

Commissioners:

Couple of comments on the mapping process and also on your policy manual.

Mapping

One, I understand there was a hiccup in starting to develop the process you may use for your mapping. I have a simple recommendation to help jump start that. Similar to your policy manual, the starting point for your mapping is provided in the **Charter Art. II, Sec. 3:**

(E) The commission shall establish the boundaries of the council districts for the City of Austin in a plan using the following criteria as set forth in the following order of priority:

(1) districts shall comply with the United States Constitution. Each council district shall have reasonably equal population with other districts, except where deviation is required to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act or allowable by law.

(2) districts shall comply with the federal Voting Rights Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 1971 and following) and any other requirement of federal or state law.

(3) districts shall be geographically contiguous.

(4) the geographic integrity of any local neighborhood or local community of interest shall be respected in a manner that minimizes their division to the extent possible without violating the requirements of any of the preceding subsections. A community of interest is a contiguous population that shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation. Communities of interest shall not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.

(5) to the extent practicable, district boundaries shall be drawn to encourage geographical compactness such that nearby areas of population are not bypassed for more distant populations.

(6) to the extent practicable, district boundaries shall be drawn using the boundaries of existing election precincts.

(7) to the extent practicable, district boundaries shall be drawn using geographically identifiable boundaries.

(F) The place of residence of any incumbent or potential political candidate shall not be considered in the creation of a plan or any district. Districts shall not be drawn for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against any incumbent, political candidate, or political group.

The above is a starting point, but it does not completely explain how you will have to go about the mapping process. I believe you all will understand the constraints involved in the mapping process once you get into actually doing it, esp. in trying to create a FULL 10 district map. I

could systematically list the constraints that you will be dealing with, but for now I think in many ways they will be better for you all to discover on your own rather than have somebody from the outside spoil the fun and surprise beforehand. Suffice it to say, the sooner you get started on the mapping the better. I WILL say, though, that it is extremely important that you all not be impatient with the mapping process leading up to your first draft of maps.

Personally, I have gone through almost 10 different versions of an Austin 10-1 map and it is still not perfect, but my most recent map is a hell of a lot better than my first map was. Be aware that because of the nature of a closed, finite 10 district map, if there are changes to be made to a portion of it, then that is likely to result in the reworking of at least a third to half or more of the map. Later, there may be pressure on and among you all to not change dramatically your first draft of maps, although if warranted, I think you should be willing to change them substantially; therefore, you should take the time to go through a number of versions of the first draft before you settle on the first draft.

Having looked at the 4 consultants who have applied to be your mapping consultants, I think all of them are likely to need a little time to get up to speed with enhancing their GIS system specific to your needs, possibly a week or more with each. Therefore, I am recommending that your goal be to come out with your thoroughly worked over first draft of maps by the first week or two of October rather than the latter half of September. Further, I think each of you should be given remote access to the GIS system so that each of you can work on the system in between meetings when you are developing your first draft of maps. This should help the process as each of you wade into it and start to acutely understand the constraints involved.

Communications

I noticed in your Policy Manual the following quote with regard to Communications:

Commission Members and Staff

All employees, consultants, and legal counsel working for the Commission shall comply with the requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act.

Commission members and commission staff may not communicate with or receive communications about redistricting matters from anyone outside of the public hearing. This does not prohibit communication between commission members, commission staff (which shall exclude staff of any council members), legal counsel, and consultants retained by the commission that is otherwise permitted by state and city open meeting requirements.

I just want to point out that you have already been lobbied, repeatedly by an individual saying that he wants to "get with your mapping consultant" to work on integrating details of his maps with what your mapping consultant brings to you all. By the language of the Charter, THAT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE. People who want to influence your maps CANNOT do it in between your meetings by lobbying or even talking with your mapping consultant about

specific line drawing redistricting matters. People outside of you, your consultants and staff have to bring their specific input with regard to maps to your open public meetings, NOT to private meetings with your mapping consultant.

Onward!,
Brad Parsons,
Austin, TX.