

CITY OF CRANSTON
REDISTRICTING COMMISSION
Public Hearing of August 10, 2021 – APPROVED MINUTES

The Cranston Redistricting Commission met on August 10, 2021, in a public hearing advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on July 22, 2021. The public hearing was called to order by the Chairperson, Randall Jackvony, at 6:01 p.m. It was held in Council Chambers, Third Floor at Cranston City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, RI 02910-2786.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Randall Jackvony, Gary Vierra, Quilcia Moronta

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), Maria Giarrusso (GIS Manager), Jessica Marino (Councilwoman – City Wide), Steven Frias (Charter Review Commission Chairperson), Maria Bucci (Cranston Democratic City Committee Chairperson), Nicholas Capobianco Jr., and additional members of the public whose names were not submitted for the record

The chair declared a quorum present.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER (NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)
- II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 6-24-2021 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- III. PUBLIC HEARING
 - A. THE COMMISSION MAY HOLD A WORKSHOP TO REVIEW A DRAFT REDISTRICTING NEIGHBORHOOD MAP OF THE CITY, AND RECEIVE COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHO ARE PRESENT. COPIES OF THE DRAFT MAP WILL BE DISPLAYED FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO REVIEW AND SUBMIT FEEDBACK ON (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- IV. ADJOURNMENT (VOTE MAY BE TAKEN)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Jackvony asked if the minutes had been distributed to the members. Mr. Lima said they were sent out shortly after the last meeting.

MOTION: By Mr. Vierra and seconded by Ms. Moronta to approve the meeting minutes of 6-24-2021.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Mr. Jackvony, Mr. Vierra, and Ms. Moronta voting Aye.

PUBLIC HEARING

A. THE COMMISSION MAY HOLD A WORKSHOP TO REVIEW A DRAFT REDISTRICTING NEIGHBORHOOD MAP OF THE CITY, AND RECEIVE COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHO ARE PRESENT. COPIES OF THE DRAFT MAP WILL BE DISPLAYED FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO REVIEW AND SUBMIT FEEDBACK ON

Mr. Jackvony said this public hearing is intended to be an informal working session to allow the Commission members and the public to review copies of the city neighborhood map, ask questions of staff, and provide direct feedback. He said Mr. Lima would start by giving a presentation describing the work done to date and what the purpose of the map is.

Mr. Lima introduced himself and Ms. Giarrusso, and explained the map is part of the Commission's effort to comply with new Charter language directing that neighborhoods be kept together in the redistricting process to the extent practicable, as well as requiring major roads and natural features to be used as boundary lines where possible. He said the map is a draft work product, and will continue to be worked on and edited from public feedback throughout the process, and is designed to serve as a guide to help the Commission's work in complying with the City Charter provisions.

Mr. Lima further explained the redistricting process, and the pending release of data from the U.S. Census Bureau. He described block boundaries, block groups, census tracts, and the precincting process that the Board of Canvassers must simultaneously undertake once ward lines are finalized, and he detailed the timeline for the process. He said the General Assembly must act first to finalize state lines this winter, following by the Commission finishing its final report and recommended map in March, to be forwarded to the Council for additional review, edits, and public hearings. Final approval will come in the form of an ordinance from the Council, subject to veto by the Mayor, which then must also be ratified by the General Assembly.

He said the timeline is tight, as the Board of Canvassers must send a mailing to 60,000 registered voters informing them of their new districts and polling places next May, ahead of candidate declaration in June. As such, the Commission has been actively meeting since the spring to get as much work as possible done now, and this neighborhood map is a part of that. He said the map is flexible, and feedback from the public tonight may be incorporated into it. The map is not intended to define actual boundaries of neighborhoods, which are subjective and may vary from person to person, but to have an approximate idea of where they should be for redistricting purposes only.

Mr. Lima said that the bold dotted lines on the map are neighborhood lines that, in most cases, line up similarly to the city's previous neighborhood map, which was first generated in 1980. He said the yellow lines are sub-neighborhoods, comprising housing complexes, smaller subdivisions, and other small geographies that could serve well as precinct lines or state representative and senate district lines. He said the blue lines on the map are 2020 Census block boundary lines, which also include the other two line types. He said many of the blue lines are not well-suited to be voting district lines,

because they may follow power lines that go over houses, or divide neighborhoods up into many smaller parts. One objective, Mr. Lima said, is to show this work to the state's Reapportionment Commission in order to aid their work, so when they draw state district lines, they are drawn on favorable geographies – the dotted and yellow lines – instead of in areas that would break up small neighborhoods and force voters on the same street, for instance, to be assigned to different polling places from each other.

A member of the public asked how many blocks there were, and Ms. Giarrusso said there were about 1,975. He asked about how blocks are determined, and Mr. Lima and Ms. Giarrusso explained how the Census Bureau develops census blocks, mostly through an automated process, and updates them over time. Mr. Lima stressed that census blocks are the smallest geography, and aren't built to incorporate a specific area. Ms. Giarrusso said that blocks comprise block groups, and block groups comprise tracts, and due to long-term studies and for easy identification purposes, census tracts generally do not change much from decade to decade. Discussion ensued.

