

Austin Neighborhood Council

Support of Geographic Representation on the Austin City Council

(Presented to Charter Revision Committee, January 5, 2012)

The function of any elected representative is to gauge the political will of the people, to mediate differences among constituencies to form fair and effective public policy, and to ensure that the bureaucracy carries out that policy. In city government, effective representation ranges from determining why a pothole hasn't been repaired to setting long-range priorities for citywide infrastructure improvements. Over the last ten years, as members of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC) have participated in the city's neighborhood and comprehensive planning efforts, it has become clear that the roles of our City Council and city administration have been reversed. The task of gauging the political will of the people has fallen increasingly to city staff, and citizens find that they must negotiate the terms of public policy directly with staff. At the end of the process, city staff presents recommendations to City Council, and there is little opportunity for citizens to communicate directly with an elected representative.

Several years ago, ANC identified Austin's at-large election system as a significant factor in this disconnect. Because our at-large City Council members each represent the entire population (almost 800,000 people), none of them can provide effective constituent services. If truly representative and participatory, geographic election districts would ensure that district voters' interests are represented, and that each district has equal weight on the council. The cost savings of running district election campaigns (versus citywide campaigns) would foster more grassroots candidates and participants, which in turn makes the electoral process more competitive and increases voter turnout. Geographic districts are not a panacea for all that ails our city; however, they do promise a substantial improvement.

The ANC membership recently reviewed proposals for election systems with six, eight, and ten single-member districts, with and without at-large seats. In October they voted to recommend a system with 10 single-member districts and no at-large seats (other than the mayor). This vote reflects our belief that our city has grown in size and diversity to the point that the current system no longer can provide adequate and fair representation of all residents. The ANC-endorsed election model – 10 districts and a Mayor – would ensure that Austin today and tomorrow will be in compliance with the spirit and letter of the Voting Rights Act. A 10-0-1 plan combats voter apathy by providing citizens a better opportunity to engage with their elected officials.

Sample Maps

To demonstrate how such a system would comply with federal guidelines and with the districting criteria and guidelines in City Council resolutions 20110526-024 and -025, two 10-district sample maps are being submitted with summaries of the demographic data and precinct-by-precinct tables.

Option A maximizes African-American voting strength in an election district serving Central East Austin and attempts to maximize the number of districts likely to be dominated by Hispanic voters (4 or 5, depending on your interpretation of the term "opportunity district").

Option B maximizes the voting strength of the growing population in Del Valle and southeast Austin (perhaps the most neglected community in city politics), taking care not to dilute it with south central voters, who have somewhat different interests. The demographic

distribution in Option B is almost identical to that of Option A, except that the Hispanic population of northeast Austin is concentrated in District 9 rather than District 1.

Although ANC long ago organized itself into 10 sectors, neither of these maps is based on the ANC sector map. That map places two of the top African-American voting precincts in a Central East sector, separate from four other top precincts in the Northeast sector. These neighborhoods are among the most active and effective organizations in ANC, but given the concentration of this minority community in so few precincts, the six voting precincts in Table 1 should probably be included together in a single City Council election district, regardless of the number of districts.

African-American Population Distribution

When ANC began to review the 2010 Census data and election district maps in the spring of 2011, a new organization (later to become AGR) suggested that a 10-district plan could contain a City Council election district with an African-American plurality, or close to one-third of the population. An analysis of the population distribution in Travis County Precinct 1, however, shows that the proportion cannot exceed about one-quarter (Table 2). About 62% of County Precinct 1's African-American population resides within Austin's city limits, and 33% of that population resides within 8 voting precincts in Central East Austin. Outside those 8 precincts, the concentration of African Americans is only 11%, which means that any district of 80,000 people (the ideal population under a 10-district plan) will dilute the African-American population to about 25%. In ANC Option A, the percentage in the Central East district is 26%; in Option B it is 24%.

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Table 1. Top Six African-American Voting Precincts

VTD	Total Pop	Hispanic	White	African American	Asian	All Other	Total VAP	Hispanic VAP	White VAP	Black VAP	Asian VAP	All Other VAP	Registered Voters	Spanish Surname
0151	4,361	1,475	1,279	1,495	40	72	3,338	975	1,157	1,128	36	42	2,865	393
0132	4,380	1,646	933	1,671	34	96	3,335	1,048	853	1,344	32	58	2,614	385
0124	7,252	3,081	1,802	2,130	78	161	5,375	1,887	1,680	1,629	72	107	5,137	1,069
0122	7,787	4,582	836	2,226	48	100	5,121	2,635	742	1,643	40	63	2,894	470
0121	6,719	3,611	253	2,757	17	84	4,244	2,063	228	1,900	15	41	2,122	391
0126	7,372	2,613	2,038	2,476	90	155	5,767	1,681	1,905	1,975	86	120	4,996	745
Total	37,871	17,008	7,141	12,755	307	668	27,180	10,289	6,565	9,619	281	431	20,628	3,453
		45%	19%	34%	1%	2%		38%	24%	35%	1%	2%		17%

