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Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

An Independent Body with Sole Authority to Draw Council District Boundaries

“Redistricting encourages manipulation of our elections by allowing incumbent politicians to help partisan allies, hurt political enemies and choose their voters before the voters choose them. The current process is used as a means to further political goals by drawing boundaries to protect incumbents and reduce competition, rather than to ensure equal voting power and fair representation.”

-- Center for Voting and Democracy, *The Redistricting Problem* (2015)

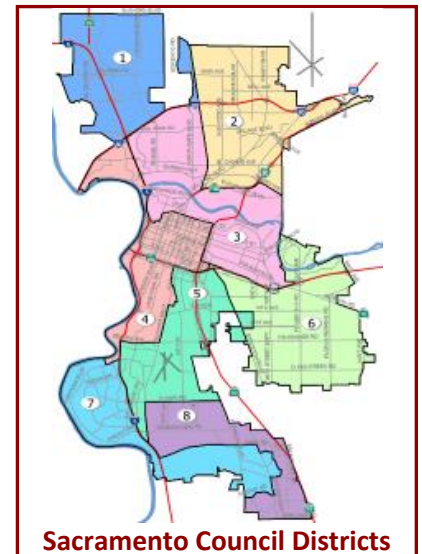
Sacramento needs an Independent Redistricting Commission.

The principle of “one person, one vote,” guaranteed by the United States Constitution, requires the redrawing of city council districts every ten years to ensure that they maintain substantially equal populations. **Redistricting** is at the heart of representative democracy. At its best, redistricting creates **cohesive districts** that keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact, giving these voters a political voice in city decision-making. At its worst, redistricting is an **incumbency-protection plan** or a **partisan tool** for a legislative majority to retain or expand its influence by drawing wildly unrepresentative maps.

Sacramento, like most California cities, gives incumbents the power to draw their own districts. As explained by the Center for Voting and Democracy, it is a **conflict of interest** to have politicians “choose their voters before the voters choose them.” This was apparent in the disastrous 2011 decennial and 2014 mid-cycle redistrictings: the City Council was accused, fairly or not, of playing political games, disenfranchising minority communities, and creating final maps in secret without public input. This controversy is not new. In 2011, the *Sacramento Bee* editorialized about the previous decade’s lines: “*Sacramento’s City Council districts are a mess. They split too many neighborhoods. There’s far too big a gap in populations among the districts, making a mockery of the democratic ideal of one person, one vote. And, to suit politicians, they’re contorted into ridiculous shapes.*”

The modern trend is to place redistricting in the hands of an **independent commission**. The State of California draws state and federal legislative districts using an independent commission. Five of the ten largest cities in California have amended their charters to create permanent redistricting commissions. Research has shown that redistricting commissions do a better job of:

- eliminating **political gerrymandering**,
- keeping **communities intact**,



Sacramento Council Districts

- building **compact districts**, and
- increasing **minority representation**.

The City of Sacramento needs to move away from an elected official-driven redistricting process. Sacramentans have consistently voted in support of the state redistricting commission. It is time to bring that reform to city council districts. The Sacramento City Charter needs to be amended to create an **independent Redistricting Commission** to ensure fair and representative districts for our city.

Five core principles of a Citizens Redistricting Commission

The following five core principles, based on statewide best-practices, lay out essential elements to building an effective Redistricting Commission:

Principle 1: The Redistricting Commission is established in the City Charter and has the sole authority to adopt new district maps.

The Redistricting Commission should have the power to **actually draw council district lines**, and not merely provide recommendations. In the last redistricting cycle, in 2011, the City Council created an advisory committee on redistricting that held ten public meetings to create four proposed district maps – only for all four to be rejected by the Council. Establishing the Commission in the City Charter, equivalent to the City’s constitution, is crucial to ensuring the Commission’s maps are not simply discarded or ignored.

Principle 2: The Redistricting Commission is independent of political control. Commissioners are unbiased, and not directly appointed by elected officials.

Redistricting should be about creating cohesive and representative districts, not protecting incumbents. If Commissioners are directly appointed by the mayor or city council, there is too great a risk that they will act on their appointing official’s interest over the public’s interest. This is why the State of California, Oakland, and San Diego all select qualified commissioner through a transparent, fair process that **does not involve direct political appointment** and **excludes political operatives** from serving.

Principle 3: The Redistricting Commission reflects Sacramento’s diverse communities.

Sacramento is one of the most diverse cities in America. To effectively redraw council district boundaries, commissioners must come from **different geographic areas** in our city, and should reflect, to the extent practicable, the **ethnic, economic, gender, sexual orientation, and political diversity** that makes up our city.

Principle 4: The Redistricting Commission draws boundaries using fair redistricting criteria that promote representative districts which keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact.

The Redistricting Commission should be guided in its mission with **clear and well-accepted redistricting criteria** that promote district cohesiveness and reduce the opportunities for gerrymandering, including: population equality, complying with the Voting Rights Act, contiguity, compactness, and keeping intact neighborhoods and communities of interest.

Principle 5: The Redistricting Commission conducts all of its business in public and actively seeks out public participation in the line-drawing process.

There are no better experts on the boundaries of Sacramento’s neighborhoods and communities than the residents that live there. Transparency and public engagement are vital to a successful redistricting. The Commission should hold **public meetings in all corners of the City** to receive resident input; any **data or reports** that the Commission relies on should be placed **online** so residents can review and comment on it. Finally, to the degree possible, as in 2011, redistricting software should be available online so community groups and individuals can create and **submit their own maps** and boundaries for consideration.

For More Information, visit: <http://www.eyeousacramento.com>.

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