

## COLUMNS

## Column: Redistricting offers no shortage of debate with chances to learn and influence

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SAN DIEGO, CA - OCTOBER 28: A woman walks by a vote banner on 6th Ave. on Oct. 28, 2020 in San Diego, CA. Throughout the city, county and state, nonpartisan redistricting commissions are redrawing the lines around voting boundaries. The basic purpose of redistricting is to equalize population among electoral districts after the census has indicated population shifts over the prior decade. The redistricting decisions will influence political representation over at least the next decade. (K.C. Alfred/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

## Get involved in redistricting because your insights may be valuable and you'll learn about other community concerns

BY CHARLES T. CLARK | COLUMNIST

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Sometimes disagreement doesn't mean someone is hostile to your concerns; they may just have a different perspective or lived experience.

That's not an earthshattering notion by any means, but it's easy to lose sight of when issues get heavily politicized. It's also well worth keeping in mind as we watch the many debates around redistricting efforts, because while there will certainly be arguments made for political ends, some insights shared at redistricting meetings provide us an opportunity to learn more about our communities, as well as to get involved.

The redistricting process can sometimes be difficult to keep up with. Currently there are variety of redistricting efforts going on throughout the state that are in their final stretch, including several efforts related to San Diego.

Efforts to redraw San Diego's City Council district boundaries are nearing their end with the city's Redistricting Commission hoping to decide Tuesday evening which map or maps will be used for its preliminary proposal of San Diego's nine city council districts.

The volunteer commissioners have been deadlocked, the [U-T's David Garrick reports](#), debating between a proposal that would have a more minimal impact on boundary changes and another that would more aggressively redraw district lines in an effort to better support minority groups' voting power. The commissioners also have the option to move both maps forward as they work to potentially merge them.

Garrick reported Friday that the more ambitious map, which has been endorsed by more than two dozen nonprofits and advocacy groups for minorities and low-income residents, has gained momentum. However, some commissioners have concerns about the plan, which would shift council districts for more than 300,000 residents, including every resident of District 2.

The county's Independent Redistricting Commission also is weighing potential boundary shifts for the region's five supervisorial districts. At a meeting last week commissioners looked at a second set of four draft maps and listened to input from more than 100 residents.

As the [UT's Deborah Sullivan Brennan reported](#), those residents' recommendations ranged from wanting to maintain current boundary lines and consolidating unincorporated communities, to making significant changes such as extending a district along the U.S.-Mexico border, creating a district encompassing the Black, immigrant and refugee communities in Lemon Grove, La Mesa and El Cajon, or grouping together Asian Pacific Islander communities in central county areas into one district.

Commissioners expect to receive additional maps from demographers incorporating some residents' feedback by their next meeting Saturday.

Meanwhile the state's Citizens Redistricting Commission is expected to make waves when it releases actual draft maps of California Assembly, Senate and U.S. Congressional districts this week.

The statewide commission — which is bipartisan, with an even split of Democrats and Republicans and a handful of independent members — has been reviewing district electoral boundaries for over a year and previously released “visualizations” of proposed new voting districts last month. The visualizations have been criticized by folks from a variety of political positions.

Will Rodriguez-Kennedy, Chair of the San Diego Democratic Party, told Brennan the proposed districts would divide a significant portion of the San Diego region's LGBTQ community and in other instances would pair up areas that are racially and economically dramatically different, such as putting Santee and National City in one assembly district.

Fernando Zweifach López, Executive Director of San Diego Pride, [worried that](#) the region's LGBTQ community would have a diminished voice at the Capitol.

Carl DeMaio, a conservative radio host and leader of Reform California, criticized some of the potential district boundaries for potentially fracturing some East County districts. He called the visualizations “grotesque political gerrymandering” and alleged some of the Republicans on the commission are not real Republicans because they have supported the Black Lives Matter movement and Planned Parenthood.

Beyond the political operatives though, the variety of perspectives you hear from everyday residents who take the time to comment or offer feedback on redistricting offers an opportunity to learn about your neighbors and your community — who feels heard and who doesn't. The suggestions for supervisorial districts are good examples. Some are arguing that people living in unincorporated communities are more sensitive to backcountry issues, such as threats of wildfire, but as a divided voting bloc their influence with supervisors may be limited.

Participating in the redistricting process also allows one to make a real effort advocating for fair political representation.

Often accessing elected officials can be challenging. Although navigating the maps can certainly be intimidating, at least with redistricting you're more likely to engage a volunteer commission member, who may be more open to incorporating your input than an elected official would be.

Just last week the chair of the County of San Diego Independent Redistricting Commission, David Bame, wrote in the U-T asking residents to get involved. He said the preliminary maps are just a starting point, and through resident feedback about their communities, unique interests, and relationship to other communities, commissioners can make improvements.

"Everyone in San Diego County can help solve the redistricting puzzle," he wrote.

So, although redistricting may be in the final stretch, it may well be worth joining the journey.

The city commission, even after figuring out a preliminary map, is obligated to hold five public hearings before finalizing the new council district boundaries sometime before Dec. 15.

The County of San Diego Independent Redistricting Commission has a meeting set for Nov. 13 to receive more public input and a public hearing scheduled for Dec. 2.

And throughout this week the state's redistricting commission is holding online meetings. That schedule can be found at [wedrawthelinesca.org/meetings](https://wedrawthelinesca.org/meetings).

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