

Members of the Redistricting Task Force:

Below are my remarks that I will present at the meeting this Thursday, Nov. 19.

I requested that you have them before hand just in case they address issues that come up in the meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bruce Miller

At the October meeting, T. J. Costello gave a clear and compelling presentation of what was achieved in Austin through the establishment of an Independent Redistricting Commission. This is the procedure that the mayor's Race and Culture Task Force recommended that the city of Fort Worth consider in its 2018 report to the city. Mr. Costello explained the mechanism for creating an IRC. He showed how it resulted in growing political engagement in Austin and resulted in 72 candidates running for ten positions. Part of the charge of the Fort Worth Redistricting Task Force is to recommend redistricting procedures to the city council. Therefore, it was puzzling and disappointing that the chair appeared to rule out any consideration of this possibility for Fort Worth before the Task Force members even had the opportunity to hear Mr. Costello's presentation. Especially since, at the previous meeting, some Task Force members were speaking up in favor of the approach. This occurred at the October meeting as well, where Mr. Espino and Mr. Bradshaw spoke in favor of an IRC and Mr. Schur pointed out that this was the direction that other cities were following. Nearly all of the public comments following the October meeting were strongly in favor of creating an IRC. Today, fourteen states are engaged in creating either independent or nonpartisan commissions. We believe it would be a mistake for the Task Force to turn its back on this promising approach. It will lose credibility with the public since independent redistricting is now coming to their attention.

In spite of all the good public comments in favor of creating an IRC, and the comprehensive and compelling presentation by Mr. Costello, the city council wants to maintain ironclad control of the redistricting process. We have already explained that it is a bad idea for council members to determine the districts that elect them. Rather, they should be created by our citizens through an open and transparent procedure.

Our group, Citizens for Independent Redistricting, thinks it is important to continue to go on the record in support of an IRC. Please consider that Fort Worth has a zip code (76104) with the lowest life expectancy and one of the highest infant mortality rates in Texas. Although the city is about 40% Hispanic, there is only a single Hispanic council member. Our public transportation is dysfunctional if you need to commute on a regular basis. In some zip codes there are no regular grocery stores. Following the Jefferson homicide, it was necessary for the city to bring in an external evaluating board to try to address systemic problems in the police force. This is where the present system has taken us; a fair city for the rich and an impossibly difficult place for the less fortunate. Clearly, we have to find a better approach to local government.

As part of its recommendations, the current Task Force could easily include at least the consideration of the creation of an IRC. This would not be a serious distraction from its goals of choosing criteria and public outreach. Regardless, independent redistricting should be included as a component of any outreach efforts. Otherwise the present group will be painting an incomplete picture of what's available and occurring elsewhere, and lose credibility in the process. This is already taking place. Citizens for Independent Redistricting hopes that you have the tenacity and courage to follow this path. Either way, we urge the Task Force to include in its report that it heard numerous public comments at these open meetings in support of an IRC and that not one person spoke in favor of the Council retaining that power. Our City Council members deserve to know the depth of support that still exists for an IRC in Fort Worth and that the idea did not die with the Race & Culture Task Force.