



OFFICE OF THE CLERK/TREASURER

City of Burlington

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REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE

MONDAY, AUGUST 27, 2012

MINUTES

PRESENT: Mayor Weinberger; City Council President Shannon; Councilors Bushor, Decelles, and Siegel; Interim CAO Sisson

ALSO PRESENT: Councilor Kranichfeld; ACAO Goodwin; Assistant City Attorney Eugene Bergman; Jay Appleton, Planning and Zoning

1. Agenda

On a motion by Councilor Bushor and City Council President Shannon, the motion was adopted unanimously as presented.

2. Public Forum

No one came forward to speak.

3. Committee Discussion on Ward Redistricting

Mayor Weinberger stated this section will be dedicated to discuss legal responsibilities and setting goals to help choose the direction the committee wishes to take.

Eugene Bergman, Assistant City Attorney, stated the legal obligation is to give each person one vote. The City will be broken into districts that are equal in number. There are no requirements for how many districts there are or how they are organized, so long as there is mathematical equality. Deviations of 15-20% are allowable. It is also important to be able to move from the current situation to a good solution as expeditiously as possible.

Mayor Weinberger stated that the goal is to have new districts in place for the 2014 election cycle. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated that would be acceptable.

Councilor Siegel inquired if there is any legal requirement to keep the same number of wards. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated there is not. Councilor Siegel inquired if changing the number of wards would require a charter change. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated a charter change will be necessary no matter what the new districts are.

City Council President Shannon stated this is a process that she would like to engage the public in as much as possible. They will become engaged when something is implemented that will affect them. She stated she would like to involve them in these conversations rather than just at the end stages. She would like to keep neighborhoods intact to the extent it is possible.

Councilor Bushor stated there are some natural boundaries, such as Main Street, that do not impact neighborhoods. That kind of thought process can be beneficial. She stated she would like to see this

committee spreading the word to the public as much as possible. It is important and it would be better to hear from individual residents. Most people prefer to stay in their familiar wards, but the reality is that someone is going to have to change. She stated she is interested to know what kinds of tools are available to do this.

Councilor Decelles stated they can provide information through NPAs or having a series in different parts of the City to explain how this will affect people. The best method, aside from Front Porch Forum, may be to give children flyers in their backpacks. It may be helpful to hear comments from the School Board, though it is ultimately not their decision. He stated he is not sure if it better to present a proposal and then ask for comments, or to ask for comments up front.

Mayor Weinberger inquired if school board districts are the same as wards. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated they coincide with wards. Mayor Weinberger inquired if the number of City Councilors were to change, would the number of School Board members change. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated they would. Mayor Weinberger inquired if the number of Council seats is something that they would like to discuss at the beginning of the process.

Councilor Decelles stated the first time he heard about this was from another City Councilor. There have been thoughts about reducing the size of the Council. Most Councilors are intrigued by the idea. He stated that having been on the Council for 6 years, he would like to look at the number of items on agendas and see how long the Council meetings took. There have been times when there are small agendas but they still take a long time. Reducing the size could expedite the process and make things run smoother, but that change could come from the existing Council. He stated he does not feel that reducing the size is necessary, but he would be interested to hear why others may think it is.

Councilor Bushor stated she has only known Councils with 13 or 14 members. The perception is that the process will be streamlined, but it will also increase the workload and it will take a different type of person to fill that seat. It is important to have all of the voices in Burlington heard and to have voices from each party. She stated she has concerns that by reducing the size, diversity will also be reduced. It is challenging to do achieve the same level of diversity if the size is reduced. Having visited other countries, she asked what size their Councils are. They all had much broader representation. The Council has gone to a more committee based format.

City Council President Shannon stated she served on the Blue Ribbon Committee on Governance and they discussed the size of the Council. One feeling was that there was a heavy workload and this would spread it around. As redistricting happens, it may be determined that it makes sense to have a few more or a few less people depending on how the boundaries fall. She inquired if the committee is open to the idea of changing the number of representatives on the Council. If the committee is open to it, they can have further discussions about the pros and cons of doing that.

Councilor Siegel stated there is a program online that would allow people to map neighborhoods and submit these maps anonymously. This would allow people to say where they think their own neighborhoods are. She stated she is not interested in changing the number of Councilors and does not see a problem with meetings running very late because process is important. Looking at neighborhoods and finding a number that makes more sense could be a good option.

