



## Recommendations for a Fair & Open Redistricting Process for Fort Worth City Council

**The Fort Worth Redistricting Task Force has made their initial proposal for the redistricting criteria and process that Fort Worth City Council should use during the 2021 redistricting cycle. Below you will find the Fair Maps TX Coalition’s recommendations to improve and strengthen the Task Force’s proposals. These recommendations can be used in your testimony at the Task Force’s public input hearings.**

*Note that we are breaking this down into 2 sections: Recommendations on:*

- *Criteria*
- *Process*

### **Criteria:**

The current criteria that the Fort Worth Redistricting Task Force has proposed is quite strong. The criteria goes above and beyond what the current Voting Rights Act (VRA) calls for (explained below in #2) and lays the ground work for districts to be drawn that reflect the diversity of the city.

Below are the criteria that the Task Force is proposing (in black), **with the Fair Maps TX comments/recommendations in purple:**

1. Districts should be approximately equal size. The population of the largest district should be no more than 10% greater than the population of the smallest district.
2. Redistricting should be completed in compliance with the U.S. Constitution, Voting Rights Act, Texas Constitution and other applicable laws, with no packing of minority voters, no fragmentation of minority communities and no retrogression in the ability of minorities to participate in the electoral process.

**By asking for “no retrogression” in the new district maps, the Task Force is asking City Council to voluntarily observe a provision of the VRA that was removed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 in the *Shelby County v Holder* ruling that prevented jurisdictions from decreasing the number of districts that were currently allowing people of color to elect a candidate of choice.**

3. The process should create minority opportunity districts, in compliance with federal law, to further reflect the growing diversity of Fort Worth. — **Here, the Task Force is asking City**

**Council to draw more districts that would allow people of color to elect a candidate of choice, where possible.**

**NOTE: We strongly recommend that Criteria 2 & 3 be combined into one criteria, so that they have equal weight. We would essentially like City Council to observe the full strength of the VRA before it was weakened by SCOTUS. This version of the VRA prevented packing and cracking (or fragmenting) of minority communities, prevented retrogressions in the ability of people of color to elect candidates of choice, and created new minority opportunity districts when the growing diversity of the city called for it.**

4. The new district alignment should contain communities of interest in single districts. Community of interest is defined as “a local population with shared socio-economic characteristics and political institutions that would benefit from unified representation.”

**We are recommending:**

**Preserve Communities of Interest (COI). The geographic integrity of any local neighborhood, or local community of interest shall be respected in a manner that minimizes their division to the extent possible without violating the requirements of any of the preceding subdivisions. COI’s are contiguous populations that share common social and economic interests and that should be included within a single district for purposes of their effective and fair representation. This includes: interests of pollution, natural resources and/or natural disasters and peoples that have organized entities that function as a decision-making body for their own peoples.**

5. Districts should be contiguous territory.

Lower-priority criteria, in no particular order of priority:

6. Compact districts, with the goal of attaining a Polsby-Popper ratio of  $>0.050$ . Learn more about the Polsby-Popper ratio. **Note: Not a high priority, and should come last on the ranked list.**

7. Identifiable geographic boundaries

8. Contain whole voting precincts **Instead say: Minimize splitting of precincts.**

9. Contain whole census blocks or block groups.

10. New districts should not take into consideration the places of residence of incumbents or potential candidates.

### **Process Recommendations:**

Currently, the only process that the Task Force has recommended is:

“The group is urging for transparency in the redistricting process by potentially requiring all map drawing to occur at public meetings, with computer screens visible to all parties.”

**Unfortunately, this does not go far enough to ensure that the public is part of the map-making process. Our goal here is to see a dialogue occur between City Council (the map drawers) and the people. We want people to be included in the process, and we want our input to be taken seriously and reflected in the maps.**

**This is how we can make that happen:**

**In addition to the recommendation above, that maps are drawn in public meetings, we also want:**

1. City Council must hold robust public hearings as part of the redistricting process. Hearings should be held across the city (geographic diversity requirement) **before and after** draft maps are published.
  - City Council shall establish and implement an open hearing process for public input and deliberation that shall be subject to public notice and promoted through an outreach program to solicit broad public participation in the redistricting public review process. There should be at least one public hearing in each of the existing eight council districts. A preliminary map should then be prepared and put on display in a manner designed to achieve the widest public access reasonably possible.
2. City Council should also hold 3 hearings to receive public input after the maps have been drawn **but** before they are adopted.
3. The Council and staff must equip the public to provide robust input (including alternative maps) by providing:
  - Ample time for feedback on any proposed plans.
  - Multiple avenues to submit feedback (in-person testimony at public hearings, online submissions, and mail-in)
  - Access to the same demographic data that the City Council has access to in machine readable form.
  - Access to mapping software licenses to analyze available data. This software should be made available in all Fort Worth public library facilities.

4. City Council should provide adequate time for alternative views.
  - Public comment shall be taken for at least **ten days** from the date of public display of any proposed plan.
5. City Council should comply with all requirements of Open Meetings Laws.
  - Including not discussing Council business outside a public meeting with anyone who is not a council member or staff member, whether in person, in writing, or by electronic or any other means.
6. If a members of the public submits a map to City Council, they must include the person and/or organization's name that drew the map, data that was used to draw the map, and the reasoning for why the map was drawn the way it was.
7. Council and staff must respond publicly to any comment that is a specific response to a map. The response must address whether the recommendation is viable or not and whether/how it was incorporated in the map.
8. The records of city council and all data considered by them are public records that will be made available in a manner that ensures immediate and widespread public access.
9. All votes by the Council must take place in public meetings announced at least two weeks in advance.
10. City Council must maintain an accessible website with:
  - Background information on the redistricting process in multiple languages.
  - Live streams and minutes of all public meetings and hearings, including map-drawing sessions.
  - Announcements of upcoming meetings.
  - A searchable database of feedback and alternative maps that is tagged and catalogued.
  - Available data and draft maps.
11. Preliminary and final maps must be accompanied with a report from council staff summarizing public input used in creating the maps and documenting rationale for each district.