

Redistricting Task Force Final Report Remarks

By Member Jeremy Lee

I. Introduction

The Redistricting Task Force began its work on September 17, 2021. Over the course of 7 months, the task force set out a process to listen to the public and prioritize their needs against the monumental task of redrawing district lines. I firmly believe that the task force initially acted in good faith to conduct a process that was consistent, fair, and transparent. However, it is evident by the process that the task force fell short by all these metrics. Below is a list of recommendations for future redistricting task forces. It is my hope at least some of these items may be enacted prior to the next iteration of redistricting in order to prevent a process that is divisive, cruel, and inconsistent.

II. Recommendations

A. Convene the task force earlier

- a. The next iteration of the task force will again have a monumental task, if growth projections across the city hold true by 2032. The future task force will need additional time that the current task force was not afforded. The 2021-2022 task force was not involved in the selection of the mapping consultant or the outreach consultant. The task force lacked context around understanding how the consultants were selected and their scope of work. Had the task force convened earlier and been involved in the consultant selection process, the task force would have been on much stronger footing to conduct its work.

Recommendation: Redistricting task force should be convened 3-6 months prior to the release of the decennial census data.

B. Vetting of task force members

- a. Mayoral appointees - There is a lack of public input for the selection of mayoral appointees. It is the mayor's authority to appoint whomever they chose as members of the task force. However, the public has no opportunity to voice their concerns around these individuals. An opportunity for public input would increase transparency and provide for a more open government. **Recommendation: Provide a public comment period for mayoral appointees to the redistricting task force.**
- b. Board of Supervisors appointees - Members of the Board and the public have ample opportunities to vet task force members. Members of the Rule Committee are able to speak with potential appointees. The public can weigh in on appointees during public comment when the item is heard.
- c. Elections Commission appointees- The Elections Commission has the most important role in determining the composition of the task force. By design, members of the other appointing bodies are well-connected to the San Francisco

political process. This is not necessarily a detriment, as the communities of interest in the city have long and storied histories. It is vital that there are representatives from those communities that understand the history of struggle, coalition building, and advocacy. Appointees of the Elections Commission must serve an inherently different role. Commission appointees must exhibit a commitment to service, but above all they must be neutral and nonpartisan. Commission appointees should be members that are independent and free from political pressure. If the Elections Commission is not careful to appoint independent individuals, the task force risks having a majority that cannot be held accountable to the public. **Recommendation: Elections Commission must select their appointees using criteria that prioritizes service and independence from the political process.**

C. Adopt Redistricting criteria/prioritization

- a. The task force had to consider a number of legal factors in its deliberation process—US Constitution, 14th amendment, Federal Voting Rights Act, etc. No ranking or prioritization of these factors were provided. The task force was not legally required to consider some criteria over others. Therefore, the decisions of the task force lack consistency and transparency. **Recommendation: City charter amendment must be made to, at the very least, align redistricting criteria and prioritization to State law.**

D. Dedicated Staff

- a. The task force would greatly benefit from a dedicated staff person from city hall assigned to redistricting. San Francisco government is quite convoluted and the work of the task force intersects most departments. **Recommendation: Allocate funding for a dedicated staff person to assist in coordinating work related to the redistricting task force.**

E. Education on impacts of redistricting

- a. Redistricting affects so much of how our city government operates and functions. The task force should be required to receive education on the impacts of redistricting to San Francisco government and services. For example, I personally advocated for the task force to receive a presentation related to the effects of redistricting on the Neighborhood Resident Housing Preference program administered by the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development. I faced resistance from task force leadership on allowing such a presentation. Ultimately, the item was agendaized but the presentation did not happen due to scheduling conflicts. **Recommendation: Provide the task force with a list describing the intersections of redistricting and city government.**

F. Increased funding for outreach

- a. The task force funding for community outreach was severely inadequate. In the final weeks of the task force's work, when community participation was the greatest, the task force had no consultant. Much of the task force's work was done online and disenfranchised low-income, immigrant, and senior communities. **Recommendation: Allocate significantly more funding to redistricting for the outreach consultant.**

G. Deadline for release of draft map

- a. The public would greatly benefit from requiring draft maps to be released earlier in the process. State law only requires a draft maps to be released very close to the final map adoption. This would disenfranchise the public from participating. For example, in January 2022, an early version of the task force meeting schedule had no dedicated mapping meetings. It only contained district focused meetings until April 8, 2022, 6 days before the task force's deadline. I reached out to our leadership with deep concerns about scheduling mapping meetings and setting a draft map release date. My concerns faced resistance.

Recommendation: Require draft maps to be released at least 2 months before final adoption deadline.

H. Required in-district meetings

- a. In the early months of the task force, members collectively agreed that holding in-district meetings was essential. That desire was unfortunately impacted by the pandemic. However, once meetings began in-person at city hall, those conversations never resurfaced. **Recommendation: City charter amendment to require one in-district meeting per district during the course of the redistricting process, as allowable by public health orders.**

I. Stipend for task force members

- a. It is inconceivable that a volunteer task force be expected to participate in over 230 hours of meeting over the course of 7 months, with meetings at times extending beyond 3am. Members of the 2021-2022 redistricting task force were privileged enough to have flexibility in their work schedules to participate with full attendance at the vast majority of meetings. The process would be greatly prohibitive to working class individuals and families. **Recommendation: Allocate a stipend to task force members to cover for parking, child care, meals, and other incidentals.**

III. Conclusion

Due to a number of factors, it is my belief that the task force failed in its charge to adequately involve and listen to the public in the redistricting process. Had at least some of the recommendations above been enacted, the process would have been far more transparent, fair, and consistent. In its final weeks, the task force had lost all credibility and broken the trust of the public. This body undertook a process that pit communities against each other. Redistricting was framed as a zero-sum game—in order for one district to benefit, another district must be harmed. There was no shared sense of pain or sacrifice to keep vulnerable communities together.

I hope with the release of our final report, the public is able to digest and review it over the coming months. I hope they are able to better understand the circumstances behind the actions this body has taken.