

Dugan, Matthew

From: Dugan, Matthew
Sent: Wednesday, July 7, 2021 4:53 PM
To: Dugan, Matthew
Cc: Rodriguez, Lisa
Subject: FW: History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government
Attachments: History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government.pdf; History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government.docx

Hello ICRC Members:

Please see email and attachments from Art Olbert.

From: AGOlbert [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, July 07, 2021 11:17 AM
To: Dugan, Matthew <Matthew.Dugan@austintexas.gov>
Cc: Rodriguez, Lisa <Lisa.Rodriguez@austintexas.gov>; Peck Young <[REDACTED]>
Subject: History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

Matt,

We would like each member of the ICRC to have a copy of the attached whitepaper on the "History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government". (There's a PDF and a Word doc.) If you would like us to bring hard copies to tonight's meeting we can do that. Please let us know.

This paper is the detail behind the summary PowerPoint slide Lisa created.

Art Olbert

[REDACTED]

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History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government

Austin has a long history of elected officials subverting democracy by choosing their voters and disenfranchising minorities. Whenever an Austin minority figures out how to gain representation, the establishment has changed the rules to disenfranchise that minority. That desire to subvert democracy and squash minorities continues today at the state and national level. You were created as the bulwark against the trend at the city level. However, that does not mean Austin electoral history does not track this pattern!

The ICRC was created, and its membership is screened, to prevent politicians from choosing their voters and instead assure voters, especially minority voters, will choose their elected officials. The ICRC protects Austin from gerrymandering.

- 1840 – 1908: Austin had geographic representation in different forms
 - 1875: Austin was granted the power to amend its own charter
 - Two Blacks were elected to city council in the 1880s, the last until 1871
 - By 1908 Austin had 7 wards and was governed by a mayor and 14 aldermen. 7 aldermen were elected by the individual wards and 7 aldermen were elected at-large
- 1906: City council requires separate streetcar compartments for Blacks and Whites.
- 1909: Austin changed to Commission government with a mayor and 4 commissioners, all elected at-large
 - Businessmen Andrew Zilker was spokesman for the interests of German, Swedish and Irish immigrants. Zilker defended the geographic representation of the ward system.
 - Businessman A.P. Wooldridge was spokesman for the interests of Anglo Austinites. Wooldridge championed the at-large commission government.
 - Wooldridge and at-large representation won.
- 1921: Capital City Ku Klux Klan No. 81 had 1,500 members
- 1924: Austin narrowly voted for a city manager form of government, by 35 votes out of 4,881. The new system retained 5 at-large councilmembers. The 5 councilmembers elected the mayor. The change to city manager government finally took effect in 1926.
- 1928: City government approved “The 1928 Master Plan”. A key portion of that plan was to force Blacks out communities throughout South, West, and Central Austin, into a designated “Negro District” in East Austin.

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- Blacks could only use public services (E.g. parks, *water/waste-water*) in the Negro District.
- Sewer connection was only allowed to Blacks in the Negro District. Blacks in other areas (E.g. Clarksville, Wheatsville) were denied sewer connections.
- 1924-1951: City council seats remained at-large. The top 5 vote getters in an election won the seats. The council members then elected the mayor.
- 1946: The first plan for what became I-35 was purportedly defined to separate Black and potential Hispanic East Austin from Anglo Austin
- 1950: By 1950 many Hispanics lived in the East Austin barrio between East 1st and East 11th Streets
- 1951: In the council election, Arthur B. DeWitty, president of the NAACP, came in 8th and Hispanic Patricio Mendez also made a strong vote showing. With increasing Black registration DeWitty was expected to be in the top 5 in the next election.
- 1953: City adopts a 5 “place” city council.
 - Each “place” required a 50% + 1 majority, with a runoff if that wasn’t achieved. This prevented Blacks from concentrating their voting power on a single candidate.
 - The day before the charter election, the front page of the Austin Statesman ran a special editorial column urging citizens to pass the charter change because the proposed new system was needed to prevent minority groups from being able to win elections to the City Council.
- 1959: Blacks first allowed to use Barton Springs.
- 1963: 30 Austin restaurants allow Blacks to eat with Whites.
- 1968: Fair Housing Ordinance
 - May, 1968: Austin became the first city in the Southwest to enact a fair housing ordinance.
 - October, 1968: The home city of the U.S. President who proposed and passed the national Open Housing Act held a referendum that repealed a City of Austin Open Housing Ordinance by 57% to 43%
- April 1969: When the three liberal council supporters of fair housing stood for re-election the next year, they were each defeated by conservative, anti-fair housing candidates.
- March 1970: Charter election created an at-large system with 6 council seats and a mayor elected directly by the voters.
- 1971-1975: A new coalition of Blacks, Hispanics, students, labor and liberals achieved electoral change.

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- 1971:
 - Berl Handcox was the first Black since Reconstruction elected to City Council.
 - First environmental advocate elected
 - Jeffrey "Jeff" Friedman, first person of Jewish faith elected to Council
 - One of the pro-civil rights council members Dick Nichols from the Council of 67-69 was re-elected
 - Anti-civil rights council members and mayor were defeated or driven into retirement.
- 1973:
 - First former-UT Student Body President Bob Binder was elected to Council
 - Re-Elected First Black and Jewish Council members
- 1975: Elected the first progressive majority city council since 1967:
 - Jeffrey "Jeff" Friedman, first Jewish mayor
 - Johnny Trevino, first Hispanic councilmember
 - First LGBTQ councilmember Emma Lou Linn in Austin history
 - First Black councilmember from East Austin Jimmy Snell since Reconstruction.
 - First time more than one woman (2) was on the Council
- 1975 Reaction – “The Gentlemen’s Agreement”
 - It was defined by a progressive and a conservative business powerbroker.
 - The white business establishment would not back candidates against Black or Hispanic candidates, in Places 6 and 5 respectively.
 - At-large elections kept all campaigns expensive and controlled by Whites.
 - No provision was made for minority population
 - The agreement successfully prevented litigation in Federal Court.
 - Details of this “Gentlemen’s Agreement’ are provided in an attached article.
- This system stayed in force until 2012. 1980s to 2010s: At-large representation and the gentlemen’s agreement meant large parts of Austin were not represented or were grossly underrepresented.
 - From 1971 to 2011: West and Northwest Austin dominated elections
 - 15 of 17 mayors came from West Austin, with 11 of the 17 mayors coming from one ZIP code: 78703.
 - Only one mayor (Gus Garcia, 2001) lived in Northeast Austin
 - 1/3rd of all council members came from two West Austin ZIP codes: 78703 and 78731
 - ~75% of all mayors and councilmembers lived within 5 miles of city hall

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- <20% of the 100 city council contests were won by candidates who lived south of the Colorado River
- No mayors lived south of the Colorado River.
- By 2010, Austin's population was >35% Hispanic, but Hispanics remained limited to one council seat.
- Numerous attempts were made to replace at-large representation with geographic representation.
- 2012: Voters amended the city charter with the "10-1" system
 - Created 10 citizen-defined geographic districts and a mayor elected at-large.
 - Created the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission to assure citizens, not politicians, drew the district boundaries. Austin could not be gerrymandered.
 - 10-1 was forced on the ballot by a grassroots coalition of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians; liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans
 - Austin's political establishment placed two other alternative representation plans on the same ballot in an attempt to confuse votes

With support of over 60% of voters in 2012 and the work of your predecessor ICRC in 2014, Austin returned to its democratic roots and resumed geographic representation for the first time in 105 years. This is the heritage that is now entrusted to you.

History of Minorities and Representation in Austin City Government

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