



**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
RESEARCH DIVISION**

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING

Meeting minutes

**November 1, 2022
12:00 p.m.**

Location: City Council Chamber

In attendance: Council Members Terrance Freeman (Chair), Aaron Bowman, Rory Diamond, Nick Howland, Sam Newby, Ju’Coby Pittman, Randy White

Also: Council Members Ron Salem, Randy DeFoor, Al Ferraro, Reggie Gaffney, Michael Boylan, Tyrona Clark-Murray; School Board Members Daryl Willie, Kelly Coker; Jason Teal, Mary Margaret Giannini, Helen Roberson, Paige Johnston, Mary Staffopoulos – Office of General Counsel; Peggy Sidman – Council Secretary/Director; Merriane Lahmeur, Sharonda Davis - Legislative Services Division; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division; Steve Cassada – Public Information Division; Kim Taylor – Council Auditor’s Office; Bill Killingsworth – Planning and Development Department

Meeting Convened: 12:02 p.m.

President Freeman convened the meeting and the attendees introduced themselves for the record. Mr. Freeman noted the court’s deadline of November 8th to file an interim remedial redistricting plan to the federal judge. General Counsel Jason Teal will describe the legal parameters for the redistricting process and then Planning and Development Director Bill Killingsworth and Dr. Doug Johnson, President of National Demographics Corp., the City’s expert redistricting consultant, will present several map options. Mr. Freeman described the meeting schedule and the public input options at 2 additional special committee meetings, a “map chat” town hall meeting on Thursday, and a special council meeting at which a new plan will be adopted on Friday, November 4th. He urged a spirit of cooperation, transparency and good will during the process on a difficult and potentially contentious issue.

General Counsel Jason Teal said the short time frame imposed by the federal court judge has caused some of the usual redistricting procedures and timetables to be waived to meet the deadline. The City’s expert consultant has produced 3 map proposals and the Council also has the plaintiff’s proposed map for consideration. He described Dr. Doug Johnson’s academic credentials and several decades of practical

experience in redistricting nationwide at the state and local level. Mr. Teal reviewed the judge's instructions regarding the new districts and referenced a legal memorandum released by the General Counsel's Office earlier today with guidance for complying with the federal court's order. He noted that Dr. Johnson has advised that the City does not have sufficient time to perform the demographic and voting pattern analysis that would be required to use race as a factor in drawing districts in a legally defensible manner.

President Freeman said his hope is that the special committee will be able to narrow the 4 proposed maps down to 2 today, and discuss those two at tomorrow's meeting to review at one final map that will be discussed and perfected at the Thursday meeting for recommendation to the City Council at its special meeting on Friday.

Dr. Doug Johnson said that since none of the districts south and east of the river were challenged in court, they have not been changed in any of the new proposals. He said that race was not used at all in crafting his 3 proposals (Lime, Maroon and Orange maps) but the demographics were analyzed afterward. All of the maps, including the plaintiff's map, show a reduction from 4 to 3 districts with a majority Black population allowing for a Black representative on the Council. Dr. Johnson reviewed and described the differences in each of 4 proposed maps from the version originally adopted by the Council. He said that whether or not protection of incumbent council members is used as a factor makes a substantial difference in several districts, as would considering only current incumbents who are eligible to run for another term. The consultant's maps were drawn with strong consideration given to physical boundaries (major roads, water bodies) and the CPAC boundaries which are long-standing representations of established communities of interest. There are different ways to craft proposals that meet the court's order and constitutional requirements.

President Freeman said that any additional maps being proposed for consideration must also have the demographic data that supports the lines contained therein.

CM DeFoor asked about how the historic connection between neighborhoods can be considered. Dr. Johnson said that Jacksonville has a large number of neighborhoods that are generally understood by their residents, but many don't have specifically defined and mapped boundaries. Ms. DeFoor suggested using plat data for definitive neighborhood boundaries. Mr. Killingsworth noted that plat boundaries go back to the founding of Jacksonville.

