More

POLITICS

County commission releases district maps

By Steve Hughes

Albany

Albany County's independent redistricting commission released its first take on what the 39 legislative districts might look like.

The draft maps, which are available at www.albanycounty.com/acrc, are subject to change as both the commission and the majority-minority redistricting subcommittee will consider public input on them.

The maps include an interactive countywide map that shows the proposed changes to each district. Those areas are marked with diagonal lines and two numbers divided by a slash. The first number is the current district the area is represented by and the second number is the proposed new district.

The maps also include the proposed majority-minority districts as drawn by the majority-minority redistricting subcommittee, according to a news release. Those districts are all within the city and contain only minor changes to the current boundaries.

The largest area and number of proposed changes appear to be in the town of Colonie although nearly all of the county's suburban districts will see some changes if the proposed maps remain as drawn.

The majority-minority subcommittee will have a public hearing at 5 p.m. on Wednesday at 112 State St.

The redistricting commission will have a public hearing on the proposed maps at 5 p.m. Thursday, May 26, also at 112 State St.

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TIMES UNION

Timesunion.com | Sunday, July 17, 2022 | Albany, New York | $3.00 Final

Albany County panel is aiming to boost diversity

Redistricting commission intends to create two new majority-minority districts

By Steve Hughes

ALBANY — Albany County's independent redistricting commission intends to create two new majority-minority legislative districts in the city, bringing the total to seven, the most in county history.

The proposed changes upend at least one long-standing district in the city and will likely draw concerns from county legislators, residents and organizations in other neighborhoods as the commission attempts to finish its work and send the proposed district lines to the county legislature for consideration.

The commission and its subcommittee, which are focused on ensuring fair representation for minority residents, were created three years ago in an attempt to avoid a fourth round of litigation on the issue of minority representation under the federal Voting Rights Act.

The two bodies decided to redraw the maps one last time in response to input at what was supposed to be a final public hearing last month. They initially presented a map that included six majority-minority districts in the city, an increase of one.

Larry Volk, the commission's chair, said the decision to add a seventh "will alter almost every other line in the county."

Marie Allen Campbell, chair of the majority-minority subcommittee, said everyone involved in the redistricting process knew any changes would lead to complaints.

"As we got into this process, none of us had any illusions that we were going to end up in a place that satisfied every-

Please see **DISTRICTS A6** ▶

A map showing the proposed seven majority-minority districts for the Albany County Legislature.

Photo Courtesy of the Albany County Redistricting Commission

Maps meant to make shift before 2023 elections

DISTRICTS

▼ CONTINUED FROM A1

body," she said. "We believe that where we're ending up is the best place that we can end up right now."

The proposed maps do not shrink the legislature, which is the largest in the state with 39 members. Instead, they are meant to shift the districts ahead of the 2023 elections based on population changes recorded by the 2020 U.S. census while ensuring fair representation for minority residents

Those seven proposed districts where the majority of residents are Black or Hispanic are all located in the city of Albany, although one district would include a large portion of the village of Menands.

Redistricting has a fraught history in the county. The county legislature created the independent redistricting process in 2019 after it was successfully sued for failing to properly account for the growth of minority residents in the city of Albany in its 1990, 2000 and 2010 redistricting processes. In the past few months since the commission began its work, county legislators have been reluctant to comment publicly for fear of being seen as attempting to influence the districts.

However, several legislators, including some from the legislature's leadership ranks, sent in public testimony to the commission during last month's hearing expressing their concern over the proposed lines. Several legislators declined to comment after the most recent majority-minority district maps were posted on the county's website last week so it is unclear if their concerns were addressed.

Will Waldron / Times Union

Albany County Legislature Deputy Chair Wanda Willingham, who represents the 3rd district, has told the redistricting commission that she will not support its changes to legislative district maps that create a total of seven majority-minority districts because they dilute the power of minority voters in those districts.

Some of the strongest language at the public hearing came from Deputy Chairwoman Wanda Willingham, who told the commission she would not vote to support the maps as they stood.

Willingham, who has served in the legislature for over two decades, was among the plaintiffs in the previous lawsuit and helped create the independent redistricting process.

