

Commission approves new San Diego County voting districts



Voters cast their ballots in the large warehouse area of the San Diego Registrar of Voters on Nov. 3, 2020 in San Diego. (Alejandro Tamayo/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

For the first time, an independent redistricting commission drew lines that determine how San Diego County voters are represented

BY DEBORAH SULLIVAN BRENNAN | SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

DEC. 16, 2021 10:05 AM PT



San Diego — After holding 49 public hearings and viewing dozens of draft maps, the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission Tuesday approved new boundaries that will define the county’s voting districts for the next decade.

Throughout the year-long process, the 14-member bipartisan commission contended with pandemic-related delays and navigated conflicting testimony and arguments about the identities and affiliations of San Diego’s communities.

Efforts to reach compromise on those issues resulted in 11th-hour changes to the maps, with the commission receiving hundreds of comments at its recent meetings and arriving at a final draft Saturday, just days before the Dec. 15 deadline. Commissioners said the extensive testimony helped them fine-tune the final maps.

“Thanks for the public for the outstanding comments and giving us the information and input we need for decisions,” said Commissioner Fernandez Ponds, a former U.S. Navy Admiral.

The new map establishes District 1, currently represented by Supervisor Nora Vargas, as a minority-majority Latino district in South San Diego, including the cities of Imperial Beach, National City and Chula Vista.

District 2, covered by Supervisor Joel Anderson, covers East County and much of the unincorporated backcountry, along with the cities of El Cajon, Santee and Poway.

District 3, represented by Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, forms a coastal district extending from Coronado to Carlsbad.

In District 4, now served by Board of Supervisors Chair Nathan Fletcher, central portions of the city of San Diego are joined with Lemon Grove and La Mesa and the unincorporated communities of Rancho San Diego, Campo, Paradise Hills and part of Spring Valley, in an ethnically diverse district.

The map maintains District 5, represented by Supervisor Jim Desmond, as a North County district. Under the new lines it includes the state Route 78 cities of Escondido, San Marcos, Vista and Oceanside as well as Camp Pendleton and the unincorporated communities of Fallbrook, Bonsall, Rainbow, Valley Center and Borrego Springs and a number of tribal reservations.

As late as Saturday, those boundaries were still being negotiated, more than a week after the commission approved what it had intended to be the final draft. In the penultimate version, the city of El Cajon had been included in the central District 4 and the communities of Spring Valley and Paradise Hills had been part of the rural District 2.