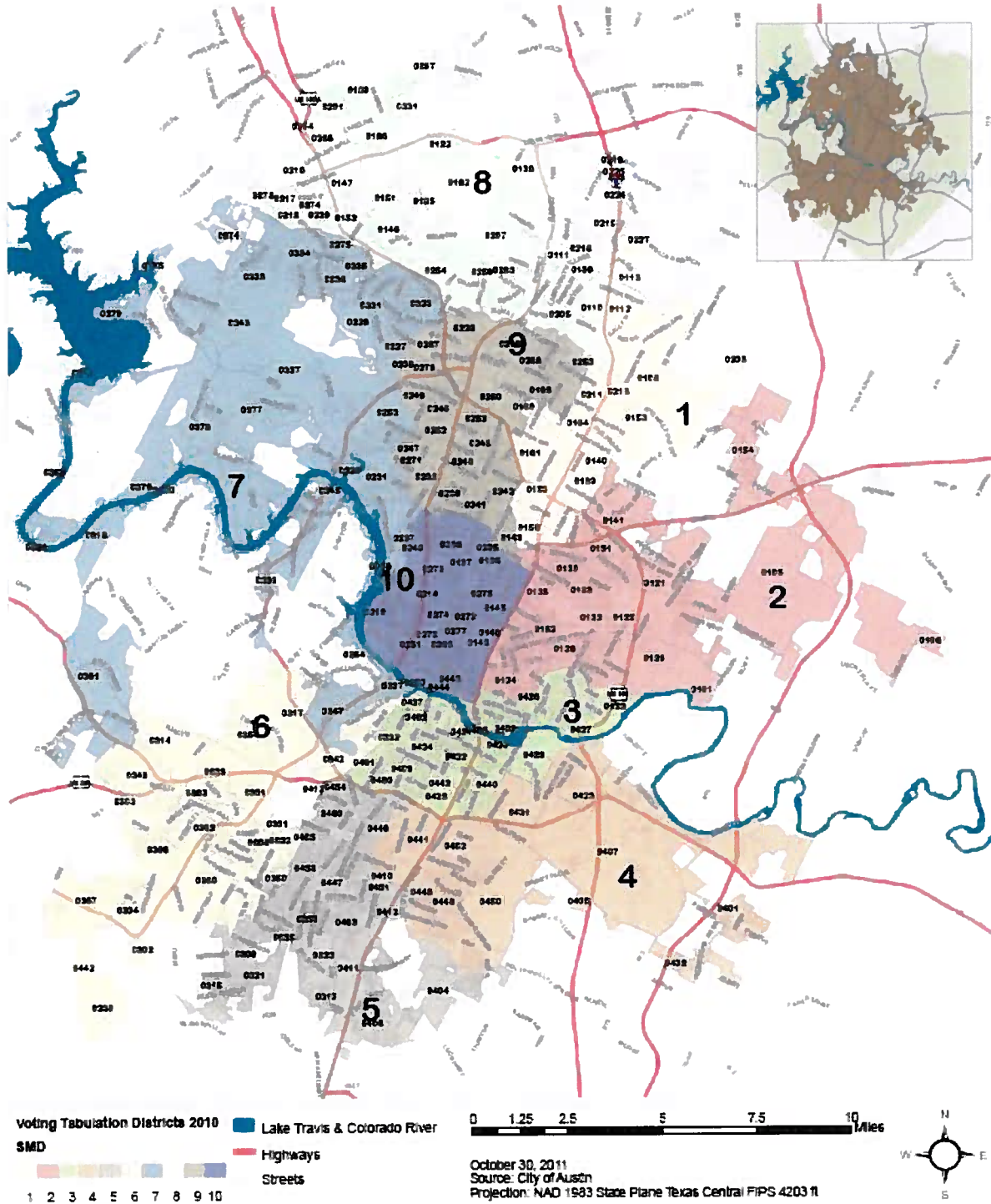
Table 2. Travis County Precinct 1 Demographics

District	Total Population	Hispanic	White	African American	Hispanic VAP	White VAP	Black VAP
County Precinct 1	251,153	43%	31%	51,405 (20.5%)	38%	36%	20%
In City*	193,966	46%	29%	32,112 (17%)	40%	35%	17%
8 Central East precincts	50,850			16,947 (33%)			
All other in-city precincts	143,116			15,165 (11%)			

* 62% (32,112) of Precinct 1's African-American population is within the city limits

