

# **SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REDISTRICTING**

## **Strafford County Community Input Session**

**September 22, 2021**

### **Meeting Minutes**

---

**Members of the Committee Present:** Rep. Barbara Griffin, Rep. Paul Bergeron, Rep. Connie Lane, Rep. Wayne MacDonald, Rep. Carol McGuire, Rep. Israel Piedra, Rep. Marjorie Smith, Rep. Len Turcotte, Rep. Lucy Weber.

#### **Opening Summary:**

Representative Griffin opened the House Special Committee on Redistricting meeting and explained that neither the Strafford County Court or the County Commissioners had anything to do with planning this Public Input Session or the Redistricting process. Staff of the General Court have arranged locations to have these Sessions in each County throughout the state.

All Senators and Representatives introduced themselves. Senators present: Senator James Gray, Senator Regina Birdsell, Senator Donna Soucy, Senator Rebecca Perkins Kwoka

Senator Gray stated the rules of decorum for a Senate meeting do not allow clapping and or booing.

Representative Griffin stated the process and procedures for the public to access the House redistricting website. She also explained how the NH Constitution places the responsibility of drawing district maps on the Legislature and that it is to be done every ten years after the federal census is finalized.

#### **Testimony**

**Susan Richman – Durham** In January of 2021 the town of Durham adopted a Resolution on fair redistricting which she presented to the Committee. In the resolution it requests transparency and she stated that if there is no Zoom access for public input, she does not believe there is true transparency at all stages of this process. Regarding the Senate districts, Senator Perkins Kwoka's district is not compact, and she believes it is an example of partisan packing. There is not fair representation of democrats in the state when they are all put into one fat district. Senate District #21 crosses county lines and school districts. Voting maps should not be gerrymandered to favor one party or candidate and that is what happened when Portsmouth and Durham were put together. Her final comment was to ask

the Committee to hold hearings for the public to view and provide input on, the drafts maps when they have been designed.

**Sue Nastasi – Rollinsford** In her town they vote for four representatives. Currently, one lives in Rollinsford and three live in Somersworth. She understands the Committee will have to combine her town with a larger city but that drowns out the voices of the citizens of Rollinsford. She would like to have time after the maps are drawn to voice her opinion. Accurate representation is shown with fair maps. The voters should choose their representatives, political candidates should not be choosing their constituents. She continued that the act of packing a district with one political party reduces the electoral voice of the surrounding districts. She believes Executive Council District #2 is an example of that and needs to be looked at. A Warrant Article for Fair Redistricting was passed on June 8<sup>th</sup> by the voters in Rollinsford.

**Madeline DeSantis – Somersworth** She would like to encourage the committee to both draw fair maps and when the drafts are ready, come again and give the public a chance for input. The last time maps were drawn the public only had 24 hours to react to them. In Somersworth, the ward lines will be drawn after the district maps are drawn. At the Executive Council level, District #2 is an example of a packed gerrymander. Decisions are made at that level that directly impact her life, but her voice has been diluted because of the packed district. Somersworth has the same Executive Counselor as Westmorland which is over one hundred miles away and borders Vermont while Somersworth borders Maine. Somersworth is experiencing a boom in young families and the next ten years will affect all their lives and she asks the committee to keep that in mind when they are drawing fair maps.

**Nate Stewart – Dover** He would like to know what is being done to include the youth in this process. A lot of the best and brightest are leaving the state because they do not feel like their government represents them or that they have a voice. He echoes the concerns for fair maps and transparency. Until there is a map that the public can consider, he cannot give specific comments and he encourages them to come back for public input when draft maps are drawn. He asked that they please respect majority rule when considering districts. It is better to have districts that accurately reflect how things really are than to be gerrymandered. There has been a general decay in trust in government and democracy. He believes many people do not trust the government which comes from years of systemic partisan politics. This is why they need transparency and accessibility.

**Ira Freeman – Exeter** He asked each of them to look in the mirror each morning and ask if they are for democracy or for bias. When they decide that question, for transparency purposes they should make it public. It is important for the people to

know what each member stands for. He encouraged the committee to vote for democracy and not for bias.

