

11-17-13

Dear Commissioners,

I went to the hearing last Thursday at the Millennium Entertainment Center, but the hearing had already concluded. I was encouraged to submit my comments in writing.

Previously, I had testified in support of the September 28th map's configuration of District 10 as a resident of Northwest Hills, precinct 238. A cursory review had me thinking that it made sense. It included most of our traffic corridors. I had also worked with neighborhood associations west of 360 on a zoning case as chair of the Northwest Austin Civic Association's Zoning Committee, and our area shares wildlife and canyon fire issues with precincts west of Loop 360.

However, I think the configuration for District 10 in the Commission's November 6th map, is much better. The District is now more compact. It does not stretch out from Mopac to the lake and include a polling place adjacent to the City of Lakeway or the Lake Travis Independent School District Offices. I also think the November 6th map's configuration for District 10 preserves our communities of interest better.

Recently the Northwest Austin Civic Association, the neighborhood association between 2222 and Spicewood Springs Road, Loop 360 and Mopac, surveyed its membership. Of the almost 400 respondents, the biggest issues were crime, fire, and speeding. In looking at crime statistics for my area, I think we have much more in common with other central neighborhoods like Tarrytown, which all suffer from more property crime than areas where the houses are more spread out. While my neighborhood is riddled with green belts and canyons, fire is an issue for all of Austin, (remember Oak Hill), with the ongoing drought and the possibility of sparking electric wires. The area around 620 is served by Emergency Services District #6, not the Austin Fire Department (AFD), and AFD has situated its wildfire response team at 360 and 2222, so it's well positioned to address canyon fire both west of 360 and east of 360. Speeding has to be an issue in every residential area.

The other issues that dominate my neighborhood association's Facebook page deal with wildlife management, schools, traffic, and land development issues. I could not find any statistics for deer populations in any zip code other than 78731, but a friend I talked to near Lions Golf Course in West Austin states they have deer, as does a friend just north of Camp Mabry. So, while the Northwest area might have more deer, it's an issue for the new precincts in the second map as well. For example, the 78703 zip code has had the same number of accidents involving deer as the 78731 zip code last year per the City of Austin. All the schools in the final preliminary map are within the Austin Independent School District, whereas the September 28th map includes a large portion of the Leander School District. The primary traffic corridors for District 10, all state roads, are the same in both maps. Our neighborhood has had to deal with the development of McMansions just as neighborhoods in Central Austin have had to, and we are largely developed with older homes and infrastructure than newer developments west of 360. We also have little infill remaining to be developed unlike the areas west of Loop 360. Finally,

areas like Riverplace, Steiner Ranch etc in your September 28th map are run by homeowners' associations, which enforce their deed restrictions, while all the areas within the final map have many of these issues enforced by code inspectors from the City of Austin.

Throughout this process, I've been struck by how folks define communities of interest and how little neighborhoods know about other neighborhoods. I was surprised to hear the Highland Park West/Balcones Area neighborhood association think they had nothing in common with Northwest Hills having worked with them on a recent zoning case. However, many of the issues they identified in their neighborhood survey: the expansion of Mopac, care for parks and green space, AISD schools, and crime are the very same issues that face my neighborhood. In fact, looking at their issues and our own neighborhood survey got me to reconsider my position.

I've also been concerned about some of the internet postings, I've seen in my neighborhood. For example, some folks think the second map splits NW Hills, "NW Hills friends- this week is really our last shot to prevent a city council district map that splits our area. The map they are about to implement splits NW Hills, making us a much smaller population for multiple council members. The majority in these districts will be from other Austin neighborhoods that don't share many of our challenges (think wildfire, wildlife, housing/zoning, and school boundaries). This invariably pushes our critical issues down on the priority list for these council members." Some think this is to get a candidate from NW hills rather than the Northwest and are convinced we've never had any representation from this area. (I recall Ron Mullen, Bruce Todd, Brewster McCracken and Lee Leffingwell, which is far more than many parts of town.) Others think that we'll be overrun by the addition of the five Central Austin precincts to the other twenty-seven in the final map, as described in an email alert sent out to my neighborhood association that urged folks to email the Commission that indicated we did not share the same issues as Tarrytown, Brykerwoods and Rosedale and that their, "...sheer numbers will dictate that a city council member will be forced to focus on their voters in those areas, over our important concerns in NW Austin." The folks I've talked to that sent the cut and paste emails have not seen either map, nor do they realize that the addition of the five new precincts would constitute such a small percentage of the total population in District 10.

In short, you've gotten past the hyperbole, the agendas and looked at the facts. Given the challenge you've had before you, the final preliminary map is a good map. No one is going to be completely happy with their district. However, let's hope we can begin to make new friends and keep the old. Aren't we all Austinites, after all?

Thanks for letting this policy wonk share her thoughts with you in creating the new Democratic Austin.

Ann Denkler
Non-candidate for anything
Representing myself