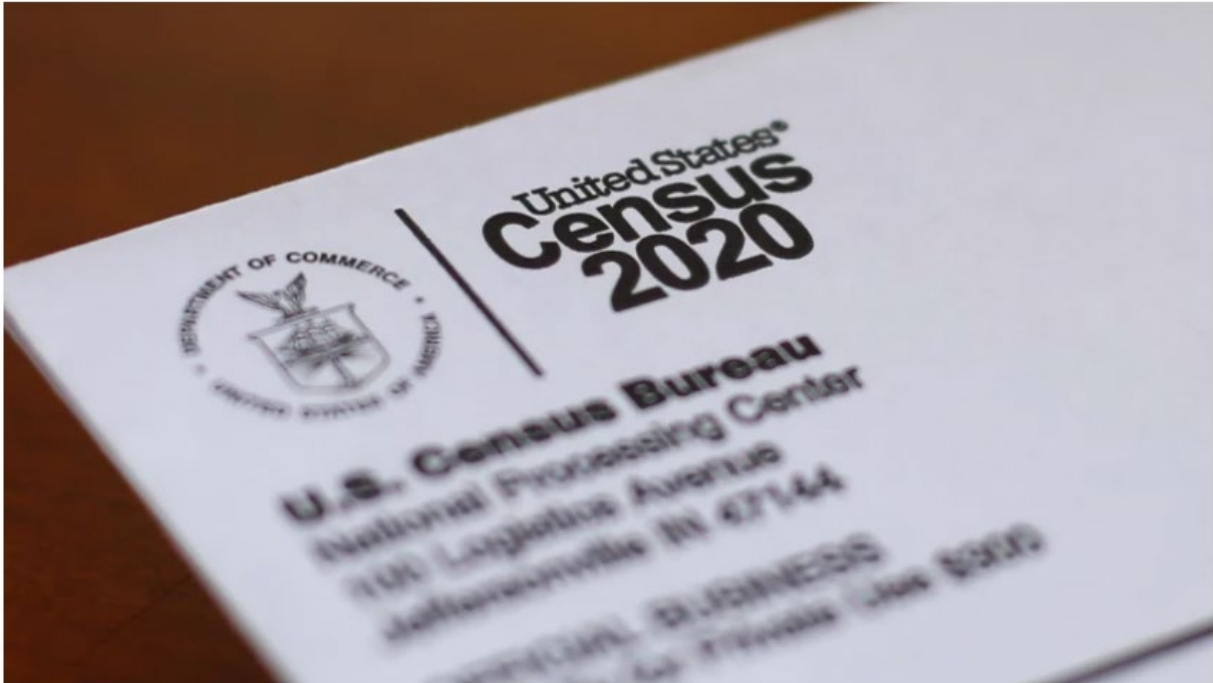


San Diego County starts independent body to redraw district lines



(ASSOCIATED PRESS)

This is the first time an independent redistricting commission will make the once-a-decade adjustments to supervisorial districts

BY [DEBORAH SULLIVAN BRENNAN](#)

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San Diego —

As San Diego County considers moving its district boundaries to adjust for population changes this year, the lines will be drawn for the first time by an independent redistricting commission.

“The U.S. Constitution says every 10 years we’ll do a census, then right after that we’ll look at how the population has changed to look at equal and equitable representation,” said David Bame, a retired U.S. Diplomat who chairs the redistricting commission.

“What’s different this time, as opposed to 10 years ago, is that we have an independent redistricting commission ... We draw a map, and that’s the map that will go into effect for the next 10 years.”

Independent redistricting commissions are designed to take political calculations out of boundary determinations. Until recently most of those efforts were overseen and approved by elected lawmakers whose own jurisdictions were subject to change.

“Because this process ... generally involves political actors whose careers depend on how the lines are drawn, both major political parties have used the process to unfairly strip voters of their voice,” the Campaign Legal Center, a nonpartisan legal organization in Washington D.C. , stated on its website.