**Maggie Fogarty – Dover** – The message she wants to convey is that the committee must release the draft maps so the public can see them and can give input. This allows everyone to see the logic behind what is drawn. She agreed with others who have brought up the badly drawn Executive Council District #2 where the democrats are packed and gives republicans a better chance to win the other four districts. Dover Wards #5 and #6 both have populations enough to merit their own seats in the House of Representatives. Instead, they share three representatives with Somersworth Ward #2. This is not coherent and unfair to Somersworth because it is hard for a Somersworth citizen to be elected when dominated by Dover voters. She agrees that everything is at stake in this process, the integrity of democracy, and encouraged the committee to be transparent and accountable and to allow the public to see the draft maps.

**Representative Smith** – She commented that she reviewed the size of all of Somersworth's wards and not one is large enough to warrant its own representative. This requires that they be combined with another town. She sees that as a problem that they have to face. She does not believe that Dover has completed the process of equalizing the population of its wards. She asked what the speaker would like this committee to do given those problems.

**Representative Griffin** – She replied by explaining that when the committee draws House District lines, they have to stay within county, town, city and ward lines. Many of the cities are not on the same timeline as they are, and the wards need to be combined with something. Wards are a consideration for this committee in regard to district boundaries.

**Ms. Fogarty** – She commented that she is aware that through the Open Democracy Map-A-Thon project, there are ways to design the maps that take into consideration the issues that the representatives have described.

**Representative Turcotte** – He encouraged everybody to go to the House website for Redistricting to gain more insight into the process.

**Palana Hunt - Hawkins – Rochester** She has no complaints about how their wards are drawn for the House of Representatives. Their Senate and Executive Council Districts do not make sense. In the Senate District, they are grouped with towns that do not have anything in common. She hopes that they will be able to give feedback once draft maps have been drawn.

**Rep. Gerri Cannon** – The big concerns that they have in Somersworth is understanding who is running and who is running in their ward. For example, this year, all the candidates to be voted on will be people who live in Somersworth. Next

year, the people in Ward #2 will not be voting for people just from Somersworth, they will have to consider candidates from Dover. She has had seniors complain to her that they thought they were voting for someone who ended up not being on the ballot. It is difficult for her when a resident from Somersworth in Ward #2 contacts her to represent them with an issue they are having. She asked the committee to hold listening sessions for the public, to better understand any changes to the maps that might affect them, so they will know who is going to represent them.

**David Holt – Somersworth** He asked that the committee try to ensure that everyone has a say in redistricting. Some people find it difficult to get to these sessions and they would like virtual accessibility so that everyone has a voice. The public needs to have a say after the draft maps are drawn. He believes there has been gerrymandering rampant across the country and the state and that this destroys our democracy. A great example of gerrymandering is Executive Council District #2 which stretches from Vermont to Maine. Every town should have their own representatives. Somersworth needs someone who lives in Somersworth. A single ward may not have enough people to have its own district now, but the wards will be redrawn in the future and disrupt the new maps. One of the ways to minimize the damage of this is to keep the wards in town and give every town or city its own representatives. The constitution requires that the districts be contiguous and preserve political subdivisions.

**Matt Towne** – He believes a simple test of fairness and democracy is being able to explain how you ended up with the final map and do it with a straight face. He asked that they consider that when they are drawing the maps. He stated that NH has a long history of gerrymandering and gave Executive Council District #2 as an example. Nobody thinks that is an appropriately drawn district. That example in addition to the Governor vetoing an Independent Redistricting Commission twice, does not give the voter confidence. This committee has the power to make sure this process is transparent and well communicated to the public. He believes they should make it a standing policy that the representatives bring the draft maps before the town and explain why they are drawn a particular way.

**Jim Verschueren – Dover** He believes that most legislators serve because they care about their state and want the best for its people. This committee is a sacred trust to our democracy and to those that believe in the promise of America. He echoes the pleas for them to draw fair maps and to be transparent. To continue belief in our democracy we must have trust that votes will count and voices will be heard. When districts are created to manipulate votes we all lose. He asked the Committee to set aside their party affiliation and make each district as competitive as possible.

