



**TESTIMONY  
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS  
FORT WORTH CITY COUNCIL - REDISTRICTING TASK FORCE  
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2020**

I am Stephanie Swanson, speaking as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas. At the national, state, and local levels, the League of Women Voters has a long history of advocating for fair, transparent, and accountable redistricting practices. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and thank you for allowing us to share our position. We would also like to commend Fort Worth City Council for creating this task force and for including the public in the redistricting process.

The League of Women Voters of Texas believes responsibility for redistricting preferably should be vested in an independent redistricting commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups.

Regardless of whether or not an independent commission is in place, we believe that every redistricting process should include the following:

- Specific timelines for the steps leading to a redistricting plan
- Full disclosure throughout the process and public hearings on the plan proposed for adoption
  - Redistricting at all levels of government must be accomplished in an open, unbiased manner with citizen participation and access at all levels and steps of the process, and
  - Should be subject to open meeting laws.
- A provision that any redistricting plan should be adopted by the redistricting authority with more than a simple majority vote.

The standards (criteria) on which a redistricting plan is based, and on which any plan should be judged, must:

- Be enforceable in court
- Require:
  - Substantially equal population
  - Geographic contiguity
  - Effective representation of racial and linguistic minorities
- Provide for (to the extent possible)
  - Preservation and protection of “communities of interest”
  - Respect political boundaries
  - Compactness may also be considered as criteria so long as they do not conflict with the above criteria
- Explicitly reject
  - Protection of incumbents, through such devices as considering an incumbent’s address

*Statement of Position on Redistricting, as Adopted by Concurrence, June 2016.*

Today, we are submitting to the task force a list of recommendations to implement in the case that City Council remains the entity in charge of drawing the new district map. These recommendations come from voting rights attorneys and are modeled off of an independent redistricting commission, with the main difference being that Council members would draw the maps, not an independent commission. The procedures and criteria included are designed to make the redistricting process as fair and open as possible and go to great extent to uphold the Voting Rights Act.

We want to emphasize that the League of Women Voters does support the creation of an independent redistricting commission for Fort Worth City Council. If one cannot be created, then we ask that the recommendations submitted today be implemented to the fullest extent so that the people have full faith and confidence in the redistricting process and the maps that are drawn.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to today.

**For additional information, please contact: Stephanie Swanson, Issue Chair of Redistricting, 281-795-0011, [steph.swanson.lwvtx@gmail.com](mailto:steph.swanson.lwvtx@gmail.com)**

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWVTX) is a nonpartisan citizens' organization that has fought since 1919 to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives. It represents 33 Leagues and more than 12,000 supporters throughout Texas.

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. The member-driven organization of women and men encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seeks to influence public policy through education and advocacy of positions based on extensive issue study and consensus.

## Redistricting Recommendations for Fort Worth City Council

### What criteria will the City Council use to draw maps? How will that criteria be prioritized?

City Council should use the criteria below to draw maps, prioritizing them in the following order:

1. Population Equality: Districts must comply with the U.S. Constitution’s requirement of “one person, one vote.” Each council district shall have reasonably equal population with other districts for the same office, except where deviation is required to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act or allowable by law.
2. Federal Voting Rights Act: Districts must ensure an equal opportunity for minorities to elect a candidate of their choice.
3. Geographic integrity
  - a. Contiguity: All areas within a district must be connected to each other.
  - b. Political boundaries: Districts shall minimize the division of Census-recognized units and precincts to the extent possible, without violating previous criteria.
  - c. Compactness: To the extent practicable, and where this does not conflict with previous criteria, districts must not bypass nearby communities for more distant communities.
  - d. Communities of interest (COI): Preserve communities of interest. 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.
  - e. Communities of interest shall not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.

### What will be the timeline for the map-drawing process?

February 1	All infrastructure minus Census data will be in place
	City Council receives data from the Census
Within 10 business days	City Council is required to make Census data and mapping software available to the public
Within 20 business days	Begin first round of public hearings
	Preliminary maps and feedback/rationale report available for public comment

	Second round of public hearings
	Final maps and report to include rationale for proposed maps, summary of feedback, and alternative maps is made available
	Deadline for approval of maps by City Council.

**What systems will be put in place to ensure public input and transparency in the process?**

1. City Council and staff shall comply with all state and city requirements for open meetings. Council members and staff are expressly forbidden to discuss 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. This paragraph does not prohibit communication between council members, staff, legal counsel, and consultants retained by the city that is otherwise permitted by state and city open meeting requirements.
2. 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.
3. If a council member communicates regarding redistricting with an individual outside of an open meeting the council member shall do the following:
  - a. If the communication is written or electronic material, instruct that the written or electronic material be placed in the council's public records.
  - b. If the communication is other than written or electronic material, place a verified written description of the communication in the council's public records. The verified written description must include the following information.
    - i. The name of the individual with whom the communication occurred.
    - ii. The date and approximate time of the communication.
    - iii. A description of the nature and substance of the communication.
    - iv. A council member must take that action not later than two (2) days after the council member becomes aware that a communication subject to this section has occurred.
4. All votes by the Council must take place in public meetings announced at least two weeks in advance.
5. The Council and staff must equip the public to provide robust input (including alternative maps) by providing:
  - a. Ample time for feedback.
  - b. Multiple avenues to submit feedback (in-person testimony at public hearings, online submissions, and mail-in)
  - c. Access to the same demographic data that the City Council has access to in machine readable form.
  - d. Access to mapping software licenses to analyze available data. This software should be made available in all Fort Worth public library facilities.
6. City Council must host public hearings 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. The hearing process shall include hearings to receive public input before city council adopts any plan. There shall be at least one public hearing in each of the existing eight council districts. A preliminary map shall then be

prepared and put on display in a manner designed to achieve the widest public access reasonably possible. Three (3) more public hearings should be held to solicit feedback on the preliminary plan. Public comment shall be taken for at least ten days from the date of public display of any adopted plan. City Council may subsequently amend the adopted plan. Unless such amendment is purely technical, the adopted plan, as amended, shall be subject to a reasonable opportunity for further public hearing and comment.

7. Members of the public that want to submit a map to City Council 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.
8. Council and staff must respond publicly in writing 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.
9. Preliminary and final maps must be accompanied with a report from council staff summarizing public input and documenting rationale for each district.
10. City Council must maintain an accessible website with:
  - a. Background information on the redistricting process in multiple languages.
  - b. Live streams and minutes of all public meetings and hearings, including map-drawing sessions.
  - c. Announcements of upcoming meetings.
  - d. A searchable database of feedback and alternative maps that is tagged and catalogued.
  - e. Available data and draft maps.

### **Who will provide City Council with technical assistance?**

City Council should vote on any outside staff support, including legal counsel and consulting firms.