When reached last week after new majority-minority maps were posted online, including her district, Willingham referred a reporter to a Winston Churchill quote that warned against putting too much faith in experts, indicating her position hadn't changed.

The concerns from legislators and residents generally fall into two categories. First, residents and neighborhood groups are worried the maps split up longtime "communities of interest"—neighborhoods that share histories, identities and socioeconomic status. Second, in creating seven majority-minority districts, there are concerns that the commission may have weakened the voting power of minority voters in those districts.

Campbell and Volk noted there have been population changes within the existing majority-minority districts and that the city as a whole has become more diverse since the previous census.

"You're trying to ensure that the districts are compact, that they're contiguous," Volk said "You're trying to consider community of interests, you're trying to not divide areas. Often times all of that is not achievable."

One district that will be disrupted if the new maps stand is the Fifth District, which represents the city's Center Square, Hudson/Park, and Park South neighborhoods and some of the Washington Park neighborhood. The area has traditionally had a large LGBTQ population. The new maps split that district into four separate county legislative districts, despite elected officials and neighborhood associations' requests to keep them together.

Democrat Matthew Peter, who represents the district, declined to comment. In his written testimony to the commission, Peter argued that splitting up the district would harm a community that had worked together for generations.

Patrick Noonan, who owns El Loco Mexican Cafe on Madison Avenue, echoed Peter's concerns.

"By redrawing the district lines, you are hijacking the neighborhood and eliminating the natural cohesiveness and connectivity that has been a tremendous resource over the last 25-plus years," he wrote in his letter to the commission.

The Third District, represented by Willingham, would also face changes. Currently, it includes parts of North Albany, Arbor Hill, West Hill and the West End. Under the new maps that district would cover portions of West Hill, North Albany and Menands.

The more delicate issue is one of voting power in the majority-minority districts. The overall Black and Hispanic population in all seven new districts would be more than 50 percent and five of the seven would be at least 55 percent minority residents.

But in two of the proposed seven districts, the percentage of voting-age Black and Hispanic residents does not reach 50 percent, making them pluralities, rather than majorities. Several legislators submitted testimony protesting what they viewed as the weakening of the minority voting power in those districts.

Willingham argued to the commission that an increase to seven majority-minority districts could be harmful in part because Black and brown residents tend to vote at lower rates than white residents.

"Majority-minority districts have a very low voter turnout," she said. "It's a dilution of the existing MMDs and that is a real concern of mine," she told the commission.

There is some national data to back up that concern. For every presidential election going back to 1968, white voters voted at a higher rate than Black voters, with the exception of the 2008 and 2012 elections, according to census data.

There is still time for all the lines to change. A joint public hearing on the proposed county lines is expected to be held in early August. The commission can also amend the seven districts proposed by the majority-minority subcommittee prior to any final proposal being passed on to the county legislature. The 39 proposed districts will be available for review prior to the hearing, according to Volk.

Once the commission agrees to the final maps, they will be sent to the clerk of the county legislature as a local law. The legislature then has 60 days to approve them or send them back to the commission with an explanation of why the maps were rejected and requesting changes.

If the legislature approves the maps, the law must be signed by the county executive, who can veto them if he chooses. The legislature can override that veto or allow the maps to be sent back to the commission for changes. Any substantial changes would require the commission to hold public hearings.

It is unclear what would happen if the legislature and commission can't come to an agreement on the district maps. There is no language in the law that governs the commission's work on how many times it can send maps back to the legislature if they are repeatedly voted down.

If history is any indicator, there is always a possibility that the proposed legislative lines will end up before a federal judge.

EDITORIAL

Trying to get it right

Tug-of-war? Whac-a-Mole? Damned if you do, damned if you don't? Take your pick: They all apply to the redistricting process.

When you create new voting maps, one group's gain is another group's loss, and solving one problem creates, or reveals, several more. It's messy — and that's even without partisan interests putting their sticky hands in. In the end, the only certainty is that someone's going to be unhappy.

The Albany County Legislature's redistricting process is no different. But it's worth noting that they really seem to be trying to get it right this time.

The county's independent redistricting commission proposed adding two majority-minority districts in the city of Albany. That would bring the number of majority-minority districts to seven, the most in county history.

