

## Concord needs spirit: keep the poles

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There's a secret I've been carrying around for too long, and now is the time to bare my soul: I really like the Spirit Poles.

Yes, I'm one of the apparently small minority of folks who thinks that much-maligned towering collection of aluminum poles gracing the middle of Concord Avenue is one of the finest public art projects in the Bay Area.

If you've never seen the 91 metal shafts some rising up to 50 feet in the air it's certainly worth the drive to downtown Concord to behold. Who knows how much longer they'll be there.

A bit of history: When Concord first installed the art piece in 1989, you really couldn't praise the poles out loud without stirring up an argument and a heap of ridicule. From day one, the good citizens of Concord hated the poles. The City Council members who bought them from artist Gary Rieveschl were threatened with a recall. And for city politicians who came after, railing against the poles became one of those apple pie promises like "I'll improve our schools" and "I'll fix this traffic mess." Once someone even put giant plastic marshmallows on the tips to point out their alleged resemblance to barbecue skewers.

But the poles always managed to survive until a couple weeks ago when a big wind blew one over. City workers discovered others in the group had cracks and removed three more.

When I heard the first inkling that the poles were in trouble, I feared it would give latent detractors new ammunition to attack their future. My fears were justified. Even the Mayor is talking like he wants to take `em down.

All I can say is "Don't!"

I'm nothing near an art critic, heck I've never even been to the Louvre. But I've never walked passed the Spirit Poles when I didn't have to stop and admire them. They interact with the space. They evoke conversation. They do, in fact, stir the spirit. Why would a city like Concord want to scrap such a prize?

Concord has been working hard at grabbing a piece of the new high-tech economy. The city wisely supports the county's first software incubator and is trying to project a high-tech, sophisticated image. Concord wants to be the kind of place where creative, free-thinking businesses want to set up shop. What better way to welcome that kind of energy than with an edgy, spirited piece of art like the Spirit Poles?