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REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2012

Minutes

PRESENT: Mayor Weinberger; City Council President Shannon; Councilors Bushor and Decelles

ABESNT: Councilor Siegel

ALSO PRESENT: Interim CAO Sisson; Assistant City Attorney Gene Bergman; Jay Appleton, Planning and Zoning; Mike Kanarick, Mayor's Office; Bill Morris, BTVvotes.

1. Agenda

Councilor Bushor requested that the October 2 minutes be voted on at a later date when all committee members who attended the meeting are present.

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

2. Public Forum

Jim Holway spoke about differences in deviations between wards and the timeline of redistricting.

Bill Morris spoke about software that could be used to determine where different neighborhoods lie.

3. Approval of the Redistricting Committee Minutes

a. October 16, 2012

Action was delayed on this item.

b. October 2, 2012

On a motion by Councilor Decelles and City Council President Shannon, the minutes were approved unanimously as presented.

4. Public Access to BTVvotes and the Committee Web Site

Mayor Weinberger stated there is a unanimous sense that this website should be opened up as much as possible. Jay Appleton, Planning and Zoning, stated he can remove the login requirement and allow citizens to draw plans and participate in the process.

The committee discussed how to use the login and the website. Mr. Appleton stated that any member of the public will be able to view the materials on the website, but only Councilors will be able to login to use the drawing tool. Councilor Bushor stated she has worked with Councilor Siegel on some scenarios but has not yet tried to draw them. The proposal kept the goals of the committee in mind by using natural boundaries and keeping neighborhoods intact. Mr. Appleton offered to show Councilor Bushor how to use the mapping tool. Councilor Bushor suggested Councilors come up with some scenarios and then discuss them.

City Council President Shannon stated that there are several proposals and it would be good to begin to look at different proposals and vote on them.

Mayor Weinberger stated that it is alright to make this information public. He can tweet about it and put it on the Facebook page. Councilor Bushor stated it should go to NPA Steering Committee members and Front Porch Forum.

Mr. Morris inquired if the Committee is interested in allowing the public to draw their own maps or just to view proposed ones. Mayor Weinberger stated he would prefer to determine the timeline first.

Mayor Weinberger stated he would like this on the March ballot. He inquired how far in advance the Charter Change must be warned. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated it must be warned 30-40 days before the election. Mayor Weinberger stated that means a decision must be made in mid-January. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated that the decision must be in place before that, but the warnings must be done in mid-January. December is when the decisions must be made and the public hearings will be held. Mayor Weinberger requested that a timeline be created and distributed. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated they must adopt the language and then have two public hearings. Changes can be made as a result of the public hearings.

Councilor Bushor stated that the recommendation will first have to go to the Charter Change Committee. City Council President Shannon stated they can suspend the rules to allow the Redistricting Committee to make the decision. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated the Charter Change Committee is part of the organizational rules, not the Charter. Therefore, the Council can choose not to follow those rules and adopt the Charter Change in a different manner. Councilor Bushor stated that the Charter Change Committee should be informed of this.

Councilor Decelles stated that the Committee only has until December 1 to include the full Council in this discussion. He inquired if they will bring this information to NPAs in November or December. Mayor Weinberger stated the work must be done by the end of November. The Council will have to take this up at the first meeting in December.

Councilor Bushor stated she does not like the idea of having the Council approve a plan before bringing it to the NPAs. She inquired how the public should be engaged in a meaningful way. If they are just going to respond to the plan and tweak it, that should be clear. If they can participate in a different way, that can happen too. Councilor Decelles suggested creating three proposals- one that is similar to the current system, one that is in the middle, and one that is very different. That would give them options without totally opening this up. Councilor Bushor stated that there could be several scenarios for any type of proposal whether it include seven wards or a different number. She stated the committee should take a position on the direction that they are headed and explain it. If there was a backlash to the proposal, changes could still be made. She stated that she does not know if there should be three totally different proposals. Councilor Decelles stated that during the State Redistricting process the only feedback the committee received was from elected officials. Councilor Bushor stated she has received a lot of feedback from members of Ward 1.

Mayor Weinberger stated the goal will be to meet twice more before bringing a proposal forward to the City Council. The Committee discussed the upcoming meeting schedule. They determined they would meet November 8 at 5:30 and November 19 at 5:00. Mayor Weinberger inquired if the Committee would like to advertise these meetings to the NPAs to allow public comment at them. Further public comment could take place during City Council discussions and at the formal public hearings. That would provide a fair amount of opportunity for the public to weigh in. City Council President Shannon stated that would be good. Mayor Weinberger stated they can listen to public input and incorporate good ideas.

5. Continued Discussion of Redistricting Alternatives

Mayor Weinberger displayed existing house districts and two seven ward options. One scenario is very similar to the existing map and allows each incumbent to remain in their ward. A second proposal shows the New North End and makes major changes to Ward 7. He stated no one cares for the three ward model and it should be eliminated. The four ward model has geographic integrity and is interesting, though radical. He suggested distributing these three models for public comment.

City Council President Shannon stated there would need to be refinement. There could be changes, such as splitting the New North End at North Avenue rather than a North and South split. Councilor Bushor stated the proposals do not consider neighborhoods in Ward 1 or the Old North End, which is concerning. This is good for the North End and the South end but not the middle of the City. One suggestion would be to change one of the wards in the New North End to a one member district to leave the Old North End more intact. This would be favorable for both the New and Old North Ends. She has concerns about the Old North End and stated she wishes they were represented. Ward 1 has a lot of UVM housing, but there are also stable neighborhoods. Some of these scenarios do not take the stable neighborhoods into account. Including too many transitional neighborhoods in a ward makes it difficult for voices to be heard from residents in stable neighborhoods. She has an idea how to address this but is unsure if the numbers work.

Mayor Weinberger inquired if Councilor Decelles has any comments about changing the New North End from a 4 seat to 3 seat ward. Councilor Decelles stated without the New North End, nobody would vote and nothing would pass. There would be dissension and people would say they would prefer to grow the ward rather than lose a seat. However, people may think it strange to include that much of the Old North End in the ward.

City Council President Shannon stated she thought that incumbency would not be a driver of how to draw the lines. Councilor Decelles stated it is part of the process and they looked at it for the State. City Council President Shannon stated it is not a legal requirement for the City while it was for the State.

The Committee continued to discuss the pros and cons of each of the proposals. Mayor Weinberger requested a proposal that would keep the North Avenue division of the New North End, would keep the intrusion of Ward 7 into the Old North End as contiguous as possible, and would eliminate the proposed divisions of all other Wards and keep them closer to their current design. There is some consensus that it would be okay to have a larger deviation in Ward 1 to include some more stable neighborhoods. Assistant City Attorney Bergman stated the constant transition of the residents would justify a larger deviation. Mayor Weinberger stated that is acceptable but it should still be below 10% and ideally below 5%.

6. Date of Next Committee Meeting

The committee determined they would meet on November 8 and 19.

7. Any Other Business

n/a

8. Adjournment

Without objection, Mayor Weinberger adjourned the meeting at 6:20 pm.