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Time to Draw the Lines for Fair Representation

By David Bame

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The County of San Diego is over 4,500 square miles making it larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island. With a population of over 3 million people it is currently the fifth most populated county with a population greater than 21 states. San Diego County is also part of the San Diego–Tijuana transborder metropolitan area, the largest metropolitan area shared between the United States and Mexico with the busiest border crossing in the Western Hemisphere. Our county is an important region and a place I love to call home!

As Chair of the [County of San Diego Independent Redistricting Commission](#), I invite you to help us draw the lines for our county so that our communities can get the fair political representation it deserves. The County's Independent Redistricting Commission, or IRC, is made up of 14 County residents who volunteered to serve on the Commission and draw the lines for the five supervisorial election districts. [The Commission](#) reflects the County's diverse geographic, political, ethnic, and racial diversity. We're honored to be part of this process, but we cannot do it without you.

After every census, our community has the opportunity to participate in a once-in-a-decade event called redistricting. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the County's population grew by over six percent, to almost 3.3 million people. This growth means that each of the County's five supervisors now will represent approximately 660,000 people. But dividing the county into five supervisorial districts is no small task, given the challenge of which urban, rural, and other areas should be placed in which electoral districts. To redraw electoral district lines fairly, we need as much input on common community characteristics and interests as possible.

Over the past several months we've listened to the many different communities that make our region great. They've told us about their unique interests, their community's location and boundaries, and how it fits with other communities across San Diego County. The IRC has collected more than 900 written and verbal comments from County residents. We continue to hear testimony about County "communities of interest", reflecting places that people believe should be kept whole in the redistricting process for their effective representation. These communities of interest are where people share common social or economic interests, coming together to live, work, learn, celebrate, and worship.

We've heard from many individuals from the LGBTQ community about their interests and concerns when it comes to redistricting. Like many other communities, LGBTQ folks live throughout the county. Engaging in the process, regardless of where you live, is important to ensure that your voice is heard. We recognize that the LGBTQ community is a hard-to-count community, so we are glad to have received comments that provide population, geographic, and COI information about the community. The IRC welcomes and encourages even more input as its map-drawing process continues. 915 comments is an impressive total for a public body like the IRC, but we strive for more.

Recently, the IRC presented its first attempts to redraw the lines in draft maps. The IRC has also posted maps submitted by the public and reviewed them as carefully as those drafted by the IRC. All of these maps are shaped by community input, and mark useful steps in creating a final map that the IRC is to approve by December 15.

By law, the IRC must draw and approve maps primarily based on the 2020 census data, the federal Voting Rights Act, and public input. The IRC is legally required to work independently of political parties, candidates, and elected officials to approve a final map that will be in place for ten years until the next redistricting process. The IRC must approve lines for five supervisorial districts following prioritized criteria: have nearly equal population; complies with the federal Voting Rights Act (so that minorities have fair opportunities to elect a representative of their choice); are contiguous as defined by law and the courts; minimizes division of cities, neighborhoods, and communities of interest; are geographically compact; and include three districts with unincorporated territory, two of which must be primarily unincorporated. The IRC by law cannot consider the place of residence of any incumbent or political candidate, nor favor or discriminate against an incumbent, political candidate, or political party.

As we continue the mapping process, we strongly encourage all communities to be actively engaged. Stay up to date and discuss redistricting with your neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Listen in during our next public hearings or, even better, provide written or verbal comment. The IRC has a public hearing set for December 2, along with a meeting on November 13, where the IRC will receive even more public input. Community members can also visit the IRC's website (www.drawyourcommunity.com) to submit comments, and use the electronic tools to draw and submit maps (through the [District Scenario Modeler](#)) or provide details on a Community of Interest (through the [Community Builder Tool](#)). Alternatively, you can send the IRC a regular letter or a hand-drawn map. The IRC website also provides background materials, including all IRC draft maps and their detailed data. You can always contact the IRC staff – at (619) 409-3003 or redistricting@sdcounty.ca.gov – for help. There are many ways to connect with the IRC and get involved.

Everyone in San Diego County can help redraw the lines by sending your comments and maps to your Independent Redistricting Commission. The IRC looks forward to hearing from you.

David Bame, a retired U.S. diplomat, is the Chair of the County of San Diego Independent Redistricting Commission and a resident of Chula Vista.