SUBJECT: Consideration of a Policy for Flag Lowering to Half-Staff at City Facilities

SOURCE: City Manager’s Office

At a previous meeting, an item was presented which outlined a policy defining procedures whereby the American Flag could be lowered to half-staff in recognition of the passing of certain City of Porterville residents. The recommended policy was to permit the Mayor to lower the City Hall Flag to half-staff for a single day in recognition of the death of a former Council member or residents who had been responsible for a major community activity for a number of years.

At the meeting, a resident outlined provisions of the U.S. Flag Code that would not allow this. According to the Flag Code, in Section 175 only the President and Governors may cause the U.S. Flag to be lowered to half-staff. Specifically, the section provides

. . . . By order of the President, the flag shall be flown at half-staff upon the death of principal figures of the United States Government and the Governor of a State, territory, or possession, as a mark of respect to their memory. In the case of the death of other officials or foreign dignitaries, the flag is to be displayed at half-staff according to Presidential instructions or orders, or in accordance with the recognized customs or practices not inconsistent with law. In the event of the death of a present or former official of the government of any State, territory, or possession of the United States, the Governor of that State, territory, or possession may proclaim that the National flag shall be flown at half-staff . . . .

“Googling” the practice indicates that many cities and other agencies have provisions allowing the lowering of the United States Flag to half-staff in recognition of an official’s death. The City Manager suggests that the United States Flag Code was adopted by Congress and defines protocol for the United States Flag. Therefore, it should define the City’s policies and actions relative to the United States Flag.

Proposed Flag Lowering Policy: The City Manager recommends that a policy be established, that once a City Flag is approved and a Flag Pole installed in front of City Hall, that the Mayor of the City of Porterville may cause the City Flag to be lowered to half-staff for a day in the case of individuals who served on the City Council, City commissions, or a community resident who served on multiple occasions as the leader or the manager of a major public, community event or activity. The United States Flag should only be lowered to half-staff when proclaimed by the President or Governor.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve a flag lowering policy as outlined above.