

KENT COUNTY APPORTIONMENT COMMISSION

Monday, October 4, 2021

Room 310 - County Administration Building

The meeting of the Kent County Apportionment Commission was held on Monday, October 4, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 310, County Administration Building.

Members Present: Chris Becker, Kent County Prosecutor
Lisa Posthumus Lyons, Kent County Clerk
Peter MacGregor, Kent County Treasurer (*Attended virtually, under medical exemption pursuant to the Open Meetings Act*)
Bill Saxton, Chair, Kent County Democratic Party
Rob VerHeulen, Chair, Kent County Republican Party

Also Present: Linda Howell, Kent County Corporate Counsel
Robert Macomber, Chief Deputy County Clerk

Handouts: 1) Meeting agenda; 2) Minutes of September 29, 2021 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Becker at 6:00 p.m.

Ms. Lyons: Explained that Mr. MacGregor would be attending the meeting remotely pursuant to a medical exemption in compliance with the Open Meetings Act; such exemption grants him the ability to participate and vote on any motions as if he were attending in person.

Motion by Mr. VerHeulen, supported by Ms. Lyons to adopt the minutes as provided.

Mr. Saxton: Offered a correction to the minutes, accepted as a friendly amendment by Mr. VerHeulen.

Motion carried unanimously.

Chair Becker: Opened the Public Hearing on the Apportionment Plans and welcomed members of the public in attendance to speak.

Laura Kane, resident of Plainfield Charter Township: Spoke in favor of keeping Plainfield Township within one commission district; supportive of Mr. Saxton's proposal which keeps Plainfield together whereas Mr. VerHeulen's plan divides Plainfield; appreciated the inclusion of the Polsby Popper and Schwarzberg scores with Mr. Saxton's plan.

Patricia O'Neill, resident of Plainfield Charter Township: Spoke in favor of Mr. Saxton's proposal which keeps Plainfield Township within one commission district; opposed to Mr. VerHeulen's plan which divides Plainfield Township into three districts; appreciated the inclusion of the Polsby Popper and Schwarzberg scores with Mr. Saxton's plan.

Dennis Hart, resident of the City of Walker: Spoke in favor of Mr. VerHeulen's proposal; believes it is the best plan.

Richard Houskamp, resident of Gaines Charter Township: Appreciates the effort behind both plans; spoke in favor of Mr. VerHeulen's proposal which keeps Gaines Township within one district whereas Mr. Saxton's plan divides Gaines Township into three districts along with a larger community in each district.

Jeff Thomas, resident of the City of Grand Rapids: Explained that he used the Campaign Legal Center's "Plan Score" tool that assess the partisan lean of redistricting plans and that Mr. Saxton's plan has a 0.7% lean towards Republican, and Mr. VerHeulen's plan has a 5% lean towards Republicans; recognizes the constraints of geography but believes the commission should not deliberately chose a plan that is seven times less fair than the other; encouraged adoption of a plan that allowed for majority of the county commission to be reflective of the majority of the votes in the county.

John Fitzgerald, resident and a City Commissioner At-Large of the City of Wyoming: Explained that today Wyoming is a part of four commission districts (7, 8, 9, 12) and only one district (8) is wholly contained within the city; Wyoming population has grown by 76,500 people and is now Kent County's second largest community behind Grand Rapids; encouraged two districts completely within Wyoming, and one shared with Grand Rapids (as does Mr. Saxton's plan) rather than combining districts with Kentwood, Byron, Grandville, and Grand Rapids (as does Mr. VerHeulen's plan). [Submitted written testimony available from Clerk's Office]

Jim Talen, former County Commissioner and resident of the City Grand Rapids: Thanked the Commission for its work, he understand that effort having been a part of past apportionment efforts; has run for county commissioner in four different districts without ever moving his residence; thanked the drafters of both plans for including a majority-minority districts for both African American and Hispanic voters; encouraged more attention to neighborhood boundaries within Grand Rapids by keeping neighborhoods within the same district; information on neighborhood boundaries is available on the GVSU Johnson Center website.

Chris Herweyer, resident of the City of Wyoming: Echoed Mr. Fitzgerald comments; Encouraged two Wyoming districts within the city limits so that Wyoming can elect Wyoming residents to the commission; argued that incumbency protection should not be a factor, Mr. VerHeulen's proposal keeps current incumbents in separate districts – only four reside in similar districts, and Mr. Saxton's proposal would place nine incumbents in similar district, including one district that would place three incumbents in one district.

Jason Gilliken, resident of the City of Grand Rapids: Has been watching the state's process also and thanked the Commission for its work; recognizes the hard task to divide the City of Grand Rapids and believes both plans are good in that they both have 21-seats and include majority-minority districts; supports Mr. VerHeulen's plan as it keeps together similar communities within Grand Rapids.

Sara Woolsey, resident of the City of Grand Rapids: Impressed with the public comments, and appreciated Ms. Lyons comments at the last meeting stating the importance of fair maps; encouraged the commission to approve maps that are fair as that's what the voters have voted for at the state-level; supports Mr. Saxton's plan as it will allow the majority of the county to select a commission that represents their wishes.

Daniel Caracheo-Teniente, resident of the City of Wyoming: Spoke in support of the Hispanic district, as that community has been one of the most-impacted by pandemic; given the power that the county has on public health matters he believes it is urgent that Hispanic voters have a seat at the table.

Robert Womack, resident and County Commissioner of the City of Grand Rapids: Commended both parties for inclusion of the majority-minority districts, and especially the addition of the Hispanic-majority district; appreciated the inclusion of the percentages of population of minorities in each district; encouraged the commission to not only look at racial make-up of the maps but also equity, classism, home and property ownership issues.

Mr. Becker: Called for any additional comments relevant to the proposals, and hearing none closed the Public Meeting portion of the meeting.

Mr. Becker: Called for any public comment of which there was none.

Adjournment

The next meeting of the Apportionment Commission will be Wednesday, October 6, 2021, at 10 a.m.

Motion by Ms. Lyons, supported by Mr. Saxton to adjourn the meeting at 6:31 p.m.

Motion carried unanimously.


Lisa Posthumus Lyons, Secretary
Kent County Apportionment Commission