

To: Charter Commission

From: Nate Burkett, City Manager

Cc: Pam Whitmore, City Attorney

Date: May 5, 2023

Subject: By-law Review - Redistricting

The Chair has requested the Charter Commission consider revising by-laws to establish basic procedure related to redistricting.

As members may recall the redistricting process in 2022 felt rushed and as though Charter Commission was asked to “rubber stamp” the proposed ward maps. While there was some good discussion and adjustments made to proposed maps, the process and time constraints did not allow for consideration of fundamental changes to the ward boundaries and amounted to small changes around the edges to meet statutory requirements.

One of the greatest challenges, and the reason the process felt rushed in 2022 is that the amount of time between the release of census data, the date the State approved new district maps and the time the ward maps needed to be approved was very short (approximately 12 weeks total, six weeks between State maps and the statutory deadline). There really is no way that the Commission, Council or staff could have controlled the time between the release of data and the statutory reporting period.

Compounding the issues with the short time frame, the Council was required by charter to hold two readings of the proposed ward maps, meaning the Commission had no choice but to approve a recommendation so that there was sufficient time to gain two affirmative votes from the Council.

Here is a timeline of how the process worked in 2022 –

- January 5, 2022 (approx.) – Census released data
- January 24, 2022 (approx.) – Staff received census data in a usable format
 - Note: staff worked to try to piece together information and do some early tests between January 5 and 24 but it was cumbersome and not totally accurate.
- February 24, 2022 – Charter Commission meeting where maps were considered and approved
- March 14, 2022 – First reading of maps
- March 28, 2022 – Second reading and final approval of maps

The next redistricting process will not occur until 2032, but there may be some value in writing in to the by-laws what amounts to a reminder to future Charter Commissions to attempt to work on redistricting early. A couple of suggestions for consideration are:

- Early January meeting of Charter Commission in redistricting years to consider at a high level whether ward boundaries need to be fundamentally shifted.
- Two meetings, one of which may be intentionally geared toward public input in early February.
- The Commission should consider a deadline to provide a recommendation to Council that is no later than February 28, since the Council must hold two readings and ward boundaries must be approved by March 29 in a redistricting year. Also note that the statute is 60 days from the date legislative maps are approved OR March 29 – whichever comes first.