Councilor Decelles stated they just redrew the lines for the house seats. They started that process knowing exactly how many seats they had to fill and began drawing lines from there. He suggested exercising a few different scenarios because it will be hard to move the lines around with the other components. Having seven Councilors would leave an enormous amount of work. These are things to consider and it will be important to aim towards a number.

Councilor Bushor stated that working on the legislative districts, there were attempts to marry neighborhoods that were not really the same. People thought they had different feels and it was unusual to put them together. There could be a one Councilor district that comes out of this. She stated she does not want to be locked into a number. There may be some glaring things that felt forced in the other process, which may allow more flexibility in this process. People might like to see several scenarios and let the public comment on them.

City Council President Shannon suggested that they move forward to the presentation about the tools available because it may provide an understanding on how to tackle this.

Mayor Weinberger stated there is broad agreement in wanting to engage the public and a desire to keep neighborhoods intact. There is no consensus on the number of representatives.

4. Staff Presentation on Available Digital Resources

Jay Appleton, P/Z, stated there is a project called the public mapping project through Google Maps. They set up a website where a person can draw ward boundaries themselves. It has been used in several places and citizens redistrict themselves. The process is simple and uses software called District Builder. Burlington is currently being set up. There are analysis tools to look at plans and rate them on factors like being contiguous, or having equal numbers of citizens. It would be possible to allow anyone to redistrict themselves.

City Council President Shannon stated there is a constituent in Burlington who introduced Councilors to this software and advertised it to people. It is a great question to ask people where they think their neighborhoods are. It may or may not be a good idea to open it up to the public. The committee can redraw lines to see how they match legal requirements. It is a great question for the public to ask them where neighborhoods lie, and then use that information in the redistricting process. Mr. Appleton stated the legal requirement to have equal numbers of representation can override keeping neighborhoods intact. In 2010, there were 42,417 people in Burlington. He displayed a map showing census blocks, which are the smallest units of area that are used for counting. He indicated they are color coded to show population density. The software can create groups based on the total population and how many blocks are desired. When there is a high density area, it affects how many people can be drawn in from other places. He noted small dots that indicate where incumbent Councilors live. He stated he created some scenarios with a different number of wards. He stated he created a few versions taking into account incumbents and others without. It is also possible to redistrict with very few changes. The only way to make the New North End work, is to include a portion of the Old North End. To allow the New North End to remain intact, there needs to be about 10,000 people, which would mean four wards. City Council President Shannon stated these versions are interesting and requested a link to these maps to look at some scenarios. There are institutions that have a lot of people, but do not have a lot of voters. She inquired if decisions should be based on the number of people or the number of voters. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated there has not been a definitive ruling on this. It is safest to base it on population, because even if people do not vote they are being represented by someone. City Council President Shannon stated that they should determine what the most important factors should be. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated the population is the safest approach. He stated he will provide as much information as he can about this. Mayor Weinberger stated the attempt will be to remain within 10% of the census numbers. There could be an institutional goal to address the institutions.

Councilor Bushor stated that because there is a presidential election this year, many more people will vote. In two years, there will be very few voters. That fluctuates more than population. It is frustrating

that this is information that is two years old and inaccurate. Mr. Appleton stated there will be 400 new beds at UVM and thought he should take that into account, but legally that is not the number that can be used. He displayed a scenario with 9 wards and noted that small wards are much more sensitive to change in population. If there is a development project, it has a strong impact. He suggested that it may make more sense to have bigger wards so they do not have to change so often. There are currently 19 different combinations of districts and wards which can make elections very difficult to administer, as each combination has to have its own ballot machine. Fewer wards would result in fewer combinations. Mayor Weinberger requested links to the maps.

Mayor Weinberger stated another goal should be to set the date to have these in place. In order to be in place for the 2014 election cycle, the Charter Change would have to come at the March City Election to avoid a special election. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated it would have to come 40 days before the election.

Councilor Siegel inquired what the process for a Special Election would be should they choose to do that. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated the Council can call a special election. Mayor Weinberger stated that it incurs an additional expense and there is usually lower turnout.

Councilor Bushor stated she is not opposed to having March as a goal. If the Committee can agree and make a decision and put it forward, that scenario works. If the committee cannot agree, more work will need to be done. Mayor Weinberger stated having it completed by March will be simpler when seeking legislative approval.

5. Any Other Business

City Council President Shannon suggested having the goals formally adopted at the next meeting.

Mayor Weinberger suggested having another meeting in two weeks. Councilor Bushor suggested having meetings on Mondays that are not Council meetings. The Board discussed dates that would work.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:51 pm.