In response to a question from CM Salem about whether he gave consideration to announced candidates seeking office, Dr. Johnson said he did not. Mr. Salem asked if the at-large residence areas had changed; they had not. President Freeman noted that no one is an official candidate for office until they file their qualification papers early next year. Mr. Salem clarified that he was referring to persons who had opened campaign accounts and announced their intentions to run for a particular office.

CM Bowman pointed out that on the Orange map the Queen's Harbor area is separated from its natural connected neighborhoods by the border on Atlantic Boulevard and he also sees another gated community separated into 2 different districts.

CM Gaffney asked which one of the 4 traditional majority-minority districts is eliminated in the new proposals. President Freeman cautioned that maps can't be drawn based on race, so the committee needs to be very careful about how this factor is discussed. Jason Teal reiterated that districts can't be drawn based primarily on race, but other factors such party affiliation are allowable. CM Gaffney asked about the political makeup of the districts. Mr. Teal noted that political data was included on the chart appearing at the bottom of each of the maps.

CM Ferraro said the new maps appear to carve up neighborhoods in a way that solves one problem at the expense of creating new ones. Dr. Johnson said that's inevitable when you draw lines – something is always going to be separated from something else. Mr. Ferraro said he had had no input into the development of the maps presented today. President Freeman asked Bill Killingsworth to explain the process by which the proposals were drawn. Mr. Killingsworth said he and the consultant drew the proposals base on geographical features, equality of population, protection of neighborhoods, rural vs. urban character, etc. and by the time the final map version was crafted he had met with a number of council members who had asked to meet with him, which had a minor impact on the outcome. Dr. Johnson said that when the committee refines its discussions down to 2 maps, then requests for adjustments can be made by council members and attempted by staff.

CM Diamond asked Mr. Teal if any of the 4 maps as proposed would pass constitutional muster and be accepted by the court. Mr. Teal said he was confident that any of the 4 would be acceptable. Diamond said constituents like the current Beaches District 13 and urged that it be kept unchanged. He believes that District 12 is a partisan gerrymander that doesn't make sense in terms of keeping like communities together. He prefers the Maroon map with a few changes, which seems to represent a lot of the current map's goals achieved in a more constitutional manner. He would like to see the current incumbent who appears presently to be drawn out of her district on the Maroon map to be accommodated.

CM White said he likes the Maroon map the best and that the Lime map is also acceptable.

CM Howland said he believes the council had the best of intentions when developing the original map and thinks the Maroon map is best and the Lime map a distant second.

CM Pittman said she can't tell much about maps given their very small scale so can't comment on her preferences today. She will study the maps tonight.

CM Newby said he likes Maroon map best and the Lime map second.

CM Bowman said Plaintiff and Orange maps are fundamentally flawed and unacceptable. On the Maroon map Districts 9 and 14 are not compact and communities of interest are lost. He noted that in the previous redistricting effort the Redistricting Committee tried to place the far northeastern corner of District 11 along San Pablo Road into District 3 because of its isolation from the rest of the District 11 and hoped that could be accommodated this time. He prefers the Lime map first and the Maroon map second.

CM Clark-Murray said that on the Maroon map the Woodstock area and Robinson's Addition are split between districts. She likes the Orange map for District 9 but not for District 12. She is leaning toward the Orange and Lime maps.

Dr. Johnson said that any of the maps could be tweaked regarding protection of incumbency to move boundaries.

CM DeFoor said she preferred the Maroon map first and the Lime map second. She asked if the Maroon map is legally defensible and Dr. Johnson said he thinks it is, perhaps with the committee suggesting some changes that would make it more defensible.

CM Gaffney said he prefers the Maroon map first and the Lime map second.

CM Ferraro said he is very concerned about neighborhoods being divided. He is particularly concerned about Oceanway and San Mateo, which he talked about with the Planning Department. He sees the proposed maps solving one problem while creating others.

