

CITY OF CRANSTON
REDISTRICTING COMMISSION
Orientation Meeting of May 10, 2021 – APPROVED MINUTES

The Cranston Redistricting Commission met on May 10, 2021, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on April 20, 2021. The meeting was called to order by the Recording Secretary, Nicholas Lima, at 4 p.m. It was held virtually via electronic means on Zoom, conducted in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order 20-46 in response to the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Randall Jackvony, Gary Vierra, Quilcia Moronta

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), David Igliozi (Assistant City Solicitor), Maria Giarrusso (GIS Manager), Jason Pezzullo (Planning Director)

A quorum was present with all three members in attendance.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER BY REGISTRAR NICHOLAS J. LIMA, RECORDING SECRETARY TO THE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION
- II. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON
 - A. THE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION MAY NOMINATE AND VOTE TO ELECT A CHAIRPERSON
- III. THE COMMISSION MAY VOTE TO APPROVE THE AGENDA
- IV. THE COMMISSION MAY VOTE TO APPROVE MEETING MINUTES – NONE
- V. PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON
- VI. PUBLIC COMMENT
- VII. OLD BUSINESS – NONE
- VIII. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND BE PROVIDED A STAFF OVERVIEW OF THE 2022 REDISTRICTING PROCESS AND TIMELINE, THE COMMISSION'S AUTHORITY AND ITS AVAILABLE BUDGET, AND THE STATUTORY AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS
 - B. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND BE PROVIDED AN UPDATE FROM STAFF REGARDING STREET RANGE FILE AND DATA PREPARATION WORK COMPLETED TO DATE IN SUPPORT OF REDISTRICTING

C. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND VOTE TO DETERMINE ITS OBJECTIVES, MEETING SCHEDULE, AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS FOR UPCOMING MEETINGS AND ADVERTISED PUBLIC HEARINGS

IX. ADJOURNMENT

ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

A. THE REDISTRICTING COMMISSION MAY NOMINATE AND VOTE TO ELECT A CHAIRPERSON

Mr. Lima called to order the orientation meeting of the Redistricting Commission and asked if there were any nominations from the members to serve as chairperson. Mr. Vierra nominated Randall Jackvony. Mr. Lima asked twice more if there were any further nominations, and hearing none, closed the nomination period.

Mr. Jackvony accepted his nomination as chairperson.

MOTION: By Mr. Vierra and seconded by Mr. Jackvony to elect Randall Jackvony as Chairperson of the Cranston Redistricting Commission.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Mr. Jackvony, Mr. Vierra, and Ms. Moronta voting Aye.

Mr. Lima congratulated Mr. Jackvony on his election as chair and passed the gavel to Chairperson Jackvony for the remainder of the meeting.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Jackvony asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

MOTION: By Mr. Vierra and seconded by Mr. Jackvony to approve the agenda as posted.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Mr. Jackvony, Mr. Vierra, and Ms. Moronta voting Aye.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Jackvony said that as this was the first meeting of the Redistricting Commission, there were no minutes to be approved.

PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr. Jackvony had none at this time. Steve Frias, chairperson of the 2019-2020 Cranston Charter Review Commission, and Council President Christopher Paplauskas were in attendance for portions of the Zoom call.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public present asked to speak.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business to consider.

NEW BUSINESS

A. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND BE PROVIDED A STAFF OVERVIEW OF THE 2022 REDISTRICTING PROCESS AND TIMELINE, THE COMMISSION'S AUTHORITY AND ITS AVAILABLE BUDGET, AND THE STATUTORY AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE REDISTRICTING PROCESS

Mr. Lima reviewed relative federal, state, and local laws related to the Redistricting Commission, starting with requirements as outlined in the U.S. Const. art. I, § 2, U.S. Const. amend. XIV, §§ 1 and 2, and 13 U.S.C. § 10503 and 52 U.S.C. § 141.

R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-11-1 *et. seq* were also discussed as they relate to redistricting and the Board of Canvassers' function to establish precincts and polling places. Approved maps must be posted in the Canvassing Dept. office for 40 days, advertised in a newspaper, and notice must be sent to all registered voters of their change in district and polling place. Mr. Lima reviewed the requirements that, under state law, precincts should consist of no more than 3,000 registered voters and no fewer than 500, and that any polling place located outside of precinct boundaries can only be approved by a unanimous vote of the Board and subsequent approval from the state Board of Elections. While state law sets a precinct size at 500 or more voters, Mr. Lima said the Commission's guidance from the Council is to aim for 1,000 voters as a minimum, when practical. Mr. Lima said one concern he has is that the proposed state redistricting legislation sets this number at 100, contrary to existing state law, and he has sent a letter to the co-sponsors of the bill and Cranston representatives expressing his concerns.

As a result of notice being sent to all voters, 60,000 postcards will be sent out in May 2022, roughly one year from today. Mr. Lima said that, pending data from the U.S. Census, these postcards may have to be bilingual. Mr. Lima said he budgeted \$25,000 for this mailing, which is part of the \$40,000 allocated in the Mayor's budget for redistricting costs.