After the 1990, 2000 and 2010 censuses — that is, each of the past three redistricting cycles — Albany County was sued for Voting Rights Act violations over maps that discriminated against minority neighborhoods; the county lost. This time, they're mandated by a 2019 county law to "ensure the fair representation of Albany County minority communities" through a process that's "non-partisan, independent, inclusive and participatory." The County Legislature created a panel to configure majority-minority districts. They held public hearings to identify communities of interest, and they gave residents access to digital mapping tools so they could suggest their own district boundaries.

To comment tuletters@timesunion.com

The proposals are far from perfect. In two of the majority-minority districts, although Black and Hispanic populations are a majority they comprise less than 50 percent of the voting-age population. Deputy Chairwoman Wanda Willingham contends adding the districts would be a "dilution" of minority voting power. Critics have also logged concerns about plans for the County Legislature's 5th District, which they say would split up communities of interest in neighborhoods that radiate from Lark Street.

Competing priorities can't always be met. But what's encouraging here is that addressing longstanding inequities seems to be taking center stage. A good-faith effort to be independent and fair won't lead to linked-arms harmony, but it's better by far than the alternative. As we've seen all too clearly on the state level, when it's warped by the powerful and the partisan, the redistricting mess can decay into mayhem.

Wanted: A standard of decency

Carl Paladino has a history of ugly behavior and questionable judgment. The state GOP's 2010 gubernatorial candidate is the man, you'll recall, who called Hitler "the kind of leader we need today." So the news that the Buffalo businessman, now a candidate for Congress, had a registered sex offender working on his campaign is just another Post-It Note on his Wall of Shame.

According to the New York Post, Joel Sartori was working for Mr. Paladino's company when he was arrested on charges of possessing child porn on his work computer; he was convicted in 2017. Mr. Paladino confirmed he kept Mr. Sartori employed. "He's a wonderful employee," he told the Post.

A campaign spokesperson denied the felon — listed on documents as assistant treasurer — has a role in Mr. Paladino's campaign. Then why was the man's name on the election filings? "A simple oversight," the spokesman told The Buffalo News. Oh, right. A slip of the pen.

Candidates like Mr. Paladino don't just make politics a sideshow; they debase the notions of leadership and public service. He is unworthy of a seat in Congress.

THE ALTAMONT ENTERPRISE
REGIONAL

Albany County calls on residents to submit their own redistricting plans

Friday, March 18, 2022 - 20:15

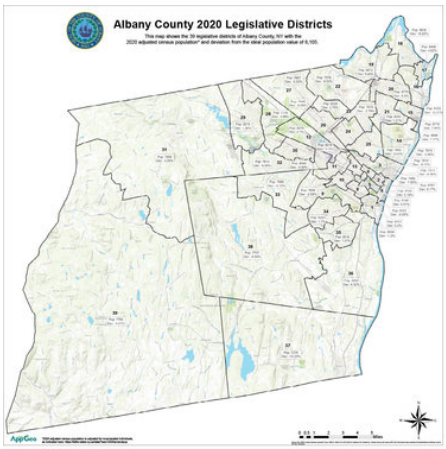
ALBANY COUNTY — For this decade's county redistricting process, residents can do more than just share their desires for their districts — they can share their own proposed maps, too.

The Albany County Redistricting Commission is calling on Albany County residents to create their own district maps using the software Maptitude, which is expected to be made available to the public through the county website next week, Marie Allen Campbell, one of six commissioners on the Majority Minority Redistricting Subcommittee, told The Enterprise.

Residents will have at least through May to submit their maps, she said.

Through Maptitude, users can view existing district lines and the census blocks that comprise them, along with data about each. The goal is to create districts that conform to legal as well as community standards.

New York State Law holds, among other things, that there should not be a population difference of more than 5 percent between districts, capping positive and negative deviations from the ideal population total of 8,105 at t 2.5 percent.



— *Map from Albany County*

***This map** shows current district lines in Albany County along with population deviations derived from the 2020 census. State law mandates that districts cannot have a difference in population of more than 5 percent, so the positive-negative deviation values for each district should not exceed 2.5 percent of the ideal total population of 8,105.*

Existing deviations allow residents to anticipate which districts are apt to change the most on that basis alone.