Austin Neighborhoods Council

City Council Election Districts 10-District Sample Map A



Austin Neighborhoods Council

10 City Council Election Districts, Option A: Data Summary

Ideal district size: 79,666 (796,668 / 10); Maximum deviation: 3% under and 2.5% over = 5.5%

10-District Demographics

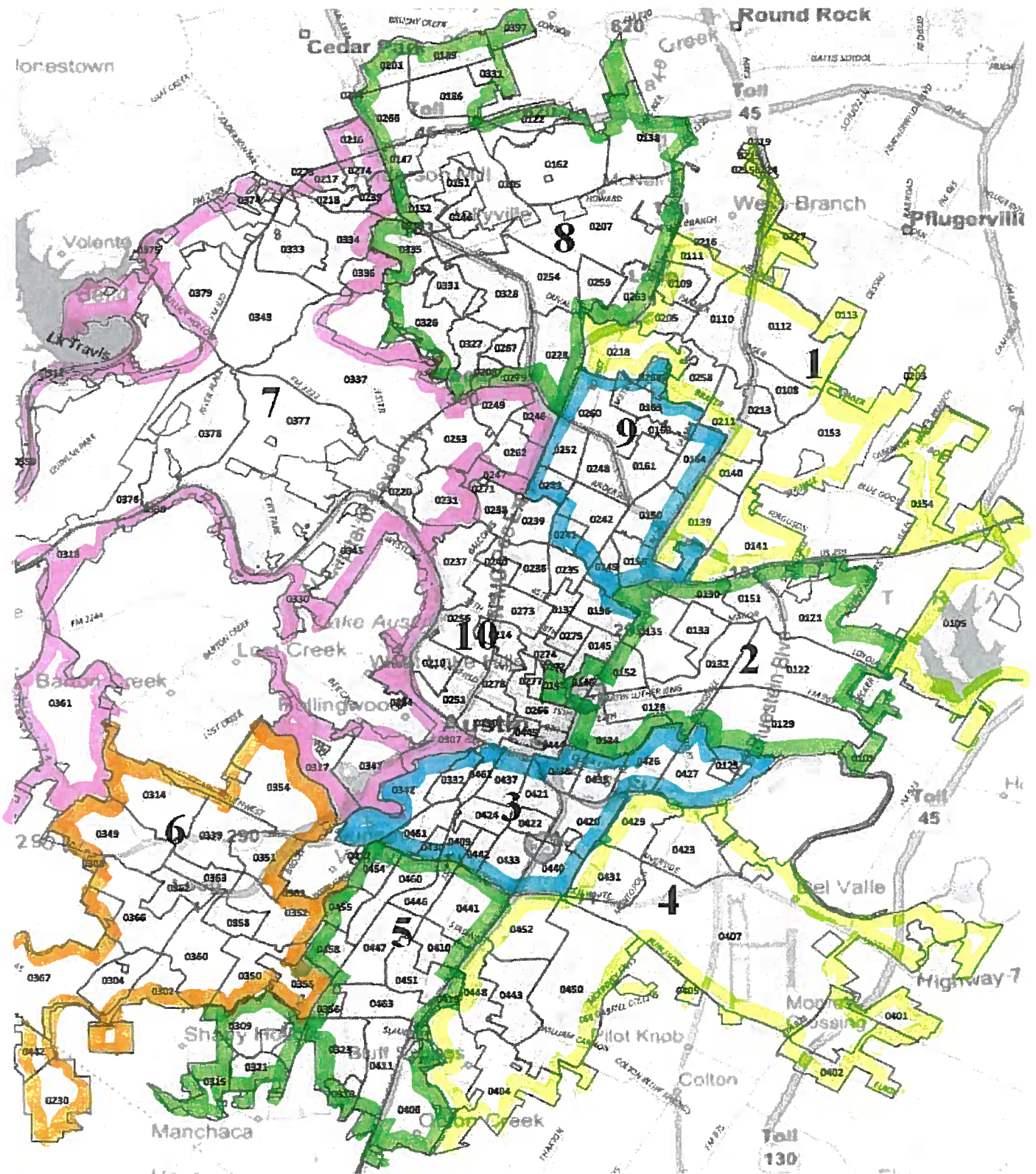
District	Population	Deviation	Hispanic	White	African American	Asian	All Other		
1	80580	1%	45829	18447	9583	5168	1545		
2	77199	-3%	34330	19734	20189	1492	1461		
3	80529	1%	38022	33519	5018	2299	1671		
4	81476	2%	57998	14071	7176	1005	1228		
5	79360	0%	32442	38922	3973	2276	1753		
6	81679	2.5%	15494	56501	2014	5639	2033		
7	78976	-1%	7282	59811	1429	8520	1932		
8	79147	-1%	15233	46039	5474	10109	2282		
9	77007	-3%	21370	45147	3998	4831	1661		
10	80715	1%	10442	57531	2177	8407	2158		
Total	796668		278442	389722	61031	49746	17724		
	Voting Age Population (VAP)		Hispanic VAP	Anglo VAP	Black VAP	Asian VAP	All Other VAP	Reg. Voters	Spanish Surname Reg. Voters
1	58,073		29,712	16,354	7,006	4,022	977	30,313	6,295
2	57,208		21,811	17,782	15,443	1,237	944	40,982	6,730
3	66,079		27,609	31,027	4,031	2,091	1,321	49,470	13,403
4	56,074		36,604	12,646	5,147	888	793	31,335	13,100
5	61,484		22,096	33,512	2,964	1,776	1,142	47,672	11,690
6	61,928		10,772	44,349	1,556	4,110	1,142	57,619	6,838
7	60,655		5,155	47,427	1,150	5,857	1,070	58,797	2,955
8	62,135		10,687	38,451	4,137	7,466	1,381	47,062	4,989
9	62,959		14,994	39,607	3,000	4,162	1,196	49,765	5,219
10	73,344		9,443	51,958	2,036	8,100	1,807	62,531	5,098
Total	619939		188883	333113	46470	39709	11773	475545	76317