Also referenced was the March 22, 2021 Redistricting Commission resolution passed by the City Council that had the effect of creating the Commission. Mr. Lima said the Commission's charge is temporary and only advisory in nature, and that its sole duty is to provide a report back to the Council with a draft plan or plans for the Council's ultimate consideration and approval. Following adoption by the Council via ordinance, the final plan will be subject to approval by the Mayor. This is due to the charter change passed by voters on Nov. 3, 2020; previous redistricting processes were done by resolution without the ability for the Mayor to provide a check.

The final plan adopted by the city will be forwarded to the Rhode Island General Assembly for ratification next spring. However, Mr. Lima said, the plan cannot be finalized until state legislative and federal congressional boundaries are known. Mr.

Lima said it will be one of the duties of the Commission and staff to monitor the work of the state's Redistricting Committee, to ensure that state-drawn lines don't have the effect of splitting up Cranston neighborhoods and communities of interest, or creating small pocket precincts with few registered voters, that are more expensive and time-consuming for the Board of Canvassers to maintain. Adjustments may have to be made to Cranston's plan pending the outcome of the state's process over the winter.

Mr. Lima said that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, delays in the 2020 Census count mean that redistricting data that normally would have been available for the Commission's work on April 1, 2021, is now not available until mid-August or late-September 2021. This means that an already compressed timeframe to complete the process in advance of the 2022 candidate declaration period will have to be even further accelerated. Mr. Lima said the state completing its work in a timely fashion is of paramount importance.

Mr. Lima said the Commission's work should also be informed by relevant case law, such as the "one person, one vote" principle outlined in *Reynolds v. Sims* and other related cases from the 1960s and later. He said that a 2016 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Evenwel v. Abbott*, further clarified that states may use total population, rather than just voter population, in determining voting districts.

2021 House bill 6222 in the General Assembly, at this time, appears to be the leading redistricting bill, among several competing proposals. Mr. Lima said it has not yet come out of committee, but once it is passed, the state Redistricting Committee can begin their work, which will culminate in another bill to be passed by the General Assembly, hopefully in January or February 2022. Mr. Lima informed the Commission that, in 2012, the Council asked for General Assembly authorization of the city's redistricting plan via companion legislation in the form of H-8153 and S-3049, which is the last step of the legislative process anticipated in April or May of 2022.

Mr. Lima noted the updated Cranston Charter Section 2.03 provides for several key principles for the redistricting process, nominally, that wards be compact and contiguous; that the geographic integrity of neighborhoods and communities of interest be maintained; and districts be bound by roads and natural features to the extent possible; and that the residence of incumbents and candidates not be considered in the process, and that maps are not to be drawn to benefit or harm any particular candidate or political party, which functions as an anti-gerrymandering provision.

Mr. Lima said additional funds in the redistricting budget, which is under the auspices of the Canvassing Department, include overtime and differential for staff, advertising for public hearings and notices, production of new maps, and contingency in the event vendors or special software are needed later in the process. Mr. Lima said that, so far, the U.S. Census Bureau has only released state-level data, which means Rhode Island will be maintaining two congressional districts for the next 10 years, the lines of which may impact Cranston. Among many other factors to consider, Mr. Lima said the members must be aware of the concept of compactness of wards, which can be measured by geography and mathematical standards such as length-width compactness or perimeter compactness.

Mr. Jackvony asked what type of work can be done ahead of time, given the delays in receiving local data from the census. Mr. Lima said Ms. Giarrusso would explain the work they've been doing to date, and what the Redistricting Commission will be doing in the months ahead to be ready for that data when it becomes available. He said identifying communities of interest and neighborhoods is a community-driven process, and he will be reaching out to local elected officials and scheduling public hearings to solicit feedback on how those should be defined.

Mr. Lima said the purpose of that exercise will be to find areas of the city where we should avoid drawing ward boundaries through, which will have the effect of splitting up smaller-scale communities and neighborhoods that have historically aligned representation in government. He said a concern will be the state using an arbitrary census block boundary line as a district line, so the neighborhood map will be provided to the state so they can be aware of areas the city prefers to keep intact, from large neighborhoods down to apartment complexes.

Mr. Jackvony asked how important it is to wait for the state to draw their districts before we can complete ours. Mr. Lima said much of the work can be done now, however we will have to wait for the state's work to be completed and make adjustments to avoid small pocket precincts that may result from divergent voting district lines.

B. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND BE PROVIDED AN UPDATE FROM STAFF REGARDING STREET RANGE FILE AND DATA PREPARATION WORK COMPLETED TO DATE IN SUPPORT OF REDISTRICTING

Ms. Giarrusso said that while we are waiting for block-level redistricting data, there is a lot of work we can do now to be better prepared to apply that data when it's ready. She gave a presentation to the Commission outlining what work has been done to date and what is ongoing.

