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RESEARCH DIVISION**

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

**March 25, 2021
9:00 a.m.**

Location: City Council Chamber and via Zoom application

In attendance: Council Members Garrett Dennis (Chair), Randy DeFoor, Reggie Gaffney, Randy White, Brenda Priestly Jackson (arr. 9:34); School Board Members Darryl Willie (via Zoom) and Kelly Coker (via Zoom)

Also: Council Members Ron Salem, Ju’Coby Pittman, Al Ferraro, Michael Boylan (via Zoom), Joyce Morgan (via Zoom), LeAnna Cumber (via Zoom); Jeff Clements and Yvonne Mitchell – Council Research Division; Paige Johnston and Peggy Sidman – Office of General Counsel; Jerry Holland – Property Appraiser; Melanie Wilkes and Eric Grantham – Council Support Services

Meeting Convened: 9:07 a.m.

Chairman Dennis welcomed the group and the attendees introduced themselves for the record. A hard copy of a presentation on redistricting produced by the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) was distributed to the members for their information, which reiterates a great deal of the information presented at the previous meeting about the timing and legal framework for the process. Mr. Dennis said the committee’s work in drafting a plan should be above politics because of the long-term importance of its task. He will have the complete FAC webinar on redistricting linked to the Special Committee’s web site when it becomes available and will explore having Kurt Spitzer, the consultant who made the presentation to the FAC, come to make the presentation to the Special Committee at a future meeting.

Consolidated Government Experts Update

Property Appraiser Jerry Holland reported in response to a question posed to him in meeting with a council member that the Beaches cities do their own redistricting process for their Beaches city municipal councils when the Census data becomes available, as Jacksonville does. With regard to his previous offer to make himself available to the general public to discuss redistricting issues, he stated that thus far he has been answering questions about the process and the legal requirements, not discussing specific map

concepts. He has been meeting individually with City Council and School Board members to discuss their ideas about the future of their districts and will do another round of meetings after the Census data becomes available in the fall. Mr. Holland said he would be guided by whatever policy the special committee wants to adopt regarding his relationship with the public. He has specifically referred any legal questions to the Office of General Counsel since he is not an attorney and is not qualified to give legal interpretations or advice.

Council Member Salem asked about the redistricting process in the Beaches cities and if or how it relates to Jacksonville's process. Mr. Holland explained that the Beaches cities have district council members and need to undergo the same redistricting process as Jacksonville to rebalance their district populations. Their process has no impact on Jacksonville's redistricting process for its council districts.

Deputy General Counsel Peggy Sidman cited several City Charter provisions (1.101, 3.101, 18.101) that provide that Jacksonville's government acts as both a city and county government. She said previous city councils have grouped the 3 Beaches cities into one district during the redistricting process so that they have one readily identifiable representative on the Jacksonville City Council. Jeff Clements, Chief of Council Research, and Jerry Holland, Property Appraiser, explained the configuration of the Beaches district through previous redistrictings. In 2011 all of the territory east of the Intracoastal Waterway was incorporated into the Beaches district for the first time, although it still takes a little additional territory west of the Intracoastal Waterway to add enough population make up a full district. Mr. Holland thinks that will still be the case this time as well.

Ms. Sidman said the OGC had, pursuant to the direction of the Special Committee at its meeting on February 25th following a discussion of the role of the consolidated government subject matter experts in the process, contacted all of the special committee members to discuss their thoughts about what the role those experts should have with regard to dealings with the general public. The consensus of those members is that the public should only be communicating with special committee members and that members of the public who have questions or suggestions should pose them to the committee for referral to the appropriate experts for response. Council Member Gaffney advocated for allowing Mr. Holland to be the single voice for the committee to answer questions since he has greater knowledge on the subject. Council Member Priestly Jackson said she thinks there should be a uniform policy for access and information distribution so everyone in the public is on equal footing and there is no perception of unfair advantage to anyone. Council Member Salem said there needs to be a formal mechanism for accepting public access and questions, not just random calls to Mr. Holland's office. He suggested perhaps a web site that accepts questions and comments or a dedicated time at special committee meetings for the public to ask questions. Council Member Ferraro asked about the redistricting timeline. Ms. Sidman explained the Census data release delay and the preparation process the special committee is going through now. A hard timeline takes effect when the Census data is officially released. Mr. Ferraro said he thought it might be premature to be taking public input since there's no Census data and really nothing official to talk about yet.

