

DISTRICTING COMMISSION
Thursday, February 2, 2012, 6:00 p.m.
Riverside High School, Theater
301 Midway Drive
El Paso, Texas 79915

Members Present: 6

Chair Gene Finke (6:30 p.m.), John Karlsruher, Vice-Chair Francisco X. Dominguez, David Thackston, Oscar Silva, James L. Graham

Members Absent: 3

Gilbert A. Mendez, Jr., Rodolfo Troncoso, Alisa Jorgensen

Planning and Economic Development Staff:

David Coronado, Executive Secretary, Lead Planner; Todd Taylor, Planner; Mariano Soto, Planner, GIS; Marissa Monroy, Economic Development Coordinator; Donna Martinez, Secretary

Other Staff Present:

Marie Taylor, Assistant City Attorney, City Attorney's Office

1. Call to Order

Mr. Coronado called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

2. Establish Quorum

N/A

3. Staff Presentation on Alternative Districting Plans

SPANISH TRANSLATION SERVICES

Prior to the presentation on alternative districting plans, Mr. Coronado announced Spanish translation services were available for members of the public.

Mr. Coronado gave a PowerPoint presentation and explained that Commissioners voted to present three, of the 11 proposed maps to the public for comment. Mr. Coronado then elaborated on the proposed boundary lines and precinct changes for each of the three maps, Plan A, Plan B and Plan C.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Dominguez called the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m.

Establish Quorum

Quorum established.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC DURING THE PRESENTATION

1. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to explain the bolded terms as shown in the “Redistricting Process: Principles and Criteria” slide of the PowerPoint presentation.

Mr. Coronado went over the “Redistricting Process: Principles and Criteria” slide in its entirety for Mr. Martinez.

Mr. Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to again review “retrogression”.

Ms. Taylor explained the definition of retrogression for Mr. Martinez. She suggested Mr. Martinez go to the “Districting Commission” website where there is a more detailed PowerPoint presentation on the legal principles which was given to City Council on August 31, 2011.

Chair Gene Finke arrived.

2. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to pan-out on Plan B so that he could see the extension of District 8 to the southeast. Mr. Martinez asked what the southeast and northwest boundaries of District 8 were.

Mr. Coronado responded that the southeast boundary of District 8 is Fonseca and the northwest boundary lines are Country Club, Lindbergh, Charl Ann, Mesa and I-10.

Mr. Martinez asked what community of interest does the Country Club area have in common with the Fonseca area.

Ms. Taylor explained that one of the principles that the Commissioners is trying to follow is to preserve and maintain communities of interest but that the Commissioners also must find 81,140 people for each District.

Mr. Martinez responded that the Commission should find people in the Country Club area for District 8 and not come down to the Fonseca area because those two areas do not have the same kind of interests and they are different in demographic and economic levels.

4. Call for Public Comment

Mr. Coronado explained a sign in sheet was available for those who wished to ask questions of Staff and/or Commissioners. Additionally, for those who did not want to speak, but would like to leave their comments, public comment sheets were also available.

PUBLIC COMMENT SPEAKERS

1. Mr. Eduardo Talamontes, District 7 resident, has resided in the same District for 32 years. He is happy with the way things are right now, and hopes things stay the same.
2. Mr. Juan Riva, not present.
3. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to show District 8. He felt this map went counter to the community of interest and drawing compact and contiguous district. He suggested, rather than picking up people out of the Delta Street area, we ought to try to pick up people out of the northeast of the end of the northwest area. You could pick up a couple of Precincts on Mesa Drive and leave Precincts 82 and 83, which have their own community of interest in the Delta area of the city.

Mr. Martinez asked Mr. Coronado to bring up the southeast area of District 2 on Plan C. Now that District 2 extends all the way from the Border Highway and goes all the way north to Diana and Hondo Pass, Mr. Martinez stated that he did not know what his area has in interest with the Diana/Hondo Pass area. The District is in violation of principles that we have to keep them compact and with the same Representative as we have now.

4. Mr. Ray Mancera, representing LULAC, asked Mr. Coronado if any of the Plans call for Districts 1 or 8 to have a deviation higher than 10%.

