

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING
SPECIAL MEETING
JUNE 23, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: Marcus Brown, Co-chair; Ernest Newton, Co-chair; Frederick Hodges, Tyler Mack, Rosalina Roman-Christy, Maria Valle

OTHERS: Council President A. Nieves; Council Member(s): A. Boyd, J. Cruz, J. Herron, M. Lyons, M. McCarthy (5:05 p.m.), M. Pereira, W. Simmons & M. Small; Thomas Gaudett, Mayoral Aide; Interim City Attorney M. Anastasi; Atty. Eroll Skyers; Patricia Howard, Democratic Registrar of Voters; Linda Grace, Republican Registrar of Voters; Kim Brace, Election Data Services; Barbara, Eneida Martinez, Bruce Levin, Ryan Taylor, Andy Toledo, Call-in user1; 203-384-0321; 203-526-3350

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Newton called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Council Member Newton said that there were guests present and he warned everyone if they were disrespectful to these guests, that individual would not be allowed to speak again in the meeting.

Council Member Newton said that the group that had done the redistricting had met with the various Council Members to review the details of the redistricting.

Council Member McCarthy joined the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked for clarification on the Council referral to the Ordinance Committee.

93-21 Proposed Amendment to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend Section 2.06.010 – Districts for Election of Council Members.

Mr. Brace said that his company, Election Data Services, had done the District Redistricting 10 years ago and then added he had done the same redistricting 20 years ago. He explained that due to COVID, the states had not received the census data until August and September of 2021 when they should have received it in April of 2021.

Mr. Brace then displayed a graph on the screen showing the percentage changes from the target number for each of the Districts.

The courts have told the States that they must be less than 10% under the target number. He then displayed the district map on screen. The State Legislation has issued legislation that those who were in prison would be counted in their home districts.

Mr. Brace then reviewed the details of where the district lines were located and added that there were also State Representative district lines were also located.

Council Member Newton said that the Registrars of Voters would be explaining how they tried to keep the various residents voting at the sites that they were familiar with rather than having them go to a variety of different sites.

Ms. Grace said that there had been a question about using Harding, which had been a voting site for primary and general elections since 2019. After looking at a variety of locations, the decision was made to go with the new Harding located across the street.

A second decision to move the voting site back to the Claytor School after being at Aquaculture. She said that there had been other changes but the City was basically back to their previous voting locations. It is the Registrars' job to assign the polling locations and they have tried to make it as convenient for the voters as possible.

Council Member Newton asked whether the voters that used the old Harding High School had to cross Boston Avenue to get to the new Harding. Ms. Grace and Ms. Howard confirmed this was so.

Council Member Newton asked the Registrars of Voters for the record whether it made sense since the State had redrawn their district lines and will be using Harding for the election of State Representatives, to allow people who were used to voting at Harding to still vote there. The Registrars agreed.

Council Member Newton said he had heard there were issues about gerry-mandering and asked the consultant staff about gerry-mandering. Discussion followed about the definition of Gerry-mandering. The staff replied that it would depend on where the people were and what kind of people they were. Racial gerry-mandering would be a violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Council Member Newton asked the staff if they would consider any of the new districts to fall into the category of gerry-mandering. The staff said that they had tried to keep the districts in the same lines as before. In one area, by following the river instead, they were able to eliminate a number of jogs from the last redistricting.

Council Member Roman-Christy asked Mr. Brace for the names of the streets that would be located in the 135th District. Mr. Brace said that he could provide her with a list of streets, but did not have that information readily available. The consultant staff was able to supply her with the border streets for her District.

Council Member Lyons asked about the changes in the 134th District. Mr. Brace displayed the map on the screen and reviewed those changes with her.

Council Member Pereira said she had a number of questions. She stated that she had a specific question for Atty. Anastasi regarding the agenda and noted that she had emailed Atty. Anastasi earlier about this. Council Member Pereira said that the meeting agenda read "Proposed Amendment to the Municipal Code of Ordinances Chapter 2.06 – Common Council, amend

Section 2.06.010 – Districts for Election of Council Members.” She stated that the Special Committee on Redistricting had this amendment before them but they had no authority to do so. She wished to know how the meeting was proceeding with an agenda item that involved debating and voting on an ordinance, which under the Charter and the City Council Rules, must only be debated and approved by the Ordinance Committee.

Atty. Anastasi said that he believed that the meeting was proper and the jurisdiction was proper. It was referred by a 2/3rds majority of the City Council to the Special Committee on Redistricting.

Council Member Pereira stated this was a purely legislative process for the City Charter. Former City Attorney Meyer was without authority to retain a Redistricting Consultant for the City Council. In addition, Council Member Pereira stated the Registrar plays no role under Connecticut General Statute or the City Charter in determining polling locations in a redistricting effort. That is solely done by the City Council.

On April 27th, Council Member Pereira said she met with Mr. Brace at 999 Broad Street. Mr. Brace showed her a map on which the 138th District had the entire left side of Boston Ave. from East Main Street to the Stratford border. She stated she had told him she had no issue with that. It cleaned up a mess and the lines were quite clean. It was a natural divider.

Then Mr. Brace clicked another button and asked, “How would you feel about this?” The map now displayed the 139th District extended further down Bond St. to take in Harding High School. She said she immediately stated that any attempt to “gerrymander” her district and to cross Boston Avenue with no legal basis would result in litigation.