Nicholas Capobianco Jr. asked which side of the city had more of a population increase. Mr. Lima said that so far, the only data the city has received is the state's total population, and the 2020 block boundaries. He said the population data for redistricting purposes will be released by the Census Bureau in raw data format on Thursday, and we will be able to go from there. Mr. Lima said right now, we don't even know what the city's total population is, and normally, we would have this information back in April, hence the tight timeline going forward. Mr. Lima said we can make assumptions – for instance, we know that Ward 4 has grown a lot the last 10 years, and knowing that, it is possible that ward will need to shrink in size while the others expand – but it's not possible to really know until we see the actual census data.

Steven Frias submitted written testimony to the Commission, and summarized it in his public comments. Mr. Frias suggested an edit to the neighborhood boundary lines near Dean Estates and Meshanticut, particularly the use of Oaklawn Ave. as a neighborhood boundary line. He said that as a main road, Oaklawn Ave. currently serves as a ward boundary, however the map currently has the neighborhood boundary on the bike path/former railroad. Mr. Frias provided historical references and research from Polk's City Directory for Cranston, and referenced suggested changes around Oaklawn Terrace, Sherman Avenue, Dean Street, and Oaklawn Avenue in the Garden Hills, Glen Woods, and Dean Estates areas.

The Commission accepted Mr. Frias' written comments into the record without objection. Mr. Frias also noted that, as chairperson of the Charter Review Commission, he was very familiar with the intent of the new Charter language and drafted it himself. He suggested the Redistricting Commission use major roads and natural features to the extent possible whenever in doubt as to where to place a neighborhood or voting district boundary line. Mr. Jackvony asked Mr. Frias to show the Commission members specifically on the map so they could have a better understanding.

Mr. Lima said any written comment will continue to be accepted through Aug. 12, and comment submitted thereafter will continue to be considered, as this map will remain a work in progress. He said the city, perhaps through the City Plan Commission, may choose to take the work done on the neighborhood map after redistricting is over as a

foundation to begin developing a more official neighborhood map, but for now, this remains a guidance document more than anything.

There were 10 large copies of the map available on tables in Council Chambers, with markers and highlighters for members of the public and the Commission to use to mark them up as they saw fit. A large copy of the 1980s neighborhood map was also on display, in addition to copies of the resolution passed by the Council that created the Redistricting Commission and granted its authority, as well as copies of the new City Charter language approved by voters in November 2020.

Ms. Giarrusso said the Planning Department helped to unofficially update the 1980s version of the neighborhood map several years ago, which was then used to help develop the product on display this evening. While many of the neighborhood lines have remained relatively unchanged, they have been adjusted to match current census block boundaries, as the city cannot draw a voting district line where no block boundary line exists.

Maria Bucci asked which map version is currently on the website. Mr. Lima said the neighborhood map being presented tonight has been posted on the city website for public access for several weeks. Additionally, he said, there is an interactive block boundary map, a copy of the 1980s neighborhood map, and the city's current interactive voting map available on the Redistricting Commission webpage.

Mr. Jackvony asked if there were any questions from the Commission. Mr. Vierra asked about updating neighborhoods in Ward 4, because many of the neighborhoods in Western Cranston did not exist and weren't built yet at the time of the creation of the original map. Mr. Lima said that many of those neighborhoods continue to be added on to and further built up, and that if we try to define them too stringently now, the definitions will be invalid in just a few years. Mr. Lima said that is different from the rest of the city, where neighborhoods like Knightsville or Pawtuxet Village are relatively static and have been well-defined for many decades.

Mr. Vierra asked whether the sub-neighborhood lines in Ward 4 correspond to anything in particular. Mr. Lima said they use major roads and natural features where possible, and Ms. Giarrusso added that many of the lines roughly cut out planned subdivisions and neighborhoods. Mr. Lima said many of those neighborhoods may not have a well-known name yet, aside from examples like Alpine Estates or Fiskeville, although they may establish one over time. For that reason, Mr. Lima said, there aren't many bold dotted neighborhood lines in Ward 4, because the lines may continue to shift and would quickly become invalid. Mr. Vierra said it's important to define them as best as possible, and asked if a neighborhood is defined based on population. Mr. Jackvony said it's based more on the geography of what confines a neighborhood as its own unit.

Mr. Lima clarified that the lack of large neighborhood lines in Western Cranston is made up for by more detailed sub-neighborhood lines, which will provide greater flexibility in precincting and drawing voting districts. The sub-neighborhood lines in the remainder of the city tend to be larger, bordering well-defined areas, while the sub-neighborhood lines drawn in Ward 4 cover much smaller geographies, and perhaps taken together as groups could eventually come to define a larger neighborhood.

Ms. Giarrusso said the original map defined Western Cranston as two neighborhoods, "Western Cranston/North" and "Western Cranston/South," which are not designations she's ever heard anyone use in the last 20 or so years. One of the reasons for that was the rural character of the area at the time, and given the large size of the land mass, it was difficult to define them otherwise. She said that Alpine Estates, Castleton, or Wildflower Estates are subdivisions, which are defined on the map with the sub-neighborhood lines.

Mr. Jackvony invited members of the public to come up and review the materials that were presented, ask questions, and provide additional feedback. Several members of the public viewed the maps and asked questions of staff. Discussion ensued. The last members of the public present finished reviewing the maps at approximately 7:15, and left the public hearing.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The public hearing was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

APPROVED by the Cranston Redistricting Commission: September 16, 2021