

November 6, 2017

To: Merced City Council & City Manager
From: Michael Belluomini
Ref: Welcome Sign & City Slogan Contest

Background: Merced is one of the few cities of its size that does not have a city entry sign. Those cities that have entry signs typically have them in the highway right of way and are funded by the city. The signs serve to identify arrival at the city and to give a sense of welcome while revealing something of the character of the community. Signs are regulated by Cal Trans and maintained by the city. A resolution of the city council is required by Cal Trans for placement of entry signs.

In February the city council established a subcommittee including Council members: Belluomini, Blake, and Martinez to prepare entry sign designs, and funding sources. The subcommittee with community members met in March, April, May, June, August, and October. The subcommittee designated three highways entering Merced that needed six signs: 59, 99, and 140 plus the need for a central Merced/downtown archway city symbol. On May 1, the city council approved a contest to solicit entry sign designs, archway symbol designs, and alternative city slogans. The council indicated that alternative slogans might be added to the city but not replace the current slogan. The award for winning sign designs, archway, and slogans would be \$300 each. The contest deadline was October 6.

Contest Results: The city received 77 slogan proposals, 56 entry sign designs and three archway symbol designs. The subcommittee reviewed the proposals and noted that there were several city symbols that appeared in many signs: 1) the Merced Theater tower; 2) the "Beginning" statue from UC Merced; 3) Merced historic Courthouse; and 4) Half Dome in Yosemite National Park. The subcommittee recommended five of the sign designs as having appealing characteristics. The various good aspects of the signs could be combined if it produces a better sign. See attached sign designs.

The subcommittee recommends the following alternative city slogans for city council consideration:

1. Gem of the Central Valley
2. Where Entrepreneurship and Research Meet
3. Honoring the Past, Envisioning the Future
4. Growth, Vitality, Family
5. Growing Ideas, Together
6. Let's Grow Together

All 77 slogan entries are attached.

There were three archway symbol designs submitted. The subcommittee liked aspects of each. It preferred the archway with bicycles, however, it does not recommend using the design as submitted. Instead the subcommittee recommends that other symbols of Merced city life be substituted for some of the bicycles. Archways from other cities are included for consideration. Aspects of each archway can be combined to create a revised archway design, or the professional sign designer can be asked to make a composite design.

The subcommittee did not agree on a location for the archway city symbol but suggests the following alternative locations for council consideration.

- 1) "M" St at 16th St or Main St
- 2) Martin Luther King Jr. Way at 16th St or Main St
- 3) G St at 16 St or Main St

Funding: The subcommittee concluded that asking community service clubs, businesses, and philanthropists to donate to the cost of the signs should wait until the sign designs were chosen by the city, and a good estimate of their cost could be prepared. Donors need to understand what they are paying for. It is prudent to ask for Cal Trans preliminary approval of the sign designs the city chooses, and to confirm their locations in the right of way. After the preferred sign designs are chosen and the cost estimate is prepared and approved by council, then subcommittee members can begin to solicit pledges of donations toward sign construction from services clubs, businesses, institutions, and individuals. The subcommittee will report back to the council in March 2018 on donations pledged.

Recommendation: The subcommittee recommends that the city council:

1. Choose a sign design for Highway 99 north bound at Campus Parkway to be mounted to the highway overpass
2. Choose a sign design for Highway 99 south bound near 16th St off ramp
3. Choose one or two sign designs for placement on southbound 59 near Bellevue Rd and northbound 59 near Mission Ave
4. Choose one or two sign designs for placement on east bound 140 near the east side of the Bradley Overpass
5. Choose an archway design for the downtown/central Merced area either as presented or suggest changes to improve the design
6. Authorize the City Manager to contract with Graphic Solutions Sign Engineers and Designers to prepare cost estimates and more polished illustrations of the preferred signs and archway
7. Authorize city staff to seek preliminary approval of the sign locations from Cal Trans
8. Authorized city staff to review archway locations and report any obstacles to placing the archway, and advantages and disadvantages of each location.