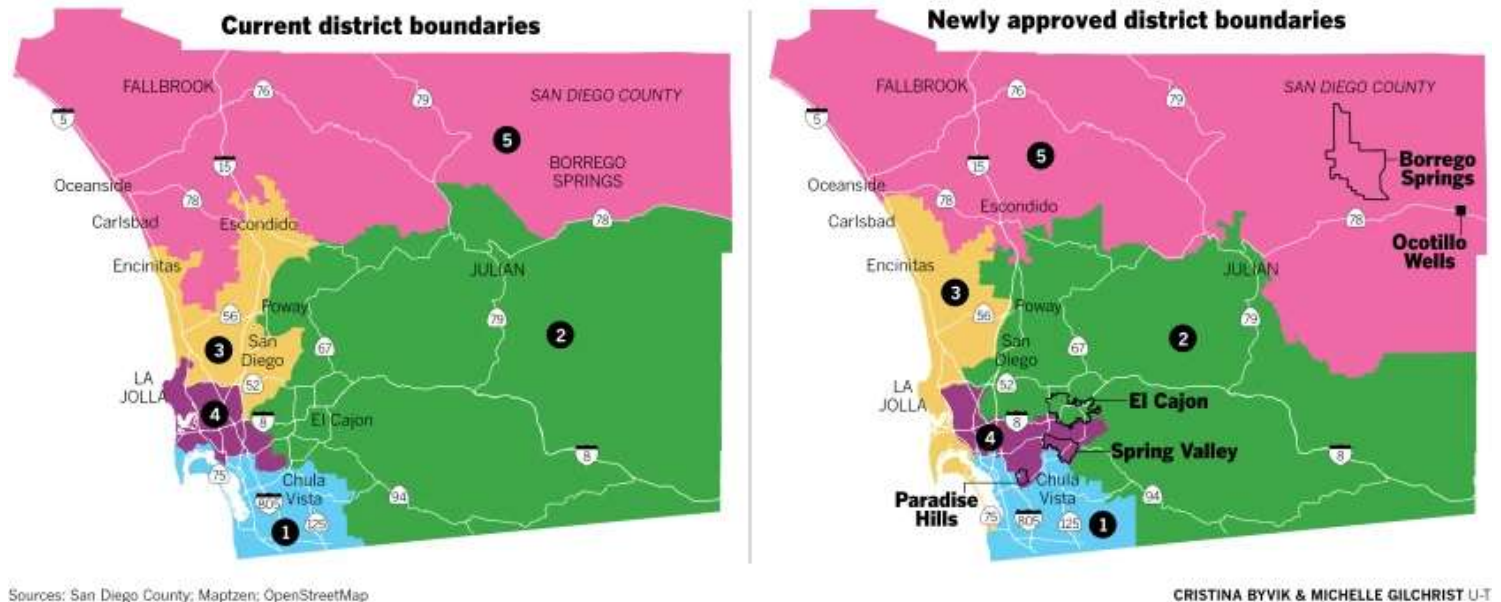
That grouping drew an outcry from members of the Chaldean community of Iraqi Christians, who number about 50,000 in El Cajon and surrounding areas. They said they identify with rural East County and not urban San Diego neighborhoods. Chaldean leaders staged demonstrations last week and brought several bus loads of speakers to a commission meeting Friday.

Residents of Paradise Hills and Spring Valley, home to large numbers of Black and other minority residents, also protested the maps, stating that their neighborhoods belonged in District 4, where they could join their voting power with other people of color.

The board decided Saturday to essentially swap those neighborhoods, switching Paradise Hills and Spring Valley into the central District 4 and moving El Cajon to District 2.

Redistricting commission approves final map

The San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission voted Tuesday to approve its final map that will set county voting districts for the next 10 years. The final map has several changes from the previous version. El Cajon will be moved into District 2 with East County communities. Spring Valley and Paradise Hills will be grouped with the urban District 4 in central San Diego. Borrego Springs and Ocotillo Wells will be moved into District 5 in North County.



Although those changes were made as compromises with communities who complained that they were misplaced, a number of speakers said they were still dissatisfied.

Some Chaldean speakers objected that Rancho San Diego, which they also consider part of the Chaldean community, remained in District 4. They warned Tuesday that they will consider suing to contest that.

Other speakers representing newer immigrant groups in El Cajon said they were unhappy to be included with East County and preferred to remain with the urban District 4. And some objected that part of Spring Valley remains in District 1, which they said splits the community.

Those conflicts illustrated the balancing act the commission performed as it worked to answer community concerns and comply with complex redistricting laws. Those include

creating districts with equal populations, protecting minority voting rights and preserving communities of interest: places with shared economic, geographic and cultural interests.

The last-minute resolutions also reflected the tumultuous political climate and shortened timeline for that process. The commission began meeting early in the year, and released its first draft maps in November.

Although the original deadline for redistricting maps was Aug. 15, census data was not released until after that, so the California Legislature extended the due date for final maps to Dec. 15.

“The 2020 Census year and the redistricting time period (November 2020-December 2021) were marked by significant disruption and upheaval, primarily due to the COVID19 pandemic,” the commission’s final report stated.

For the first time, the new lines were not drawn by legislators but by an independent redistricting commission, which was designed to take political calculations out of boundary determinations.

Commissioners were forbidden from considering the effects of their decisions on any political party or elected official.

NEWS
