

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**HYBRID VIRTUAL/IN-PERSON SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING**

**Meeting minutes**

 **January 14, 2021**

**8:00 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber

**In attendance:** Council Members Garrett Dennis, Randy DeFoor, Reggie Gaffney, Brenda Priestly Jackson (virtually via Zoom), Randy White; School Board Member Darryl Willye (virtually via Zoom)

**Also:** CMs Ju’Coby Pittman (via Zoom), Ron Salem (via Zoom); Jeff Clements and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research Division; Jason Gabriel, Peggy Sidman and Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Bill Killingsworth – Planning and Development Department; Jerry Holland – Property Appraiser

**Meeting Convened**: 8:02 a.m.

Remarks from the Chair

Chairman Dennis welcomed the group, took a roll call of attendees, and introduced Council President Tommy Hazouri to give the committee charge.

Committee Charge – Council President Hazouri

President Hazouri said that he had decided to appoint a Special Committee to handle redistricting rather than use a standing committee because of the importance of the task, and because the redistricting time frame will transcend the current Council year. He said that all council members should feel free to participate in the redistricting process and that the School Board members are also important players because redistricting affects them as well. The special committee can choose whether or not it wants to hire a consultant to analyze data and assist in the map development process. Mr. Hazouri said that he hopes the next Council President will choose to keep this special committee intact to complete the task it has started. He urged the committee to represent the best interests of the city as a whole in its deliberations and to be ready and committed to putting in the time necessary to complete this very big task.

Overview of the Process – Chairman Dennis

Chairman Dennis noted that the special committee has the option to either hire a consultant to assist with the process or utilize City staff. He said he’s made the decision not to use an outside consultant, believing that there is plenty of talent, experience and resources in the City government to complete the task.

General Information on Redistricting – General Counsel Jason Gabriel

Mr. Gabriel said redistricting is one of the biggest tasks the Council performs and it impacts the City for the next 10 years. The Office of General Counsel is producing a substantive legal memo laying out the legal parameters applying to redistricting and a memo on timeframes and frequently asked questions. Generally speaking, the U.S. Census starts a time clock ticking for completion of the process under the City Charter and Ordinance Code. The goal is to produce equally populated districts within a small deviation from the largest to the smallest district population (in 2011 a 10% deviation was utilize). The Council is charged to produce logical and compact districts and to take into account significant physical boundaries, political boundaries, etc. The redistricting plan cannot be based solely on consideration of race, gender, or economic status. There is interplay between the application of the Equal Protection Clause and the Voting Rights Act when it comes to considering race in the process; a redistricting plan can’t deliberately dilute or enhance districts based on race alone. More detailed information will be provided later in the process. The deadline for completion is 8 months from when U.S. Census data is published later this spring (usually by the end of March, but may be delayed this year). The Special Committee develops a proposed map and transmits it to the Rules Committee, which then conducts a prescribed public hearing process, then transmits a final plan to the City Council for action. Mr. Gabriel said he and his staff are always available to answer questions.

Consolidated Government Experts

Chairman Dennis noted that a number of people in City government have been through the redistricting process previously, including Property Appraiser (and former City Council member and Supervisor of Elections) Jerry Holland, Planning and Development Director Bill Killingsworth, Supervisor of Elections (and former City Council member and Tax Collector) Mike Hogan, General Counsel Jason Gabriel, and others. He has asked Mr. Holland to help facilitate the Special Committee’s work. Jerry Holland said he will guide the committee through the process without reinventing the wheel. He starts from the premise that the map is being drawn by all the council members, not just the special committee members, and that it should start from the existing state of the current districts. The process needs to redistribute population because some districts have to grow and others have to shrink to meet the new target population within the maximum deviation requirement. His office is mapping all new construction permits issued in the past 10 years to get an idea of where the population is growing. He believes the Council should drive the process and not let a consultant run it. He reiterated the need to keep the total deviation among all districts in mind – generally 5% over to 5% under the target district size.

Mr. Holland said he will meet individually with each council member and School Board member to find out where they would want to expand or shrink their district if they could choose. Then he’ll make an initial map based on all that input and let the committee work it from there. Council members can’t talk about their preferences outside of a noticed meeting and he can’t convey that kind of information back and forth between council members. The map will be drawn to protect incumbents’ residences, so no one will be drawn out of their district. He noted that the special committee can’t draw districts based solely on race, but can take lots of factors into account in producing fair districts. The new map will apply to the School Board elections in 2022 and to the City Council elections in 2023. He said to expect lots of citizen input throughout the process. He thinks his proposed process will get the job done in 8 months. He can start the process of asking council members about their preferences now in order to get ready in advance of the release of the Census data. Redistricting can be done on either total population or voting age population only. He recommends using total population rather than voting age. Changes can be made all the way through the process as the committee hears public input.

Council Member Gaffney requested that a map of all of the council districts be distributed so the members can think about how and in what areas their districts will grow or shrink based on the Census data. Mr. Holland said he’ll schedule meetings with all of the council members and School Board members to explain the basic population shifts and get their initial ideas for adjusting their districts. The Council will have to work out final decisions on exactly where lines will go. Council Member Priestly Jackson asked what data Mr. Holland will be starting with. He said that he will use the most current data available, which will be combination of Census and building permit information. In response to a question from Council Member DeFoor about what data is available now, Mr. Holland said the building permit information will show where growth has been going over the last 10 years, but doesn’t give exact numbers, just general trends and locations. Ms. DeFoor said that people will want to know the voter party affiliation statistics of each area because that makes a difference. She wants all the data to be very transparent so everyone knows what is being considered. School Board member Darryl Willye asked if growth projections are used to help draw districts so they are balanced in the future. Mr. Holland said they are not; redistricting is based on a snapshot in time in order to meet the maximum district size deviation rule. Projections of future growth may not come to pass and don’t meet the maximum deviation requirement of the present.

Tentative Meeting Schedule

The committee will meet on the fourth Thursday of each month from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. through June.

Jeff Clements reported that there is a Special Committee on Redistricting page (<https://www.coj.net/city-council/standing-committees/redistricting-special-committee>) on the City Council web site where all agendas, minutes, documents, etc. will be posted for public access.

**Meeting adjourned:** 8:45 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Research Division

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1.14.21 Posted 11:00 a.m.