



## Editorial: Chicago has a great flag. Why doesn't Cook County?

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD CHICAGO TRIBUNE DEC 20, 2019 | 6:15 PM

The flag of the city of Chicago is a thing of beauty. Its elegant, arresting design makes it easy to recognize and hard to forget. Locals fly it from porches, wear it on T-shirts and hats and even tattoo it on their bodies. The North American Vexillological Association ranked it No. 2 of all city flags, behind Washington, D.C., but we feel no compunction in calling it the best by far.

The Cook County flag is ... well, not all that. Most residents couldn't tell you what it looked like, and if they saw it, they'd be able to identify it only because it says, in red capital letters, "Cook County." At the center of a white field is a gold map of the county, including township lines, surrounded by two blue circular stripes which enclose 39 stars. It has all the charm of a metal file cabinet.

But that may change. Last week, Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton called for replacing this mediocre emblem. The cost would be minimal. He proposed a competition for high school students to come up with a new version.

County Board President Toni Preckwinkle was receptive to replacing what she called the "pedestrian" flag with something "modernizing our presentation to the world." And she liked the idea of enlisting young people in the effort.

Britton praised the Chicago flag as a model to match or even surpass. At the risk of offending our neighbors to the north, Britton said the Milwaukee flag is just the opposite. Its riot of images includes a stalk of barley, a gear resembling a Ferris wheel, smokestacks, a clock tower, a ship, an Indian head, a stadium and the date "1846" — everything but a partridge in a pear tree. It's not a flag; it's a warehouse.

Milwaukeeans didn't need to be told. A few years ago, they had a competition to design a new flag, and the winner was much better, featuring the sun rising over Lake Michigan. But the "people's flag" has yet to be officially adopted.

The basic elements of a beautiful banner have been set down by the flag fans (OK, vexillologists) at NAVA. They include being simple enough for a child to draw from memory, with two or three basic colors, some meaningful symbolism and no writing. The creators of the current Cook County flag were conspicuously neglectful of these guidelines.

We're not sure that Cook County residents would ever embrace a flag the way Chicagoans do theirs. But we're happy anytime the commissioners occupy themselves with things that don't require higher taxes. And if the county is going to have a flag, it might as well be a good one.

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