

Resolution of the Human Rights Commission
Citizen's Districting Plan
Endorsement of Charter Amendment for Election of City Council Members
Approved February 27, 2012

WHEREAS,

-the Citizens Districting 10-1 plan and the Independent Redistricting Committee have been recommended by the City of Austin Charter Revision Committee; and

WHEREAS,

-Austin is the most populous City in Texas and the United States without geographic representation in its City government; and

WHEREAS,

-all members of the City of Austin Charter Revision Committee voted for some form of a 10 geographic district system; and

WHEREAS,

- the City of Austin Charter Revision Committee voted unanimously to have an independent, impartial, committee of citizens define the 10 district boundaries; and

WHEREAS,

-the Citizens Districting 10-1 plan is the only fully defined and integrated districting plan available which meets all the recommendations of the City of Austin Charter Revision Committee; and

WHEREAS,

-the current system of citywide voting was created in 1953 with the express intent of preventing minorities from being elected to the City Council, and it has been stated by minority plaintiffs in Federal Court in Austin twice that the "current system provides the representative that the white majority chooses" (Volma Overton, 1982), a view echoed by Stab Coleman of the NAACP last year; and

WHEREAS,

-the AUSTIN CHARTER REVISION COMMITTEE recognized its legal responsibility to provide an opportunity for African-American & Hispanic representation on the Austin Council, and found that a 10-district system met that obligation to avoid returning to a past pattern of institutional discrimination; and

WHEREAS,

-an analysis of the history of residence of City elected officials over the 41 years since Austin started electing its Mayor and Council members city wide, shows that more 50% of the Council members and 15 of 17 Mayors have lived in 4 contiguous zip codes 78701, 78703, 78731, & 78759, which contain 10% of Austin's population and are overwhelmingly white; and

WHEREAS,

-for over 40 years Austin's geographic representation with one district has resulted in 10% of the population having the majority of the representation, and 45% of City Elected officials have been elected by a small number of the population of Austin; and

WHEREAS,

-that same system has most often meant that the representatives *for* Austin's minorities and most neighborhoods are elected neither *by* nor *from* those minority communities and neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS,

-the Citizens Districting 10-1 plan will best represent population realities and immediately create two Hispanic districts and one more district that Hispanics should win as their population increases by the end of the decade; and

WHEREAS,

-African-Americans represent only 7.7% of Austin's population, but extensive research has demonstrated that only a 10-district plan can create an opportunity district for African-Americans; and

WHEREAS,

-Texas' senior redistricting expert, Dave Richards, has stated in a letter to the Hon. Gonzalo Barrientos that the Citizens Districting 10-1 plan is "significantly preferable as it is the best means of assuring that the minority communities will be adequately represented on the City Council"; and

WHEREAS,

-Dave Richards further stated the Citizens Districting 10-1 plan "should be viewed most favorably by the Dept. of Justice..."; and

WHEREAS,

-at-large districts in Texas have been found by a Federal Court, specifically in an 8-2-1 system in Dallas, to be a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS,

-in a letter to the City of Austin Charter Revision Committee, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) stated, "Hybrid plans, which combine single-member and at-large offices, undermine the effectiveness and fairness [of] a single-member district system." Especially applicable to the Austin situation they wrote, "Hybrid plans allow for multiple elected officials from one area to be over-represented at the expense of the City as a whole":

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Austin Human Rights Commission supports the recommendation of the City of Austin's Charter Revision Commission which voted in favor of 10 single-member districts and electing the Mayor at large, and voted to support the creation of the independent redistricting committee to facilitate the drafting of the 10 single-member districts.