Bruce Miller for Citizens for Independent Redistricting

Following the Jaqueline Craig debacle, the mayor created the Race and Culture Task Force to investigate diversity in Fort Worth and the treatment of minority populations. The Task Force met for nearly two years and submitted a list of 22 recommendations to balance the quality of life and opportunity for all Fort Worth communities. The city manager studied the recommendations and, three months later, submitted plans to execute each of them at a council work session. The best known and, some would argue, most controversial was the establishment of a police oversight committee. We just had a report from Ms. Neal, the recently hired police monitor, on a citizen survey that showed wide support for this concept among our citizens, but not the police.

One of the recommendations was the consideration of an independent redistricting committee (IRC). An IRC is a non-partisan group of citizens that surveys the entire city and creates the maps that determine the boundaries for each council district. The goal of the IRC is to ensure that all populations and interest groups are fairly represented on the city council. In particular, the creation of an IRC circumvents the packing and cracking of districts to manipulate the outcome of an election to assure the re-election of council members, and artificially maintain the status quo – what we call gerrymandering. Today Austin is the only Texas city that has an established IRC. Elsewhere it is starting to catch on.

The city council pushed back on this concept and did not seriously consider it. A group of us who either served on, or followed, the Race and Culture Task Force tried to keep it alive. We communicated with folks in Austin who served on their IRC and with Austin city staff who liaised with it. They were very forthcoming and, overall, spoke highly of the concept and its implementation. Since, for most citizens, it is a new concept, we created a web page\* and face book page\*\* and made presentations at various citizens groups in Fort Worth to introduce the idea. We also had useful exchanges with a few Fort Worth council and staff members. However, the pandemic effectively shut us down. When, recently, the city decided overwhelmingly not to pursue an IRC, we went back to the drawing board to consider how the previous city plan could be improved to create a more transparent and engaging process. We created a short documentary, which all of you received, to review the previous implementation and explain specifically how it could be improved. My colleague Byrwec Ellison is about to go over that with you. Thanks for your attention.

\*citizensmapfw.org

\*\* citizens for independent redistricting fort worth