

**Council Update:
Scope and Process for Public
Education and Outreach on
Formation of City Council
Districts**

April 4, 2018



Goals for Study Session

- Summarize prior council discussions and guidance regarding districting
- Review City Council Resolution No. 7214
- Review relevant state laws and new guidance provided under the Washington Voting Rights Act approved by the 2018 legislature
- Present a proposed scope, process, and timeline for public education and outreach effort around City Council districting

Overview of Council Guidance to Date

Summary of Resolution 7214

- City Council will conduct a public process to place district representation measures on the November 2018 general election
 - Public participation
 - Expeditious and orderly process
 - Consideration of alternatives
- Workshops and public meetings to consider
 - 5 by district / 2 at-large
 - 4 by district / 3 at-large
 - District nomination vs. At-large election
- Flexible and adaptive process moving forward

Summary of key decisions moving forward

- Potential district models beyond the 5/2 and 4/3 proposals
- Number of at-large seats
- Timing of transition to new model
- Alignment of election cycles (all in same year or staggered)
- Timing, appointment process, composition, authority and charge of a districting commission

Review of State law and Washington State Voters Rights Act

Re-cap: City Council Districting

- Voters have flexibility to change the Council governance structure by amending the charter
- According to the Municipal Research Services Center (MRSC), 23 cities in Washington currently have at least some councilmembers appointed by district
- Everett Districts Now (EDN) is advancing a potential ballot measure for the November 2018 general election that would change the City Council structure from 7 at-large seats to 5 districted seats and 2 at-large seats. An initial district map is included in the EDN proposal

Re-cap: Cont'd

- There are many ways the City Council could be structured to include districts
- There is no single “best practice” for council structure including districts
- There are legal requirements that must be observed when developing and adopting a council districting proposal.
- For the November ballot, the City must transmit measure to County elections no later than August 7 (the primary election date)

Examples of larger WA cities with districts

- Aberdeen - 12 councilmembers: 2 each from 6 wards
- Bellingham - 7 councilmembers: 1 at-large, 6 wards
- Bremerton - 7 councilmembers: 7 districts
- Seattle - 9 councilmembers: 2 at-large, 7 districts
- Spokane - 6 councilmembers: 2 each from 3 districts
- Tacoma - 8 councilmembers: 3 at-large, 5 districts
- Yakima - 7 councilmembers: 3 at-large, 4 districts

The basic legal rules for a proposed district map are that the districts must be:

- As nearly equal as possible in population
- As compact as possible
- Geographically contiguous (no islands), coincide with natural boundaries, and “preserve existing communities of related and mutual interest”
- Designed so as not to favor or disfavor any racial group or political party
- Adopted in a process that “ensure[s] full and reasonable public notice” of the proposed districting plan – at least one public hearing with a week’s notice
- Revised at least every 10 years to reflect most recent federal census data

New State law on City Council districting

The 2018 legislature passed the **Washington Voting Rights Act**, which:

- Prohibits council district boundaries that dilute the votes of people in any “protected class” or prevent them from equal participation
- Establishes a new process for challenging a council district plan in state court
- Provides that if challenged, a city, county, or other local government can revise its plan and seek court approval. Private citizens can contest the local government’s proposed plan
- Allows successful challengers to seek attorneys fees

Advice for moving forward under existing law plus the new Washington Voting Rights Act

- Use a professional geographer/demographer to assist in district mapping
- Use an independent districting commission
- Ideally, take sufficient time to “get it right”
- Provide more public notice and participation than minimum required, have hearings at several locations, provide notice of meetings in select languages
- Ask the public to help identify “communities of related and mutual interest” that are important to them

Public Outreach

Goals and process

Goals:

- Engage community; provide outreach in several languages
- Provide opportunities for education and discussion with other community members
- Gather feedback on key questions

Tools:

- Website and resources
- Community meetings: April 17, April 19, April 25, April 30
- Online survey: May