**Phil Hatcher – Dover** – He is a member of the technical mapping team for the Open Democracy Map-A-Thon. He asked that they honor the fair and transparent redistricting resolutions passed by multiple towns across the state. Last evening Open Democracy held a Zoom forum where citizens could comment on the maps drawn. He believes this is an excellent approach for the committee to use once the draft maps are drawn in order for the public to have input. There are severe challenges to complete the House District maps. They hope to have theirs completed by October 5<sup>th</sup>. The constitutional requirements of one person one vote, one rep for sufficient population, and contiguous districts are challenging. He believes some people like to think there is only one way to overcome these challenges. He wrote software to auto generate potential House Rep maps, taking into consideration the constitutional requirements, and giving consideration to the towns that need their own representatives, there were a lot of options to choose from. There were tens or even hundreds of ways to draw the maps and fulfill the constitutional requirements. Saying it's too hard is not an adequate response. His software shows they can do the maps for 2020 with only 2 violations. If the constitution says every eligible town should be given their own representative his maps will do that with only 3 violations. David Andrews spoke about the Alternative Component Method and using that they can build a map for Strafford County with only 1 violation. He would be happy to share his maps, there are hundreds of ways they can map Strafford County. There are many questions of which priorities should be considered when drawing the maps, floterials, keeping city wards together, communities of interest, etc. There are lots of solutions and this committee is going to have to choose one. The public should know what the criteria are. Joel Anderson presented a tool with a database of solutions, and he believes the public should be able to see those solutions. There are no licensing agreements to his software, and he is happy to share it.

**Jack Gale – Barrington** – He spoke about Carol Clevin, a Representative from the town of Chelmsford, MA. In the last round of redistricting, in a closed meeting, they broke up Chelmsford into 4 different wards. People from the town could not run for office because they only had  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the town. Towns with less population were representing their town. Ms. Clevin lost her seat. Concerned citizens looked into what happened and found out that there were some bad, illegal things done by people with a lot of power in government. He does not think that will happen here but encourages the committee to consider fair practices for the public.

**Rep. Peter Schmidt** – He believes that the situation in Dover and Somersworth needs to be changed. What was done in 2010 was not appropriate. The Supreme Court has not stated that every ward has to be equal it just has to be as close as is reasonable. Under the constitution, every one of the wards in Dover deserved to have a representative of their own. He represents Wards 1 and 2 and their numbers

together are about 10,000 and under the constitution they deserve 3 representatives and that is what they got. Wards 3 and 4 got 3 reps. Wards 5 and 6 were entitled to 3 representatives but they did not get that. They got put together with Somersworth 2 and the representatives elected were at large. That is not what the constitution called for. It should have been 1 from Ward 5, 1 from Ward 6, and 1 from 5 and 6 together. In addition to the inequity, you could have all 3 representatives be from Dover or from Somersworth 2. That is unfair and wrong, each deserves their own representation. He believes this committee can do better.

**Rep. Timothy Horrigan** - Durham, Lee, and Madbury, are in one district. He believes that they need to figure out what is a reasonable deviation, from 3,448. The 2006 constitutional amendment has not really ever been obeyed. It states that in addition to districts being contiguous, each town or ward should have their own representative if it is reasonably practical. The Vermont plan deviation is plus or minus 10% and they were approved by the federal government. We should not draw too many districts across city lines. Contiguity is another consideration and there are many now that are not contiguous and are not legal. The software that will be acquired by the committee is not transparent in how it is going to work. Open Democracy has mapping software that is open sourced and respects the city and ward lines. Drawing the maps is not quite as complicated as it is made out to be. He requested the committee release the drafts maps in time for the public and the courts to review. In addition to providing time for public input, it will allow candidates to know where their district is going to be.

**James Fiescher – Dover Ward 5** – He remembers being shocked to find out that he shares a district with Somersworth who is on the other side of Dover. The districts that were drawn last time did not pass the smell test. He asks that this committee, consider, when they finish, if the maps accurately reflect the politics of the state or reflect a bias to one group or another. This year they have seen an insurrection at the capital, congress unable to come up with decisions to get the country out of debt, and worse, neighbors fighting with each other. This is because our representatives have secure seats. They do not have to answer to all of their constituents. The idea of compromise and working out solutions is no longer something that people are interested in. He respects each of them and knows that they care about this state and their neighbors. The only way we can come together as a state is to have districts where people have to talk to each other and work things out. This committee has a chance to fix the gerrymandered districts. They can say to every member of the state that they care about their voices. To draw lines to separate people is not good for the state and will only make the problem worse. He asked them to give the public time to review the maps before they are finalized.