Demographic percentages

District	% Hispanic	% White	% African American	% Asian	% Other	District	% Hispanic	% White	% African American	% Asian	% Other
1	57	23	12	6	2	6	19	69	3	7	3
2	45	26	26	2	2	7	9	76	2	11	3
3	47	42	6	3	2	8	19	58	7	13	3
4	71	17	9	1	2	9	28	59	5	6	2
5	41	49	5	3	2	10	13	71	3	10	3
Total	52	31	12	3	2	Total	18	67	4	9	3

Austin Neighborhoods Council

City Council Election Districts 10-District Sample Map B



Austin Neighborhoods Council

10 City Council Election Districts, Option B: Data Summary

Ideal district size: 79,666 (796,668 / 10); Maximum deviation: 3.4% under and 3% over = 6.4%

10-District Demographics

District	Population	Deviation	Hispanic	White	African American	Asian	All Other		
1	77,942	-2.2%	30,132	26,700	10,692	8,466	1,941		
2	79,039	-0.8%	31,952	23,110	19,110	3,224	1,651		
3	78,100	-2%	34,982	35,877	4,060	1,521	1,660		
4	80,998	1.7%	57,563	12,521	8,023	1,699	1,195		
5	82,258	3.3%	34,776	39,561	3,860	2,285	1,781		
6	80,112	0.6%	16,494	53,843	2,224	5,526	2,028		
7	80,874	1.5%	9,220	61,042	1,801	6,882	1,925		
8	81,548	2.4%	11,961	52,821	3,509	10,935	2,315		
9	76,922	-3.4%	42,385	24,737	6,021	2,485	1,294		
10	78,875	-1%	8,977	59,510	1,731	6,723	1,934		
Total	796668		278442	389722	61031	49746	17724		
	Voting Age Population (VAP)		Hispanic VAP	Anglo VAP	Black VAP	Asian VAP	All Other VAP	Reg. Voters	Spanish Surname Reg. Voters
1	59,504		20,072	23,636	7,932	6,634	1,227	38,263	6,261
2	61,421		21,000	21,397	14,761	3,066	1,205	45,355	7,415
3	63,602		25,019	32,889	3,108	1,308	1,278	49,677	12,316
4	56,122		36,534	11,264	5,967	1,579	783	30,701	13,010
5	64,443		24,092	34,435	2,923	1,804	1,194	49,357	12,531
6	60,352		11,352	42,138	1,692	4,044	1,127	55,177	7,134
7	63,143		6,497	49,083	1,398	5,011	1,158	59,291	3,356
8	64,420		8,670	43,729	2,767	7,844	1,399	52,850	4,453
9	57,064		27,835	21,957	4,338	2,070	864	32,823	5,759
10	69,868		7,812	52,585	1,584	6,349	1,538	62,049	4,082
Total	619939		188883	333113	46470	39709	11773	475545	76317

Demographic percentages

District	% Hispanic	% White	% African American	% Asian	% Other	District	% Hispanic	% White	% African American	% Asian	% Other
1	39	34	14	11	3	6	21	67	3	7	3
2	40	29	24	4	2	7	11	76	2	9	2
3	45	46	5	2	2	8	15	65	4	13	3
4	71	16	10	2	2	9	55	32	8	3	2
5	42	48	5	3	2	10	11	75	2	9	3
Total	48	35	12	4	2	Total	22	63	4	8	2