Ms. Giarrusso explained that the redistricting process results from a combination of an odd/even street range address list and actual mapping and census blocks, and the challenge lies in generating an accurate street file that matches up to those blocks and the new districts. Under normal circumstances, there isn't a lot of time to complete this process, but in this case, we have even less time to make this work. So, she said, it's critical to complete as much work as can be done in advance as possible.

Several maps were shown to the Commission explaining problems that we are aware of and have already well-documented involving wrong side of the road addresses, out of sequence addresses, and other problematic addresses that cause havoc with accurate street list implementation. Ms. Giarrusso said she has developed programs to account for these known problem addresses when applying changes to the redistricting plan, so that the process can be as automated as possible.

Another issue is the placement of the census block boundaries themselves, which in some notable cases run directly through a residential structure because the Census Bureau chose to use, for example, an overhead high-tension power line as a block line. Mr. Lima noted that Ms. Giarrusso spent a considerable amount of time in recent years working on the Block Boundary Suggestion Program, among other GIS-driven data

clean-up processes ahead of the 2020 Census, to help mitigate these issues. In some cases, the Census Bureau accepted the city's recommended changes, however they did leave many problematic blocks in place for what appears to be arbitrary and unstated reasons, likely resulting from the automation of the process by the Census Bureau –power lines being an example of block lines that were requested to be removed by the city, but were kept active in the 2020 Census.

Ms. Giarrusso explained the balance that must take place between ensuring the wards have roughly equal population – plus or minus 5% – while also ensuring the smaller precincts that make up the wards do not exceed 3,000 people. She said that each voter address from the Central Voter Registration System is geocoded into the GIS software to help visualize and check this, and is particularly helpful to identify addresses that are not properly coded.

Ms. Giarrusso said she has also preassigned existing state precincts and wards onto the 2020 Census block data, which will allow us to readily know how much variation in population the wards have over 10 years ago once the block population data is known in August or September.

Another project Ms. Giarrusso is actively working on is a publicly accessible portal where vector GIS map scenarios can be easily viewed, which will also include public access to the underlying redistricting data files used to create the maps. The latest priority project that can be done while we wait for data is to identify neighborhoods and communities of interest in the city, to ensure they are not broken up by ward and district lines to the extent possible.

A separate but related issue is identifying smaller “sub-neighborhoods,” which may only include a couple of streets or street segments, but are divided up in odd ways by census block geography – sometimes isolating a single address on a street that, really, should be kept together. Identifying and mapping these areas, which also include housing complexes, is important to ensure district lines aren't inadvertently drawn in such a way as to break them up, violating the principles of maintaining neighborhoods and communities of interest as stated in the City Charter.

Ms. Giarrusso said getting input from the public to identify these areas, both large and small, will be an important part of the Commission's work while we wait for data, so those types of discussions don't take up too much time later on in the process. Mr. Jackvony asked where the community of interest duty comes from, and Ms. Giarrusso said it is in the language of the resolution that created the Redistricting Commission, which Mr. Lima said is reflective of the Charter.

Mr. Vierra asked what type of census geography has been released from the federal government so far. Ms. Giarrusso the geography includes blocks, tracts, and block groups, and while we have the correct lines, neither we nor the state have the associated population data for each of these geographic units at this time. Mr. Vierra asked for the definition of a census tract vs. the other units, which Ms. Giarrusso explained, where census blocks are the smallest unit that make up the larger ones.

Mr. Vierra summarized that we have to take into consideration census blocks, neighborhoods, sub-neighborhoods, communities of interest, and street and natural feature boundaries. Ms. Giarrusso said we also need to take into account population distribution and the number of registered voters in each precinct that is created. She said the language about some of these requirements is looser for some than others, allowing discretion when needed for areas like neighborhoods, but establishing strict requirements, for example, for the maximum number of registered voters allowed.

Ms. Moronta asked for clarity on the maximum 3,000-person provision, whether that was for total population or for registered voters. Ms. Giarrusso clarified that the provision just counts registered voters, which is different, for example, of the total population used in apportioning wards and legislative districts. Because Ms. Giarrusso is geocoding the Board of Canvassers' voter list, we will be able to quickly see how many registered voters there are in each census block, which can be calculated to view how many voters are in each precinct.

Mr. Vierra asked how many precincts should make up a ward. Ms. Giarrusso said the six wards can have as many precincts as needed based upon total registered voters and the 3,000 limit, however the more precincts there are, the more polling places the city will be required to open and staff for every election. Discussion ensued.

C. THE COMMISSION MAY DISCUSS AND VOTE TO DETERMINE ITS OBJECTIVES, MEETING SCHEDULE, AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS FOR UPCOMING MEETINGS AND ADVERTISED PUBLIC HEARINGS

Mr. Jackvony asked Mr. Lima to reach out to the members to schedule a time for the next Redistricting Commission, tentatively to be held the week of June 21.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: By Mr. Vierra and seconded by Ms. Moronta to adjourn.
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – VOICE VOTE

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas J. Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections
Recording Secretary to the Redistricting Commission

APPROVED by the Cranston Redistricting Commission: June 24, 2021