**Rep. Peter Bixby** He quoted the requirements from the state constitution and stated that he likes Somersworth but he does not think it is fair that he, a resident

of Dover, represents them. They should have a dedicated representative from their ward as opposed to being tagged on to Dover. Anyone who is running from one ward in Somersworth is going to be at a disadvantage running against someone from two wards in Dover. Hudson and Pelham also have this issue. He urges them to pay close attention to any town or ward that is large enough to have their own representative and that boundaries be respected. He also urges that when there is a draft map there be public hearings with remote access.

**Emmett Soldati – Somersworth** He gave the history of Somersworth. It is so small it should be a town but was turned into a city in 1890. It was split into 5 wards to be sympathetic to the large corporation in town. He is concerned about the economic representation in the state. He questioned how people who do not have connections with a community or region are supposed to represent them and how are they supposed to run for office unless they have the financial resources to do so. Drawing fair maps tips the balance of favor against financial resources into community resources. Social capital can allow people to run for office and be successful without having to be funded by special interest groups or deep pockets. He also urged that the public be allowed to give input to the draft maps once they are drawn

**Jules Good – Read by Emmett** – Some of the people who will be most impacted by redistricting do not have the opportunity to share their thoughts tonight. This limits government transparency and stifles important discourse. People that do not have transportation access, work outside the area, or have physical limitations are disenfranchised when there is not a remote option for testimony.

**Parker Cook – Dover** In a city of 33,000 people, this room only has roughly 45 people. He does not think it is because people do not care. Voters have jobs, families and responsibilities and they put their faith in the legislators, that they have the voters' best interests in mind, that they are loyal to a just democracy. When looking at the Executive Council district map, his faith is a bit shaken. At the end of this process, he would like the committee to be able to say, above our party or any other interest we have contributed to this democracy.

**Rep. Kurt Wuelper – Strafford** His district is connected by a point. Strafford has a population of 3,991 which is enough for their own representative, and they want one. Currently, they share two with New Durham. New Durham does not have enough population for their own representative, so they have to be combined with another town. Strafford and New Durham have similar geography, and common interests but operate differently.

**Nancy Pierpont – Madbury** They want everyone to have a voice. Madbury has a population of 1,918. They share a school district with Durham and Lee, and they are so small that they share representatives with Durham. Madbury is small but

important. They are the keepers of the water supply for Portsmouth and Dover. She would like the committee to make sure their voices count equally. She works with the Madbury United Church of Christ and chairs the immigrant and refugee support group. She has seen many immigrants go through the asylum process and gain citizenship and asked the committee to consider the spectrum of the populace to make sure we are hearing from the new Americans. Make sure they count and include everyone's voice.

**David Bickford** – District 3 does not work out well and is only connected by a point. He had to drive through 3 other towns to get to a town in that district. He asked that they consider the transportation corridors that have to be taken within the districts. It is hard to represent people that they cannot get to nor have any connections with.

**Heath Howard – Strafford** Strafford and New Durham are not connected in the most contiguous way. It takes him 40 minutes to drive to new Durham and he has to go through Belknap County. That same time could take him to Concord. Strafford has enough population to have its own representative, yet it does not. It is linked with New Durham because it is culturally similar but comparatively New Durham is far more similar to Farmington, Middleton, and Milton than it is to Strafford. They do not share a public school, public safety resources, or community services and it makes no sense why they should be in a district together.

**David Andrews – Open Democracy** – He presented a display map that they came up with as well as the current map. He explained that the red arrows display the SAUs that are broken up and the green arrows show county lines that are broken up. He believes they should work hard to keep SAUs together. They went through a mapping process for all the districts. Using the most important community interests to people and the constitutional criteria they came up with a number of possible maps which make regional sense. Comparing both maps it is clear that the current map of districts is clearly gerrymandered. When he was creating the maps, he made sure to not look at partisan areas.

**Brian Beal** – They will have charts and graphs at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:03