School Board Chair Daryl Willie said the district will map school locations onto the final 2 selected maps to see the impact. The proposed maps don't seem to particularly impact the School Board members.

School Board member Kelly Coker thanked the Council for allowing the School Board to be involved in the process again. She hopes that School Board members can be permitted to call and talk to Mr. Killingsworth about impacts on their districts. She noted that School Board District 2 has a new member taking office in 3 weeks and her residence needs to be plotted on the maps.

CM Newby pointed out that there will be a new City Council member in a couple of weeks, so that needs to be recognized as well.

President Freeman said the group consensus seems to be that the Maroon and Lime maps are the committee's top two preferences, so the process will work from there. Mr. Teal said the Legislative Services Division has emailed PDF files of the 4 maps to all council members and they can be zoomed down to a very fine level and the demographic data table will be readable. Mr. Freeman said the special committee will refine those two maps at tomorrow's meeting.

Public Comment

Essie Howard said all of the maps are practically the same – the committee should be working from the Plaintiff's map and the Maroon map. The public needs to be involved in revising the maps, not just the committee members.

John Draper said he was a council member during the redistricting process in the early 1990s and the process has always been race-based and is getting worse every time. The council needs to give up on race-based districts altogether and start from scratch and get a better result.

Vanessa Cullins Hopkins applauded the committee for having a transparent process. She urged the use of sound logic and critical thinking, and suggested that districts crossing neighborhood boundaries is inevitable and could possibly be positive.

Bill Lewis of the Argyle Civic Council said the 2001 redistricting was bad and produced a "combover" district encompassing a huge rural area. Don't protect incumbents, and his group likes the Orange map.

Eunice Barnum said she has a constitutional right to redress her grievances and shouldn't be time limited in her comments. Why is the City wasting \$1 million on an appeal? Who drew the districts wrong in the first place?

Stanley Scott said the federal judge told the City what to do in the new redistricting and the committee is not doing it. He was a member of previous Charter Revision Commissions and believes the maps should be drawn by the community, not politicians. The city suffers from poor leadership.

Daniel Henry said a racial impact analysis of redistricting was needed all along, which the plaintiffs have proved in court. The judge said race could be used if the proper analysis of need was performed, which the City has failed to do.

Kathleen Beck with the Argyle Area Civic Council said redistricting needs to be about preserving communities and the Argyle has been split between districts for 20 years. The Orange map puts it back together with Chimney Lakes where it belongs.

Ayesha Covington said the redistricting process is disingenuous for not using the racial analysis. The City is wasting \$1 million on a process that wasn't necessary. The Council keeps using the wrong methodology.

Ben Frazier said the entire process is a sham and the people are not being listened to. Does the council want to collaborate with the people and produce fair maps or not? Stop trying to reduce the influence of Black voters.

Kim Pryor said the judge said the council didn't listen to the public's input last time and it isn't doing it again. The committee has chosen maps before any public input was allowed. She likes the Plaintiffs map and the Orange map.

Mike Ludwig said the whole process is ridiculous. The public can't comment without having seen any maps until just now. There has been no discussion of the Plaintiff's map at all. Public input on November 3rd will have no impact at all.

Carnell Oliver said the system is broken and the Charter needs to be changed. He and the community will rise up and take power from corrupt politicians.

Shamari Lewis said none of this process makes sense. The plaintiffs challenged "packing" of several districts. There will still be more Democrats in the urban core districts under any plan, so what's the point?

Kevin Kuzel said the Argyle area needs to be kept together and represented by 1 council member, and urged that Riverside and Avondale be kept together no matter what district they're in.

President Freeman reminded everyone about the map chat town hall on Thursday from 5 to 7 p.m. in City Hall. He said the committee has not chosen a map yet, just selected 2 concepts to start from to workshop down to a final plan. The committee is still open to making changes in the next 2 meetings. The public has many more opportunities for input.

Meeting adjourned: 1:35 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Research Division

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