For instance, District 32, which covers the southern portion of Guilderland, has a negative deviation of roughly 6 percent. So, if the only goal is to balance the population of this district and the ones surrounding it, it would make the most sense to move parts of Districts 29 and 12, which border District 32 and have positive deviations of about 1.4 and 2.1, respectively, into District 32.

But there's more to districts than population.

The commission expressed at a public hearing held earlier this month that what it wants most from residents is to hear about "communities of interest," which are communities that are unified by at least one common value. A hamlet would be an example of a community that might prefer to stick together so its residents can more potently lobby for their interests.

Because communities of interest can be defined by myriad qualities, they can sometimes be invisible from census data or maps, which is why the commission is hoping for public input.

After the 2010 census, the county legislature in the spring of 2011 voted, 22 to 14, to accept the map submitted by a seven-member redistricting committee — the GOP minority of eight voted solidly for the plan while the Democrats were divided — that divided the Hilltowns.

Dozens of Hilltown residents had asked the legislature to maintain District 39, which had included Berne, Knox, and Rensselaerville and been represented by Alexander Gordon since 1996.

At the March public hearing, Patricia Sibilia, a commissioner with the Albany County Redistricting Commission, pointed out that Princeton University hosts a software called Representable, which lets people map out their own communities that can then be shared with the commission.

“You don’t need to know anything about redistricting,” Sibilia said. “It will walk you through and allow you, as well as any other people you want to work together in your community, draw maps of communities of interest, and then it very easily will allow you to export those and to send them into us, because communities of interest are the backbone of really good redistricting.”

Another factor that the commission will need to consider is the grouping of minority populations, whose powers as voting blocs are protected by state law.

To further ensure that minority-group interests are looked after at the beginning of the process, as opposed to through a court challenge, such as those brought forth in each of the last three redistricting processes, the Redistricting Commission is aided by the Majority Minority Redistricting Subcommittee, made up of six Black commissioners who will offer “a laser focus to ensure the fair representation of Albany County minority communities in all aspects of the redistricting process,” according to county law.

Albany County is using an independent commission is made up of nine unpaid commissioners, in addition to those on the subcommittee, all of whom have no formal political involvement.

A similar tactic was employed by the state this year, but the state committee was unable to agree on a single map, instead presenting two maps to the legislature, one created by the Democratic commissioners and the other by the Republican commissioners. The Democrat-dominated legislature went forward with the Democratic map, which is being challenged in court by Republicans.

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More Regional News

- ### Almost half of state pollinators at risk of local extinction, survey finds

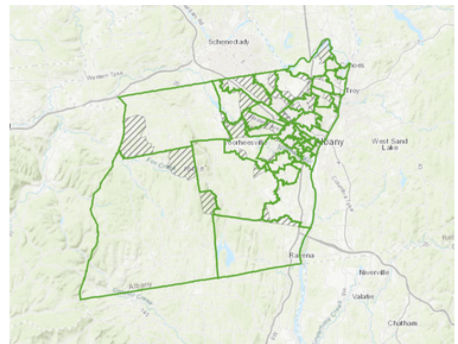
  New York State’s first-ever pollinator survey, conducted over a three-year period, found, by conservative standards, that 38 percent of the state’s native pollinators are viable to be wiped out of the state completely, and that it could be as high as 60

THE ALTAMONT ENTERPRISE
REGIONAL

Albany County publishes first redistricting map draft

Friday, May 13, 2022 - 17:21

ALBANY COUNTY — Before the Albany County Redistricting Commission holds its next public hearing on May 26, county residents can review the first full-county redistricting draft map, which was published online earlier this week.



— *Map from Albany County*

The green lines *show the new Albany County district boundaries as drawn for the first redistricting draft map submitted by the Albany County Redistricting Commission. The striped sections are areas of change.*

The redistricting commission is tasked with drawing new legislative districts based primarily on population changes recorded in the 2020 census. The maps will be in effect for approximately 10 years, until the next census necessitates another change.