Council Member Pereira went on to state she had no idea that there was an attempt to keep Dover, Bond and Remington Streets in the 139th, which there was no legal basis for.

The Charter states specifically such districts shall be established in conformity when provisions [inaudible] under law, and by making such each district as equal in population to each such district as possible taking into consideration natural boundaries and divisions. There is no legal basis for crossing Boston Avenue, which is a natural boundary and division and the 139th District is the most overpopulated District in the City, while the 138th is the most under populated followed by the 137th.

Council Member Pereira then asked Mr. Brace what evidence he would provide to a court to defend himself in a court action regarding gerrymandering.

Council Member Newton said that they were not in a court of law. The Committee has heard from the Registrar of Voters and this item needs to be moved out of Committee. The Committee is the ones who have to vote on this. To those who are not on the Committee, they can take the issue up in court or when the item comes to the Council floor. All those questions are not germane at this point. The Committee needs to move forward. He asked if any Committee Member would move the question.

Council Member Pereira stated that this was outrageous.

Atty. Anastasi said he did not have any problems with questions being asked of the consultant, but wished to caution and advise the consultant about answering hypothetical questions about potential litigation that may be filed. Atty. Anastasi said that he believe Mr. Brace has very good reasons for proposing what he did after working with the Council. He pointed out that it was not the consultant who draws the plan, it is Council as a body. The consultant is a resource to the Council and this is why the consultant met with each Council Member personally.

Atty. Anastasi said before anything was adopted, he would suggest that everyone have a fair opportunity to speak their pieces. He added that there were some proposed amendments made to the item. These should be done prior to voting on the matter. He gave a brief overview of the proposed amendments.

Council Member Newton noted that Mr. Brace had met with each Council Member to go over their District. He pointed out that it was not Mr. Brace's job to know the City Charter. His job was to redraw the lines.

Atty. Anastasi reiterated that the decision to approve the item lies with the Committee and then the ultimate decision will be presented to the full Council. The consultant was presenting the information to the Committee. The Committee has the authority to make a change if they wish to. The authority rests with the Committee, not the consultant.

Council Member Herron said that the back and forth dialogue was disturbing. The consultants are experts but the Committee had the authority to make the changes. She reiterated that there had been changes made back there.

Council Member Herron asked if they would be losing just the prison or an area around the prison. She was told that her district would increase by about 3 blocks around the area. MA said that he would like confirmation

Council Member Brown said that he thought that this was a fair process and the Council Members had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Brace about the changes. He added that the issues that were occurring are happening across the nation.

Council Member Brown asked for clarification on the doughnut holes. Mr. Brace said that there were some areas that had overlap with the State Senate and Representative lines. They try to reduce this as much as possible.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO ENTER THE DOCUMENT TITLED "THE BRIDGEPORT 2022 COUNCIL REDISTRICTING PROPOSAL A" AS EXHIBIT # 06-23-2022-A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO MOVE TO AMEND THE ORDINANCE BY DELETING SUBSECTION E IN ITS ENTIRETY BECAUSE THE POLLING PLACES AND PRECINCT LINES WILL BE ADDRESSED IN A DIFFERENT AMENDMENT CYCLE.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MACK SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO DELETE 2010 PLAN 3 LOCATED IN SECTION 3 AND INSERT BRIDGEPORT 2022 COUNCIL REDISTRICTING PROPOSAL A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER ROMAN-CHRISTY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO AMEND SUBSECTION D TO ELIMINATE 2010 PLAN 3 TO INCLUDE BRIDGEPORT 2022 CITY COUNCIL REDISTRICTING PLAN A.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BROWN MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 93-21 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND SECTION 2.06.010 – DISTRICTS FOR ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS AS AMENDED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE SECONDED.**

Council Member Pereira said that a motion had been made and seconded, so the item was now debatable. Atty. Anastasi said that Council Member Newton should afford the Council Member the opportunity to speak on this motion before it was voted on.

Council Member Pereira said in order to preserve the record, with all due respect to the consultant, he is not uniquely qualified. There are many other experts in the field that are also qualified to give an informed opinion to the Council. If the legislative branch were given an opportunity to hire their own consultant rather than the City Attorney's choice, the Council would have been able to interview other experts. This consultant has been entrenched in the relationship for over 20 years, so much so that the City Attorney [inaudible due to crosstalk]. She stated that this meeting was out of order and claimed that Ms. Eneida Martinez was constantly interrupting the meeting while neither of the Co-chairs have stopped her.

Council Member Newton requested a Committee Member move the question.

Ms. Howard and Ms. Grace left the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

Council Member Newton reminded everyone that Council Member Pereira was not chairing the meeting, he was. Secondly, he pointed out that Council Member Pereira was not a Committee Member. He reminded everyone that while they were able to make statements, they would not allow insults or disrespect. It does not matter if Mr. Brace had worked with the City for 20 years or ever 30 years. Council Member Newton said that this was out of bounds with him.

Council Member Newton repeated his request that a Committee Member move the question.

Council Member Brown requested that the vote be called.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM 93-21 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF ORDINANCES, CHAPTER 2.06 – COMMON COUNCIL, AMEND SECTION 2.06.010 – DISTRICTS FOR ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER MACK MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER VALLE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Telesco Secretarial Services