

City council begins redistricting process

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 12 November 2021 06:00

The U.S. Census Bureau sent out in-depth demographic statistics from the 2020 Census in August, and now the Gallup City Council is finally ready to use that data to redistrict its boundaries.

The pandemic held up the release of the data by about five months. The final redistricting plan must be submitted to the Secretary of State's office by Dec. 1.

The city council held a special work session on Nov. 2 to begin discussing the redistricting plan.

New Mexico Demographic Research LLC has a contract with the city to create redistricting plans, and the company's president Rod Adair gave a presentation about the three possibilities. The council has to decide which plan to go with.

Adair explained that the city's four districts have to be divided into equal parts. He told the council that the 2020 Census reported that Gallup has a population of almost 21,900 people.

According to Adair, Plan A remains closest to the current plan. He said it takes some space and population from District 4 and gives it to District 1, providing it with a slight population boost.

Adair called Plan B a "perfect plan" because he tried to ensure that each district had almost exactly the same population numbers. He explained that Plan B does change the size and shape of the districts, but that's because the sole purpose of a perfect plan is to make sure the population in each district is even.

Councilor Michael Schaaf, Dist. 2, questioned why the plan had an area where two census blocks were taken from District 2 and given to District 3, and in another area, the opposite takes place. He questioned if just leaving the districts alone would be best since they end up leveling out.

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Adair noted that while some things may seem unnecessary, the only goal of Plan B is to make the populations in each district as close as possible.

“[You] have things that look unnecessary because the only goal in a ‘Perfect Plan’ is to try and get exact populations,” Adair said.

However, Adair noted that municipalities can be within five percent of that perfect number, which is 5,475 people per district in Gallup’s case. Meanwhile, the United States Congress has to have a “Perfect Plan.”

The National Conference of State Legislatures published redistricting criteria in July. In terms of legislative and congressional redistricting, it requires districts to be compact, contiguous, preserve political subdivisions and preserve communities of interest. It allows districts to preserve cores of prior districts and avoids pairing incumbents.

States must comply with federal constitutional requirements related to population and anti-discrimination and calls for all districts to be as nearly equal in population as practicable. Several states have provided their own deviation standards between five and 10 percent from one district to the next. But that has not proven to be a guaranteed protection against revision.

After explaining Plan B, Adair moved on to Plan C, which he called the “Major Features” Plan.

“So the idea of Plan C is to try and have the boundaries of each district be along very very prominent major identifiable boundaries for the city clerk and for the county clerk,” Adair said. “And of course in each one of them a major goal is to keep every incumbent [councilor] within [the] boundaries of each district from which they’re elected.”

Mayor Louis Bonaguidi and the councilors all expressed some confusion about the redistricting process, especially the changes and how different they would be from what the districts look like now.

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Adair said he understood why there was confusion and blamed it on the infrequency of the census.

“The problem with the redistricting is it only comes up every 10 years and most of the people [in local governments] only participate in it once,” Adair commented.

Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, made a suggestion for the next meeting where they would be discussing redistricting.

“What would’ve been helpful for me, would have been if they’d had an overlay of existing boundaries and then each new proposal, so we could see where those differences lay, because we’ve got to be able to sit down and draw those out,” Palochak said. “I want to have the fairest number in every district, so I would probably lean more towards the ‘Perfect Plan’ because it’s got the least deviation.”

The council asked Adair if his company could create an overlay for all three of the plans.

He said the maps could get confusing if they were done that way and that they become difficult to see, but the company would try to prepare them for the next meeting.

The council will hold another special work session Nov. 10 to further discuss the plans.

An ordinance of the final plan will be drafted and voted on during a third special meeting Nov. 16.

The maps that the council reviewed at the Nov. 2 meeting can be seen at

<https://bit.ly/3ELeJXc>

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