

**Levesque, Jennifer**

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**From:** Jonathan [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2021 9:51 AM  
**To:** cityclerk  
**Subject:** Item K-5, Public Comment email for consideration

January 19, 2021

To: Merced City Council

From: Jonathan Whitaker

Ref: Business item, K-5, "Echevarria request, public speaking podium, press area"

Nearly 13 years ago, when Ellie Wooten was mayor, I started covering the Merced City Council as a reporter for the County Times. When I entered the Council Chambers for the first time, I was very impressed with the modern design. Having the speakers' podium to the side and elevated was one of the progressive aspects of this public meeting space. I appreciated the views of the speaker that the podium offered.

As for the press area, it was most impressive. There was desk space and outlets for three journalists in an elevated area to the left of the dais. We had a bird's eye view of both the council and the audience.

This remained the same for the mayoral terms of Bill Spriggs and Stan Thurston, a total of eight years. But when Mayor Mike Murphy took office, things changed. A portable podium for speakers was brought to the galley below, and the press space was removed, pushing reporters to the audience area.

So what happened?

I think one of the arguments about the elevated podium is that it lends itself for residents to start speaking to the audience, instead of the council members. However, I believe that this can be largely avoided by providing a clear warning that residents need to address the City Council members, and no one else.

I believe the chamber is the People's House — and the original design of the space did that concept justice.

As for the hardworking media, compare your chamber with others in the surrounding area. The Modesto City Council Chamber includes a desk and meeting TV monitor in the rear of the room for up to three journalists and/or city officials. The Fresno City Council Chamber includes a press seating area in front of the dais for up to eight journalists.

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