively engage clients in order to achieve the absolute best result to any given visual problem. Yes, that's going to be frustrating on a government level, but if done correctly, it will be extremely rewarding. Oh, and there needs to be a visual problem in the first place—as in, did the City of Milwaukee actually want a new flag.

The People's Flag of Milwaukee initiative was not handled to professional standards. First and foremost, the City of Milwaukee never approached Steve Kodis or Ken Hanson, or anyone for that matter asking for a new flag. Is the current flag perfect? Absolutely not. But, that's a separate issue from what I am discussing here. Secondly, Kodis and Hanson never went through the proper government outlets prior to beginning this initiative. They didn't respond to any RFP (there wasn't an RFP), they didn't meet with City Council members, they didn't meet with the City of Milwaukee Arts Board or the City of Milwaukee graphic designer. Instead, they chose to run a contest in 2016. There were 1,000 entries. Participants could submit up to five designs, so there were NOT 1,000 people submitting. Robert Lenz himself submitted five designs. Yes, this contest was

open to the general public, but it was far from all-encompassing. Some measures were taken to engage people who may not have been engaged otherwise, but doing the best they could, is simply not good enough for a flag design that is supposed to represent a city of 600,000 people. No graphic designer who upholds high professional standards would say that they did the best they could and be happy with that. Engaging some school children and bringing in a celebrity panel for the big reveal at City Hall is not doing the best this city can do.

On a personal note, I didn't participate because this initiative was originally touted as a contest. The AIGA does not support crowd sourcing and states that it is their duty to educate anyone who does not understand why design crowd sourcing is not a good thing. There are two articles that you may be interested in reading that explain this stance. One article is called "What's the Harm in Crowdsourcing?" and was written by the AIGA president, Richard Grefe, in 2011. The other article is entitled, "Against Crowdsourcing Logo Design: an Open Letter from AIGA to the Tokyo Olympic Committee." It is an op-ed piece from a few years ago. Both of these articles can very easily be Googled. Sadly, I just renewed my AIGA membership, but with the Chicago Chapter instead of the Wisconsin Chapter, due to their support of this contest. I feel that the Wisconsin Chapter of the AIGA no longer supports the profession as it should. A couple of years ago, the National AIGA reprimanded the Wisconsin Chapter of the AIGA for supporting the People's Flag Contest and thus, the contest became an initiative.

I have loved the creativity and support for the arts that I have seen in this city ever since we moved here thirteen years ago. Milwaukee is a community full of unique thoughts and talents—music, art, and writing. Unfortunately, this flag contest has turned a blind eye toward the support that artists need to continue to thrive in this city. If you don't believe that the graphic design profession has lost respect in Milwaukee due to this contest, then you haven't read the hurtful comments on each social media post promoting this flag contest. Comments such as, "my kid could have done this" or "this flag sucks" do absolutely nothing to support the arts in this city. Contest organizers will happily tell you how many other cities used crowdsourcing to get a new flag, but that does not mean that it is the right thing to do.

If the City of Milwaukee does want a new flag, this could be such a wonderful opportunity for the City to support the arts, and the graphic design profession. If the city stood up for the design profession and said, "We do want a new flag, but it needs to be done in a professional manner." that would be lauded by artists in this community, as well as artists in other communities, on a national level.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Silber

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