The commission is working alongside the Majority Minority Redistricting Subcommittee, which is concerned with maintaining the voting power of minority communities. The redistricting commission said that the first draft map has incorporated all the suggestions offered by the subcommittee.

The Albany County Redistricting Commission public hearing will take place on May 26 at the Harold L. Joyce County Office Building at 5 p.m., but those interested in attending also have the option of doing so remotely, over Zoom.

The Majority Minority Redistricting Subcommittee is also holding a public hearing, on May 18, also at the county office building or over Zoom.

Guilderland

Because Guilderland comprises more legislative districts than other municipalities in the Enterprise coverage area, it's been subject to the most change in the first draft.

District 28, represented by Dennis Feeney, would lose the whole southern section that stretches from I-90 past Route 20, near Nott Road Town Park, with that area being broken up among districts 29, 30, and 33. However, District 28 would gain a large portion of District 27 that lies between Curry Road and Central Avenue. The whole district's population would stay basically the same.

District 29, which is represented by Mark Grimm, would lose a bit of its northeastern section (around West Lydius Street, in Guilderland) as well as the area near Guilderland Center, but would gain an enormous amount of ground in the east that currently belongs to District 28. That area includes the Pine Haven Country Club and Fusco Town Park, and extends just past I-90. The district's population would increase by 1.4 percent.

District 30, represented by Dustin Reidy, would no longer include the area that runs from Church Road to Crossgates Mall, ceding it to District 32. However, it would take over a part of District 28 that stretches from Star Plaza to just past the Pine Bush Preserve. It would also gain land between Walden's Pond and Dr. Shaw Road. The district's population would increase by 2.2 percent.

District 31, represented by Jeff Perlee, would lose the portion of Berne that it currently represents, but gain a part of Knox that lies between Township Road to the north, the town of Schoharie to the west, the town of Berne to the South, and several different roads to the east, including Knox Cave Road. District 31 would also gain a bit of land east of the Northeastern Industrial Park, but lose a similar amount just south of its addition. The district's population would decrease by 2.5 percent.

District 32, represented by Mickey Cleary, would lose all its land west of Norman Kill, but gain the section of Crossgates Mall that currently belongs to District 30. The district's population would decrease by 0.4 percent.

Hilltowns and New Scotland

District 33, in New Scotland and Bethlehem, represented by William Reinhardt, would lose patches of land in its southern section to districts 38 and 9, but would gain a sliver to the north, and the area around the Colonie Country Club. Its population would increase by 0.4 percent.

District 38, in New Scotland and Bethlehem, represented by Victoria Plotsky, would lose a portion of its southwestern, as well as its southeastern corners, but would gain a bit north of Delaware Avenue. Its population would decrease by 1.5 percent.

District 39 in the Hilltowns, represented by Chris Smith, would lose the entire portion of Knox that it currently represents, but gains the rest of Berne. The county legislature had voted in 2011 to split up the Hilltowns between districts 39 and 31, despite dozens of Hilltowners requesting that they all remain within one district.

Tags: politics

More Regional News

- ### Almost half of state pollinators at risk of local extinction, survey finds

  New York State's first-ever pollinator survey, conducted over a three-year period, found, by conservative standards, that 38 percent of the state's native pollinators are viable to be wiped out of the state completely, and that it could be as high as 60 percent of species when considering those that are known only by historical records.

- ### Week CXXVII: The CDC relaxes rules as Hochul extends state's disaster emergency

  On Aug. 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention relaxed standards, continuing a trend it had started earlier this year. In February, the CDC had shortened isolation times. The changes are part of a movement away from institutions enforcing COVID rules — the Albany County Health Department like others in New York State long ago stopped tracking COVID cases — and towards individuals taking their own measures to protect themselves.

- ### State follows relaxed guidelines from CDC for back-to-school protocols

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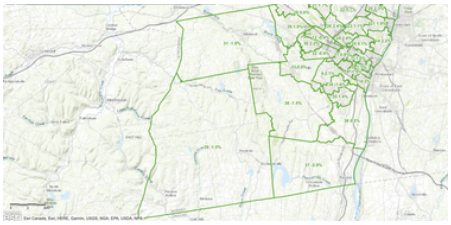
County releases final redistricting draft, public again invited to comment

Thursday, June 16, 2022 - 19:12

ALBANY COUNTY — The Albany County Redistricting Commission has released the final draft map ahead of a June 30 public hearing scheduled for 5 p.m. at the Harold L. Joyce Albany County Office Building in Albany.

