

Divvying Up the Pie

Why local redistricting matters to our neighborhoods



By Cecily Hastings
Publisher's Desk

The results of the 2010 U.S. census have been released. Now comes the drawing up of new electoral district boundaries in order to equalize district populations. To understand the redistricting process, envision a cake that must be divided equally among hungry family members.

Since the 1960s, redistricting has been performed every 10 years soon after the Census Bureau releases the past decade's data showing where people reside. The purpose of redistricting is to redraw districts in order to address any changes in population concentration. Districts

will be redrawn in time for the June 2012 election.

Districts are redrawn at the state, county, city, school and special-district level. Different bodies have different rules for which criteria—other than population—should be used to decide how and where lines are drawn.

Often, a legislative body is responsible for redrawing its own lines. Such is the case with Sacramento city and county.

The State

In 2008, California voters approved the Voters FIRST Act, taking the job of redistricting out of legislators' hands because of their frustration with a process that served to protect incumbents.

The commission has 14 members from varied ethnic backgrounds and geographic locations. The commission includes five Democrats, five Republicans and four "decline to state" members. The process for

selecting members was set out in the Voters FIRST Act.

The CRC will be in charge of redrawing districts for California's 53 congressional seats, plus the State Senate, State Assembly and State Board of Equalization.

The County

In California counties, each board of supervisors must redraw its own supervisorial district boundaries.

According to the 2010 census, our county's population is 1,418,788—a 16 percent increase over the past decade, with 195,289 residents added. This increase will require adjustments in the district's boundaries.

Using census data, the county's Department of Voter Registration and Elections submitted several redistricting plans to the board for consideration. These proposals will also be presented at a number of community workshops to give residents an opportunity to learn more about the redistricting process

and provide input. The workshop series runs through June 15.

For information on county workshop locations, plus past redistricting maps, go to elections.saccounty.net or call 875-5827. You can also e-mail your ideas and input to voters-redistrict2011@saccounty.net.

The City

According to the census, Sacramento city's population grew from 407,018 to 466,488 over the past decade, a 5.7 percent increase. District 1, which includes Natomas, grew more than any other city district. The boundaries of the city's eight districts will be redrawn to reflect the changes in population.

The city council created an advisory committee of residents to study the matter and report to the council before the council adopts a redistricting plan later this summer.

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INSIDE PUBLICATIONS

INSIDE THE CITY • INSIDE EAST SACRAMENTO • INSIDE ARDEN

PUBLISHER: Cecily Hastings · publisher@insidepublications.com

ADVERTISING SALES: Ann Tracy (East Sac) 798-2136; Michael Boyd (Central City and Land Park) 341-9755; Nicholas Walsh (Arden) 335-3607

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POLICY: Commentary reflects the views of the writers and does not necessarily reflect those of

Published Monthly by Hayward Hastings, Inc.

3104 "O" Street #120 · Sacramento, CA 95816 (Mail Receiving Location Only)
916.441.7026 · FAX 916.443.5078

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The City's Redistricting Advisory Committee

Steve Maviglio: political consultant who ran Kevin Johnson's 2008 mayoral campaign (appointed by Mayor Kevin Johnson)

Roman Porter: executive director of the state's Fair Political Practices Commission (appointed by Angelique Ashby)

Bill Camp: executive secretary of Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO (appointed by Sandy Sheedy)

Cyril Shah: Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment commissioner (appointed by Steve Cohn)

Julius Cherry: former fire chief (appointed by Rob Fong)

Steve Hansen: vice chair of Downtown Sacramento Partnership (appointed by Jay Schenirer)

Bill Motmans: president of Tahoe Park Neighborhood Association (appointed by Kevin McCarty)

Bernard Bowler: former chair of Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce (appointed by Darrell Fong)

Sandra Frye-Lucas: schoolteacher, consulting firm owner (appointed by Bonnie Pannell)

At-large members: Linn Hom, Miranda Perry, Phil Pluckebaum, Maya Wallace, Michelle Rubalcava, Nadia Leal-Carrillo ●

Does the Advisory Committee Reflect the Community?

When the mayor and city council members made their selections for the redistricting advisory committee, they naturally chose people who reflect their own political beliefs and philosophies.

Theoretically, the addition of six at-large members should have created a more diverse, politically balanced committee by adding people who were representative of the greater community as a whole.

According to voter registration rolls, about 25 percent of Sacramento city voters are registered Republicans. Yet

while several Republicans with significant backgrounds in public service applied for the panel, not one was selected. Most of the committee's 15 members are registered Democrats. A few are on the voter rolls as "decline to state," and one member does not even appear in voter registration records.

By comparison, the state's redistricting commission was designed and approved by the voters to be balanced politically—notable in a state that is not. Ironically, city voters overwhelming supported the creation of this politically balanced commission. ●

to ignore. (Recall the city's Charter Review Committee, which met for more than seven months in 2009, after which its recommendations were summarily dismissed.)

The panel includes 15 members. The mayor and eight council members each appointed one member. The council's personnel committee at first selected four at-large members from about two dozen applicants. But after

the originally chartered 13-member panel was announced and not a single Latino was included, the council voted to add two more positions and extend the deadline. Ultimately, no eligible Latino applicants stepped forward.

There is an online tool on the city's website that allows residents to create, share and submit district plans to the city. It's fairly easy to use. The advisory committee will review and analyze submissions, identify key issues and recommend the plans it prefers. It could come up with a plan of its own, combining elements of others.

One of the greatest powers that the people have is the right to elect their own representatives.

To comply with the city charter, along with state and federal law, the districts are supposed to be as nearly equal in population as possible, while still considering factors such as neighborhood boundaries, common interests, geography, topography, compactness and "proper political and legislative concerns."

The new districts ought to keep neighborhoods together and put those with common interests in the same district. It makes no sense, for instance, that downtown is divided between three different districts. Downtown and Midtown, which share common issues and concerns, should be in the same district.

Unfortunately, leaving the final decision to the council appears to be an open invitation for political mischief. I fear council members may be tempted to come up with districts that protect incumbents, not necessarily districts that lead to fair representation. (Redistricting could leave a council member living outside his or her own district and unable to run for re-election.)

Sacramento Bee editorial writer Foon Rhee recently wrote that the city's redistricting procedure "badly needs reform because if it's anything

like last time, the results won't be very pretty. A decade ago, the council largely ignored outside suggestions and approved a map that made sure no incumbent was moved out of his or her district. The map also divided too many neighborhoods, however, and put dramatically different populations in the districts."

The pressure is on council members to approve fair and sensible districts.

It's always a politically fraught process—and will likely be more so with the rivalries and divisiveness on this council.

One of the greatest powers that the people have is the right to elect their own representatives to conduct the business of their government. How the district boundaries are drawn can make the difference between maximizing and muting the voters' voices. It remains to be seen if the council does more than pay lip service to community involvement when it redraws district boundaries.

For more information about the city's redistricting process, go to cityofsacramento.org/redistricting.

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Redistricting Goals

- Districts must be of equal population.
- Districts must comply with the Voting Rights Act to ensure that minorities have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.
- Districts must be contiguous, so that all parts of the district are connected to each other.
- Districts must respect the boundaries of neighborhoods and "communities of interest" (a contiguous population that shares common social and economic interests).
- Districts must be geographically compact—that is, have a fairly regular shape.
- Districts must not be drawn to favor or discriminate against an incumbent, candidate or political party.

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The city council will make the final decision on the city's new district plan.

Keep in mind the important difference between a commission—which usually has the final authority to make decisions—and an advisory committee, which is designed to elicit advice that the council can choose