



File #: 2019-589, Version: 1

Report to Mayor and City Council

Thursday, June 13, 2019

Special Orders of the Day

SUBJECT:

PUBLIC HEARING NO. 2 RELATED TO CHANGING FROM AN AT-LARGE TO A BY-DISTRICT SYSTEM FOR ELECTION OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS, PURSUANT TO THE CALIFORNIA VOTING RIGHTS ACT (CITY COUNCIL)

I. SUMMARY

Tonight is the second public hearing in the matter related to by-district voting in Carson. In order to move from at-large elections to by-district voting the City needs to establish both the data necessary to complete the process as well as a timetable for meeting state and federal requirements for the transition. The City has selected Compass Demographics, Inc. to assist with this process. The principal of the firm, David Ely, will lead tonight's discussion.

The discussion will surround the composition of maps and solicit public input on what to consider when preparing the maps. No draft maps will be drawn tonight. During the meeting there will be an opportunity for the residents to comment and ask questions. The next discussion on the transition to by-district voting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 18, 2019. All documents pertaining to districting are available on the city website.

II. RECOMMENDATION

TAKE the following actions:

1. OPEN the Public Hearing.
2. TAKE public testimony.
3. CLOSE the Public Hearing.

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III. ALTERNATIVES

TAKE another action the City Council deems appropriate.

IV. BACKGROUND

WHY IS CARSON CHANGING THE ELECTION PROCESS?

On May 22, 2018 the City received a letter from Shenkman and Hughes, PC of Malibu demanding that the City Council elections transition from the current “at-large” method to “by-district” in order to conform to the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA). Mr. Shenkman asserted that the City of Carson is in violation of the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 because “racially polarized voting” occurs in the city.

A by-district election process means voters within a designated Council electoral district elect one City Council member, who must also reside in and be a registered voter of that district. The City of Carson currently elects City Council members through an at-large election process, which means that each voter elects all members of the City Council. The Mayor would continue to be elected at large.

WHO CREATES THE DISTRICT BOUNDARIES?

The by-district process will be transparent, accessible and participatory to all residents of Carson. A professional demographer has been hired by the City to create proposed district boundaries. A public electronic “tool kit” will be available for the public to draw and submit maps. Residents are able to provide input on boundaries, suggested criteria for creating boundaries, beyond what is legally required. Draft maps will be posted July/August 2019 for public view and comment. The city will hold a minimum of two additional public hearings to receive input on the draft maps. The dates of these hearings have not been set yet; however, when they are the City will continue to make this a public process. There will be a review period and a deadline for members of the public to submit input on the draft maps, or even their own draft maps generated using the toolkit described above.

HOW ARE DISTRICT BOUNDARIES DETERMINED?

Many factors may be considered, but population equality is the most important. The districts should be as close to the same size by population as possible. Other factors include:

- Preserving “communities of interest”
- Districts should strive to be compact
- Districts must be contiguous
- Districts should have visible (natural and man-made) boundaries
- Districts should include respect for past voter selections
- Districts should plan for future population growth

WHAT ARE COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST?

A community of interest is a neighborhood or community that would benefit from being in the same district because of shared interest, view, or characteristics. Possible community features or boundary definitions include:

- School attendance areas
- Natural neighborhood dividing lines such as roads, hills, or highways
- Areas around parks and other landmarks
- City borders
- Shared demographic characteristics, such as:
 - Similar levels of income, education or linguistic isolation;
 - Ancestry (not race or ethnicity)
 - Languages spoken at home
 - Single-family and multi-family housing units.

PROS AND CONS OF BY- DISTRICT ELECTIONS

PROS

- Each geographic area of the city is represented
- Viewpoints that might not be citywide can be represented
- Minority candidates (racial or political) have a better opportunity to be elected
- It will likely cost less to run for City Council since citywide campaigning is not required
- Each voter has a specific Council member to contact for assistance
- Voter's choice is simplified with less candidates to learn about

CONS

- Council members may represent only the interests of their districts, not the whole city
- Candidates may be elected with few votes
- Council members may have divergent views, may conflict with each other
- District lines have to be reviewed and possibly redrawn after each census and significant annexation
- Depending on staggered terms, not all voters may be voting each election, reducing overall turnout

Attached is a proposed schedule of events related to changing from at-large elections to by-district voting elections. After the maps are drawn, two more public hearings must be held and then the maps are finalized, and then an ordinance is introduced and then adopted. A Special Election would be held in March 2020 for the voters to consider an amendment to the City Charter establishing by-district voting. The first by-district elections for the City Council would occur in November 2020.

V. FISCAL IMPACT

No specific financial impact from the holding of this public hearing.

VI. EXHIBITS

1. Proposed schedule of events. (pgs. 4)

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