Mr. Coronado responded that they did not, and he explained the total deviations of each of the Plans for Mr. Mancera.

Mr. Mancera asked Ms. Taylor what the difference was between “communities of interest” and “gerrymandering”.

Ms. Taylor clarified one of the goals is to preserve communities of interest. What she understood Mr. Martinez to say, is that the Fonseca area felt more aligned with District 3. Staff will go back and look to see if any communities of interest are being broke up. The challenge is how you find 81,140 people, who are near each other, who feel they have common interests. The Commission may have to combine communities who don't feel they are very much aligned but not split up any existing communities of interest.

In terms of gerrymandering, it is when you try to split Precincts to have certain minority groups in or out of that area that you are trying to create.

5. Representative Eddie Holguin asked Staff to address why members of the public could not create their own maps on the Districting Commission website.

Mr. Coronado explained that Staff did try to purchase software that would have allowed individuals to create their own maps; however, the City would have had to purchase individual licenses and the cost would have been exorbitant. Mr. Coronado invited

members of the public to come to the Planning Department, meet with Staff, and create their own map.

Representative Holguin asked Staff why District 8 continues to be gerrymandered. He felt there was not equal representation in District 8 due to the areas of extreme wealth being mixed with one of the poorest zip codes in the country.

Mr. Coronado responded that, so far, a map like Representative Holguin was thinking about had not been created.

Ms. Taylor noted that since the public meetings have begun, five new plans, drawn by members of the public have been created.

6. Representative Emma Acosta asked why there were only six public meetings when there are eight Representative Districts in El Paso. She thought it would be fair to all Representatives to have at least one meeting in each District, especially in the Lower Valley. She asked Commissioners to consider holding additional public meetings.

Representative Acosta then stated that there are members of the Cielo Vista neighborhood, west of Hawkins, that are extremely upset. She explained to them that each District must have at least 81,140 people, and then asked Staff about how the City could add maybe two more Representatives.

Ms. Taylor responded that that was addressed in the City Charter and should be taken up by the Charter Review Committee which is being formed. The work of this Commission is to balance the population that we have with the current number of Districts.

7. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked if members of the public would be getting hard copy maps of the Precincts with the population data for each of those Precincts.

Mr. Coronado responded that he would get that information to Mr. Martinez.

8. Ms. Minerva Acosta stated she has been attending meetings and that she has created approximately five maps. She was opposed to anything that would segregate the Lower Valley below the freeway, and stated that we have to go horizontally whether we like it or not. When she created her maps, she talked to people in Districts 3, 5, 6, and 7. She stated that the Alameda corridor was not going to lose one single Representative.
9. Mr. Jorge Acosta, Jr. stated that Commissioner Jorgensen, who has been very proactive in this process, needed to be here. Mr. Acosta, Jr. was shocked that the District 3 appointee was not present tonight and this was not the first time he felt that the appointee was not representing District 3. He asked Ms. Acosta that that appointee be replaced.

10. Mr. Sebastian Martinez asked about Precinct 88.

Mr. Coronado explained that Precinct 88 was assigned 8 people according to the Census numbers.

Mr. Martinez asked about the procedure for the final meeting of the Commission.

Mr. Coronado explained that after the public meetings the Commission will reconvene and eventually select one or two Plans that will be sent to the City Council for their consideration sometime in early summer.

11. Mr. Ralph Torres asked why there was no public meeting scheduled for District 5. He commented that District 5 is the District that will be affected the most and felt that the people would like to comment.

Mr. Coronado responded that each of the locations selected by the Commission was intended to capture citizens from multiple Districts.

12. Mrs. Vanessa Torres stated that there is also a lot of diversity and growth in District 5 and she preferred the Plan B map. However, Mrs. Torres did not agree with the gerrymandering that she sees being done with the Fonseca area.

13. Representative Acosta stated that if Commissioners were to hold a public meeting in District 5, she suggested it be at the Marty Robbins Recreation Center or the Pebble Hills Regional Command Center.

Mr. Coronado explained that Staff would need to post the item on the agenda for the Commissioners to vote on an additional public meeting in the District 5 area.

5. Adjournment

MOTION:

Motion made by Commissioner Thackston, seconded by Vice-Chair Dominguez and
UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.