Ms. Sidman cautioned that there are Sunshine Law implications if the special committee delegates any of its powers to an individual such as a subject matter expert, which might entail noticed meeting requirements. She suggested possibly having a Redistricting Committee email address to receive questions from the public that can be answered at special committee meetings. Council Member DeFoor said it would be good for everyone to hear the questions being posed and have them answered in a public forum for the record. School Board Member Willie recommended a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) feature on the web site to publicize common questions and answers for the public. Ms. Priestly Jackson said she is concerned that the delay in the release of the Census data could lead to allegations of undue influence on the process if there is not a very transparent, open process for getting public input. She wants to avoid any instances or allegations of council members, including non-special committee members,

engaging in actions that might lead to the appearance of undue influence on the outcome of the process. Chairman Dennis asked for a volunteer to work with OGC on development of a public input policy – Council Member DeFoor volunteered. Ms. Sidman listed the public access suggestions made thus far: a Redistricting Committee public email address; FAQs on the committee’s web page; public input opportunity at Redistricting Committee meetings.

At the request of Council Member Pittman, Ms. Sidman explained how the redistricting process has worked in past years. Ms. Pittman expressed concern that some council members who are not on the special committee aren’t involved now, but will want to make changes in their districts late in the game. Ms. Sidman said Mr. Holland has been meeting with all council members and School Board members, not just special committee members, to get their input well in advance. Mr. Holland said his past experience has been that the process of changing and refining maps is driven by individual council members and concerns about their districts, not by the council as a whole. The process is decided by the 14 district members and all council members have an interest in the process and the outcome, so they will naturally participate.

Mr. Holland said he does not want any delegation of power from the special committee or to have any responsibility for the process other than advising the committee. He just needs clarity on what relationship he should or should not have with the public. The committee, OGC and council staff should run the process - he just wants to assist and be a resource.

Council Member DeFoor asked if there is any chance the data could come out earlier than the September timeline that has been announced. OGC attorney Paige Johnston said she has been following the data release delay in the media and on the Census Bureau web site and it is possible that data might be available earlier, but the end of September is the only official information that has been announced. Several lawsuits have been filed by states to compel the release of the data earlier, one of which has already been dismissed. The issue is very fluid and uncertain at the moment. Council Member Priestly Jackson reiterated the need for a clear policy about what can and can’t be done before the data is publicly released. She sees opportunity for undue influence to be exerted by various parties as the process drags on without solid data from which to work, which could discredit the process in the end. Council Member Salem said the policy should be that there is no discussion of redistricting specifics, aside from the basic process and timing, until the Census data is released. It’s inappropriate and counter-productive to do speculative work before the hard data is released. Ms. DeFoor said there is preparatory work that could be done before the data is released to educate everyone on what will happen when the data does arrive, and that would be beneficial to the public. Ms. Priestly Jackson advocated for a broader committee policy than just how the public interacts with the subject matter experts – it should cover the broader issues of transparency and community engagement for the whole process.

Historical District Maps Overview

Copies of council district maps from the 2001 and 2011 redistricting processes were distributed. Jerry Holland explained the factors that led to various district changes, including representation of different communities of interest, protection of incumbents, etc. He said there is always a rhyme and reason for how the districts ended up as they did at the time they were drawn. Jeff Clements said he has district maps going back to 1968 that he will distribute to the committee via email.

Next Steps

- OGC/DeFoor recommendation on a policy for citizen access to the consolidated government subject matter experts
- FAC redistricting presentation at a future meeting
- Schedule some meetings in afternoon/evening for better public access

- Review of earlier historical redistricting maps

Council Member Gaffney asked if there is any data available now that can give an idea of growth areas around the city to start getting an idea of how the current districts will have to grow or shrink. Mr. Holland and Mr. Clements explained that only very rough estimates of current population are available between official census years, which are far from reliable. Chairman Dennis asked the Council Research Division to start working on producing district population estimates using the Census Bureau's American Community Survey data.

Next meeting

April 22nd at 5 p.m.

Public Comment

Carnell Oliver agreed that meeting during evening hours is a good way to get more public input. The public needs to be educated on the redistricting process. People need to realize how population changes affecting funding availability. He thinks it would be helpful for districts to contain a mix of Republicans and Democrats, high income and low income areas so that council members have a better understanding of the range of conditions and issues that exist in the community. He said we need more shared values and less partisan fighting.

Meeting adjourned: 10:36 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Research Division

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