Residents may also submit comments to the commission through its email address: redistrictingcommission@albanycountyny.gov .

In relation to the first map draft, most of the changes in the current version affect the county's largest municipalities, while areas within the Enterprise coverage area are almost entirely unaffected.



— *From Albany County*

The final redistricting map draft *has been released by the Albany County Redistricting Commission. Few of the changes from the first draft affect residents who live within the Enterprise coverage area.*

Still, residents on the southern half of Ostrander Road in Guilderland will find themselves in District 31 in the final draft as opposed to District 33 in the first draft. The reverse is true for residents on the southernmost quarter of Depot Road.

District 31 includes Altamont and Knox, and is represented by Republican Jeff Perlee. District 33 is represented by Democrat William Reinhardt.

In Knox, residents on the portion of Rock Road that sits between Switzkill Road and Helderberg Trail will also find themselves in District 31, instead of District 39, which is represented by Republican Chris Smith and includes the rest of the Hilltowns.

In all cases, the residents affected by the changes in the final draft were essentially returned to their current districts.

More Regional News

- ### State follows relaxed guidelines from CDC for back-to-school protocols

  "It was confusing, very frustrating, stressful, the unknown, fear of the unknown, because this was the first fall when our expectation was that everybody went back to school,"Governor Kathy Hochul said at Monday's press conference, going over back-to-school COVID protocols. This year's landscape is different, she said, adding, "We're expecting it to be a much, much easier year for parents and for schools."

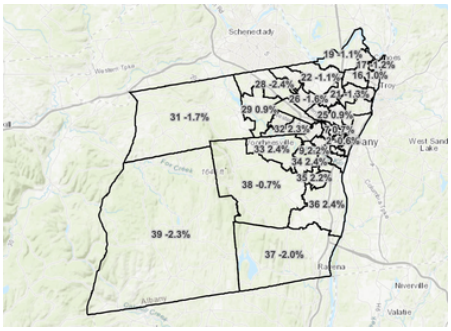
- ### Week CXXVII: The CDC relaxes rules as Hochul extends state's disaster emergency

  On Aug. 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention relaxed standards, continuing a trend it had started earlier this year. In February, the CDC had shortened isolation times. The changes are part of a movement away from institutions enforcing

Redistricting Commission adopts map and schedules final public hearing

Wednesday, July 27, 2022 - 18:11

ALBANY COUNTY — The Albany County Redistricting Commission has adopted its final map and will hold a public hearing for it on Aug. 5 at 4:30 p.m. in the Harold L. Joyce County Office Building, with the option to attend remotely.



— From Albany County
***This map** shows the district boundaries adopted by the Albany County Redistricting Commission, which has yet to seek approval of its map from the county legislature.*

After the hearing, the commission will send its map to the Albany County Legislature for approval.

The map adopted by the commission on July 21 features significant changes from its June draft, primarily in the Guilderland area.

In the adopted map, District 29, represented by Mark Grimm, has shifted south, incorporating the Albany Country Club and Nott Road Town Park, and losing everything north of Fuller Station Road, as well as some of its eastern portion around Fusco Town Park.

District 28, represented by Dennis Feeney, has taken over those northern portions while losing its own northeastern section past the CSX railway.

District 30, represented by Dustin Reidy, loses a lot of area around the Pine Bush and Prospect Hill Cemetery while picking up small spots in the west and south.

District 33, represented by William Reinhardt, has gained significant area to the east, now extending to Route 85.

District 38, represented by Victoria Plotsky, is largely unchanged.

In the Hilltowns, District 39, represented by Chris Smith, has given what little it had of Knox back to District 31, represented by Jeff Perlee, so that District 31 has all of Knox while District 39 retains all of the other three Hilltowns — Westerlo, Rensselaerville, and Berne — and a portion of Greenville.

More Regional News

- State follows relaxed guidelines from CDC for back-to-school protocols