

September 18, 2013

Dear members of the Independent Redistricting Commission:

My name is Fred L. McGhee, a resident of SE Austin and author of the forthcoming book "Austin's Montopolis Neighborhood," the first book about this important and growing portion of our city. I also was a member of Austin's Charter Revision Committee, where I was a strong supporter of the adoption of districts, but within the context of a hybrid form of government that also changed our present council/manager system to something more similar, but not necessarily identical, to a strong mayor form of government. I am unable to attend Wednesday, September 18, 2013's event at the Montopolis Recreation Center due to a scheduling conflict and appreciate you taking the time to read these comments.

If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to read or re-read the white paper "Fair Today, Fair Tomorrow," for which I was a contributor, published by hybrid advocates last year. A copy of the study is attached. I urge you to grapple with the insightful arguments discussed in the white paper, because they point to important shortcomings in exclusively geographic systems of representation. It bears repeating: while Prop. 3 was adopted last year by Austin voters, our city's voters *also voted for Prop. 4*. So the arguments made by hybrid advocates are not minority but majority positions that deserve careful consideration.

The most important consideration I ask you to bear in mind is this: effective representation is about more than electing someone with the right last name or with the correct racial or ethnic identification. It can be relatively easy to fetishize the concept of an "opportunity district," it is rather more difficult to fashion a system of political representation that is fair to everyone *for the future* not just today or a system that tries to right yesterday's wrongs. Opportunity districts matter; they are a requirement and I am a strong supporter of them. But the hard part about districting and redistricting has always been about the achievement of political *balance* between substantive and effective representation.

Secondly, the perception continues to exist that the switch to 10-1 will increase voter turnout, particularly in areas such as SE Austin. The data does not support this contention. *Neither the adoption of districts nor district design have substantially impacted voter turnout rates in U.S. cities.* Voter turnout next year will likely increase because of the move from May to November elections, not because of the adoption of 10-1. One consequence of this, of course, is that city concerns and candidates will be competing with other issues and candidates for voter attention, meaning that the person and issues at the top of the ballot will matter more than they have in previous city council elections. The political consequences of going with a November electorate for city council election are difficult to predict.

If you haven't already done so, please also take the time to compare the opportunity district maps you have been furnished by Austinites for Geographic Representation with the two scenario maps produced by the Austin Neighborhoods Council last year. Of particular interest are the precinct boundaries proposed in both alternatives, as well as population size and deviations contained in each proposed district. It is here where the "opportunity district" math can become convoluted.

For instance, unlike the ANC's maps, AGR's SE Austin opportunity district map goes north of the river and includes precincts such as 426, 427 and 439. AGR's hypothetical District 2 has high deviation numbers and percentages, whereas the ANC's maps both *show more data* (broken down by precinct, not just hypothetical district) and also achieve greater numerical balance. The ANC's "Option A" map goes west of IH-35 and includes Travis Heights precincts such as 441 and 410, presumably because that is what the existing district maps for the county Commissioners Court and AISD already do. The ANC "Option B" map for their District 4 stays east of IH-35 but goes further south down to Onion Creek." On the other hand, AGR's proposed "District 2" map does not do this.

I am not writing you to advocate for ANC's maps over AGR's. It is up to you to make the political judgment about what is best for Austin. I am simply pointing out some things that may have gotten lost sight of that I believe you should bear in mind.

To learn more about my thoughts about redistricting in Austin, I encourage you to visit and read my blog entries from January 9, 25 and February 18, 2012 at <http://www.fredmcghee.com>. I am happy to elaborate or answer any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to call at (512) 275-6027 or email at [flmcghee@gmail.com](mailto:flmcghee@gmail.com).

Many Thanks for your Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. L. McGhee', written in a cursive style.

Fred L. McGhee, Ph.D.  
Past President, Montopolis Neighborhood Association