California adopted an independent commission in 2010 following the previous census and is resuming the process this year, based on results of the 2020 census.

San Diego County’s redistricting commission is established under the state law that guides California’s, Bame said.

So far, San Diego County’s 14-member commission has held nine public hearings and received hundreds of written and oral comments from residents.

Some seek to split existing county districts along new lines, while others urge commissioners to keep communities together.

The new boundaries will adjust for demographic changes revealed by the census. The boundaries must maintain “reasonably equal population,” comply with the Voting Rights Act, be contiguous and geographically compact, and avoid dividing cities, neighborhoods, and “communities of interest,” according to the commission.

That covers “everything from communities like Asian Pacific Islander communities, to communities drawn by shared experiences as immigrants and refugees, to economic and social ties across geographic features, like coasts or even highway corridors,” Bame said.

In a recent comment to the commission, Paradise Hills resident Makhfira Abdullahi urged commissioners to retain Southeastern San Diego within one district, citing residents’ shared experience as immigrants.

“Our community has shared languages, cultural practices, food, and common goals for our families, children, and community members,” Abdullahi wrote. “Given the diversity of our area,

the languages of Spanish, Tagalong, Oromo, and Somali are often spoken within my community, as we also celebrate events and holidays together. We are immigrants, refugees, or children of immigrants and refugees.”

Similarly, Rebekkah Naputi asked commissioners to keep North County communities together in a single district.

“I strongly oppose redistricting the North County Area, which if separated, is a cause for major concern and has the possibility of creating numerous problems throughout the community,” Naputi wrote. “North County has many different cities, unincorporated areas, ethnicity, and cultural diversity; however, it is one community.”

Encinitas resident Mark O’Connor said he would like to see coastal cities grouped separately from inland areas.

“Living in a coastal community, I see that many of the needs here are different than inland communities,” O’Connor wrote. “I would like this commission to look at creating districts that run up and down the coast, North-South versus running West-East.”

The commission is operating on a shortened schedule to draw and finalize the maps, because the pandemic delayed the census data needed to redraw the boundaries.

San Diego County has seen a 6.6 percent population increase over the past decade, according to the census, with the addition of 203,301 residents. But some districts experienced more growth than others. No district in San Diego County showed a decline in population.

District 3, represented by Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, saw the largest change, with an increase of 8.6 percent. That’s followed by District 5, where Supervisor Jim Desmond’s area grew by 7.5 percent.

District 4, represented by Board of Supervisors Chair Nathan Fletcher, grew the least, by 4.9 percent.

The commission and its demographer must draw the lines to equalize populations within the districts, while also considering public comments on how the changes will affect local communities. Moving the boundaries of one district may require adjustments to others, Bame said.

“It’s not that different from putting together a really complicated jigsaw puzzle,” he said.

Some important dates are coming up.

The commission will present some options, or draft maps, at its Oct. 14 meeting, and it will hold two public hearings on Nov. 2 and Dec. 2 to seek input before approving a final map on Dec. 15, Bame said.

Members of the public can also submit their own proposed maps using digital tools on the commission website. The deadline for members of the public to submit map proposals is Dec. 2.

The 14-member commission consists of six Democrats, four Republicans and four independent or “no party preference” voters, which is in proportion to the partisan ratios of San Diego’s registered voters.

Democratic members include co-chair Amy Caterina, an investor relations and corporate communications consultant in the biotechnology industry; Sonia Diaz, nonprofit manager with Kitchens for Good; Elidia C. Dostal, a business attorney; Kenneth Inman, a retired executive; Arv Lawson, an electrical engineer and computer scientist; and retired Admiral Fernandez “Frank” Ponds.

The Republican members are retired California state auditor Colleen Brown; energy industry consultant Chris Chen; retired educator and nonprofit manager Barbara Thompson Hansen, and retired Navy officer and mechanical engineer John Russ.

Non-partisan members include Bame, English professor Carmen Rosette-Garcia, bioinformatics scientist Kristina Kruglyak, and urban planner Ramesses Surban.

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