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2012 Charter Revision Committee
City of Austin

Regarding the Charter Revision Working Group's recommendations for an independent citizens redistricting commission

Dear Committee Members,

Your working group has submitted an impressive package of recommendations for the structure of an independent citizens redistricting commission. Having studied these questions over the last 10 years in connection with various committees of the Austin Neighborhoods Council, I'd like to point out two gaps in the Working Group's diversity criteria (section 3 in the Working Group's report).

First, residents of newly annexed areas will likely seek an exemption similar to the student exemption from the qualification regarding voting in 3 of the last 5 city elections. Considering that such areas are likely to be major factors in Austin's future population growth, special status would seem to be justified for those residents.

Second, in the May 1994 election, Proposition 13, a charter amendment requiring that two-thirds of Planning Commission members be laypersons not connected with real estate or land development interests, was approved with 67% of the vote (45,131 Austin voters). The majority of Austin voters still identify real estate interests as the primary source of undue influence in City Council elections and decisions. Provisions similar to Proposition 13 and the current conflict-of-interest criteria for the Planning Commission should be included in the criteria for a redistricting commission.

Thank you all for your service on what, I hope, will prove to be a landmark charter committee.

With kind regards,
Lorraine Atherton