

Council Redistricting Process Needs Work

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With almost no media coverage, major decisions about the future of Los Angeles are being made. Like every other level of government that has district elections, the LA City Council's 15 districts are being re-drawn literally as we speak.

For many decades, this process of City Council Redistricting was done directly by the City Council itself. The opportunity for manipulation of the process was evident. Gerrymandering to protect incumbents or eliminate rivals was the standard operating procedure.

To reduce the political manipulation of the state's District drawing process, California voters passed an initiative in 2008 requiring the state of California to have a truly independent commission, to draw the lines for the state legislature and congressional districts.

The state independent commission involves representation from both major political parties as well as "no party preference" voters. Commissioners are seated after a lengthy application and interview process, meet extremely strict conflict of interest standards, and once seated, cannot be removed by any elected official.

More recently, L.A. County was mandated by state legislation to create an independent redistricting commission, and that commission was seated and is currently working on the five supervisorial districts.

In contrast, since there is no mandate for the City of Los Angeles to have an independent commission, the current city council redistricting commissioners for the Los Angeles Council districts are appointed by council members and city-wide elected officials. The appointing officials do not need to explain why they appoint someone, and the appointing official can remove and replace commissioners without revealing cause. And of course, in the end, no matter what maps the Commission draws, the Council has the power to redraw them in any way they see fit. Thus, the city of Los Angeles does not have an independent commission.

This has become clear in the last few days as we have witnessed two commissioners be removed and new ones appointed, literally a few days before the final draft maps are due. No explanation given.

Due to these last minute "reappointments", Council District boundaries are being drawn by people who may have received no training in the intricacies of the Voting Rights Act or the other criteria. They have not participated in the public testimony process and so have no context for the critical Communities of Interest data that must be considered in the redrawing process.

Los Angeles deserves better. The city needs a completely independent redistricting process. California has one. Los Angeles County has one. And a growing number of cities and counties throughout the state are moving in this direction.

The League of Women Voters urges everyone to pay close attention to how the Council draws the final maps. If you do not like what you see, we can do better. Join us in working for a truly independent commission.