

**December 14, 2022 Meeting**

**Minutes Amended per January 4, 2023 Motion**

**Committee Members Present:**

Jack Ardner  
Tim Fier  
Jack Hollis, Chair  
Dana Stroud  
Christopher Dresel

**Absent:**

Shelley Denison

**Staff Present:**

Kevin McConnell, City Attorney  
Jane Leo, Policy Analyst  
Margarita Contreras, Admin Assistant

Chair Hollis called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m.

**1. PUBLIC COMMENT/TESTIMONY**

None.

**2. VOTER DISTRICTS DISCUSSION**

Chair Hollis directed the Members to the question for Facilitator Shani Harris-Bagwell discussed at the Subcommittee's December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. After reviewing the question with proposed edits, as well as a Survey Data memo prepared by Member Denison, the Subcommittee determined there was no need to send the question to the Facilitator. Vice Chair Ardner cautioned that, in making its recommendation, the Subcommittee should consider input from a broad spectrum of sources including the City Survey and community discussions as well as the fact the City is 114,347 people.

Vice Chair Ardner introduced a Power Point he created to assist the Subcommittee in its decision-making process regarding City Council districts and number of elected Councilors per district. He described the current system of electing six City Councilors At-Large. An alternative option (Option 2) to this is electing Councilors At-Large in a system where the top three candidates receiving the most votes are elected to office. Chair Hollis commented this would result in city-wide proportional representation. Per the Subcommittee's December 7<sup>th</sup> unanimous vote to recommend districts, this option was not accepted.

Prefacing his remarks that the district lines shown on the Options are arbitrary and hypothetical and are used exclusively to illustrate the option, Vice Chair Ardner presented Option 3 which establishes four single-member districts with two Councilors elected At-Large. Two district positions and one At-Large position would be elected every two-year election cycle.

He commented that Option 2 has associated cost, such as, a very high barrier to entry and a high level of expertise needed to run a campaign. Additionally, based on previous elections, a city-wide election is expensive costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Chair Hollis commented that Option 2 does not present a solution. Member Stroud spoke to the socioeconomic societal divide.

By consensus, the Subcommittee agreed that Options 1, 2, and 3 would not be considered further.

In reviewing the support for districts, the Subcommittee stated the recommendation is for:

- ❖ no more than eight districts with
- ❖ no more than two-elected councilors per district serving in staggered terms.

Vice Chair Ardner added that staggered terms preserve some level of expertise.

Chair Hollis led the members through an exercise where each member stated the pros and cons of single member and multi-member districts. Vice Chair Ardner's Districting Options Power Point served to illustrate each option.

### **Single Member Districts**

#### Pros

Relatively close geographic relationship between elected and district residents.

Ensures geographic representation in a segregated class society.

Maximizes accountability of representative to constituent.

Six or eight districts are smaller: "walkable" for candidates.

Candidates/Councilor would be known in the community, church, grocery store, shopping venues; have a base in the community.

Eliminates isolation.

Gives value to casting a vote.

Easily contacted by district residents including able to find direct contact information on City website.

Lower barrier of entry to seeking election.

#### Cons

Cannot create proportional representation.

Will always advantage dominant cultures or majority party.

Furthers systemic exclusion.

Districts result in less democracy as residents cannot vote for all City Councilors.

Districts result in Councilors who are concerned about only their district and not the interests of the entire city.

Allows money, power structure, and influence to support one perspective; potential to consolidate power.

### **Multi-Member Districts**

#### Pros

More representative democracy.

Shared workload.

Can result in Councilors attending more community events.

If one Councilor incapacitated or absent, the other Councilor continues to represent district.

Tend to elect more women—as well as ethnic, religious, and linguistically diverse—candidates.

More diverse candidates.

More positive campaigns.

Create more balanced representation and move towards proportional representation.

Reduce barriers to entry because of smaller district size (lower cost to running a campaign).

Increase competitiveness in election.

Lower vote threshold.

Noted: Election of both Councilors representing the district would need to occur at the same time in order to achieve proportionality.

#### Con

Cost to City (salaries, physical expansion of Council Chambers, and such).

Allows status quo and "power centers" to dominate in a District.

Requires an even number of districts to achieve staggered terms.

Following the pro and con discussion, the Subcommittee agreed that Option 6 was not viable.

At this time, Chair Hollis summarized the discussion:

- Three Districts with three Councilors does not solve geographic issues
- 4 Districts better at resolving geographic issues
- Influential power bases can exist regardless of number of districts or number of Councilors

### **Public Testimony**

Chair Hollis invited public comments from Carol Rulla. She commented on the election cycle in which the mayor's race is included. She supports districts but does not think three districts is the correct number as districts would be too large. With smaller districts, campaign costs are lower and money plays less of a role. Districts are walkable allowing effective grassroots campaigning. Ranked Choice Voting is a pro for single member districts. However, she cautioned against the threshold being too low. A con for single member districts is if a district resident disagrees with their Councilor, they have no one to bring the problem before. She added that under the current system, three Council members reside in the same area of Gresham. She cautioned against absolute statements such as saying 'At-Large doesn't achieve proportionality' citing the diversity of the current Council as two black males, two Hispanic males, and three white females. She spoke to the "power structure" in Gresham and their influence regardless of a district being single member or multi-member hence her support of smaller districts which would allow grassroots campaigning.

Due to the lateness of the meeting, additional discussion of single/multi member districts—and number of districts—was tabled till the January meeting.

Chair Hollis spoke to questions he would like Professor Lochner, Lewis & Clark College, to address at the January 4, 2023, meeting of the Subcommittee:

- What are the advantages/disadvantages of electing City Councilors on staggered terms both in-District (the two Councilors representing a district are elected at the same time) and by-District (for example, Councilors serve in terms that expire in alternate 2-year terms such that there is always an Incumbent Councilor in the District)?
- Will multi-member districts create proportional representation in Gresham?
- What is needed to achieve proportional representation, such as number of districts and number of Councilors?
- What should be considered to achieve proportionality?
- Which approach/approaches are commonly used for a city the size of Gresham:
  - o 8-Districts/Single City Councilor
  - o 8-Districts/Multi-Member City Councilors
- In a multi-member district, what has been adopted by cities of similar size to Gresham:
  - o 2 City Councilors per District
  - o 3 City Councilors per District
- Has it been found that Districts—single-member and multi-member—advantage or disadvantage grassroots, marginalized, minority and/or unaffiliated candidates?
- Have elections by District—single-member and multi-member—been found to dilute or weaken the traditional, well-funded, power base?
- Have multi-member districts been shown to reduce entry barriers for minority and/or low-income individuals?

**3. UPDATE ON YOUTH AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Ms. Leo announced that the Gresham High School Debate coach, Brian Malan, requests a form of government, Charter, survey, et al, presentation in early January. Volunteering to make the in-person presentation on January 5<sup>th</sup> from 2:45 till 4:00 are Member Denison and Chair Hollis. Ms. Leo will contact Mr. Malan to confirm and for meeting details.

**4. OTHER ITEMS/AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

Next meeting dates Subcommittee: January 4, 2023

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:32 p.m.