



REDISTRICTING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is redistricting?

Redistricting is the process to change boundaries of City Council Districts from which City Council Members are elected to equalize the population in each district. Over time, the population of each district changes, but the amount of change varies in each district.

Why is redistricting happening now?

Consistent with federal law, the City Code requires redistricting to equalize population at least every 10 years based on the federal census data. The 2020 census data was delayed by COVID. Redistricting must be completed before the next city council election in 2024.

Why is redistricting required?

The “one person, one vote” principle of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution requires that every person’s vote have equal weight. If population in election districts is not equal, the weight of an individual’s vote is less in a district with greater population than for a voter in a district with lower population. The requirement applies to all levels of government.

What does “equal population” mean?

The population in the eight City Council districts must be substantially equal. The goal has been to achieve population in each district within 1% of the average (the City’s total population divided by eight). The population deviation between the highest and lowest district should be under 5%.

What are the legal requirements for redistricting?

In addition to the requirement of equal population, federal law requires fair treatment of minority voting rights. To prevent racial discrimination in the election process, the federal Voting Rights Act prohibits district boundaries that would diminish the voting rights of racial and language minority groups.

Are there other guidelines that apply to the redistricting process?

There are several other principles or guidelines that are traditionally used in the U.S. and have been recognized by courts. The City uses the following guidelines, which the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized as appropriate for redistricting.

- Recognition of public preferences regarding communities of interest (whether communities of interest, such as historic neighborhoods, arts districts, neighborhood associations, and others want to be kept together in one district or separated into multiple districts)
- Geographic contiguity and compactness (districts must be geographically connected and should not have irregular shapes)
- Preservation of core of current districts (should not be unnecessary radical changes to a district so that the general geographic configuration and characteristics are preserved)
- Continuity of representation (councilmembers should remain in the district that elected them)
- Preservation of political subdivisions (district boundaries should coincide where possible with boundaries of other political subdivisions)

Applying these principles to specific situations commonly presents conflicts and requires balancing and prioritization.



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Why does the City Council, not the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC), draw the City Council District Boundaries?

The City Charter provides that the City Council shall adopt the City Council District boundaries. By law, the IRC only has authority to draw the boundaries for the congressional and state legislative districts. In jurisdictions that do not have a redistricting commission, the governing body of the jurisdiction adopts the election district boundaries (e.g. state legislature, county board, City Council).

When will the new City Council district boundaries be effective?

The new City Council districts will be effective Jan. 1, 2024. This date fits the timeline for the City Mayor and Council Election in November 2024.

Why are voting precinct boundaries used to build the City Council district boundaries?

Voting precincts are the foundational unit for voter registration and election administration. Precincts are established based on census blocks, natural geographic boundaries, and other election district boundaries. Using precincts provides a convenient and manageable number of blocks to build election districts and provides consistency for voter registration and election result data across election jurisdictions (e.g. council districts and state legislative districts).

Can the number of City Council districts be changed?

The number of City Council Districts is established in the City Charter, which currently provides for eight City Council districts. With an even number of districts, when the mayor's vote is included, there is an odd number of votes to avoid ties. The number of districts can only be changed by voter approval of an amendment to the City Charter. Redistricting must be completed to equalize population based on the 2020 census before the next City Council election, so the number of City Council districts cannot be changed as part of this redistricting process.

What is "gerrymandering"?

"Gerrymandering" refers to drawing of boundaries of election districts in a way that unfairly, or improperly, or illegally gives an unfair advantage to one group over another. Under the federal Voting Rights Act, gerrymandering that disadvantages racial minority groups is illegal. Gerrymandering is often alleged when election district boundaries have an irregular shape. However, whether such district is illegal depends on the reasons those boundaries were drawn and the impact on various groups.

Why does District 6 have an irregular shape?

The irregular shape of District 6, with its northern and southern areas, was established during redistricting in 1990 to protect the voting rights of minority groups in south Phoenix. When the district system was established in 1982, the area south of South Mountain was originally part of District 8. That area was mostly undeveloped except for the Ahwatukee Community, which was not yet part of the City. When the Ahwatukee Community was annexed into the City in the late 1980's, adding the large white population to the predominantly minority population in District 8 would have diminished minority voting rights in District 8. The irregular boundary of District 6 with the northern and southern areas protected minority voting rights and combined the more similar demographic and racial communities that are in these two areas together in District 6. During redistricting in 2000 and 2010 changing this configuration still would have had significant impact on minority voting rights and the non-minority communities in District 6.



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Why are there “boxes” or “holes” in the maps of the Council Districts?

These boxes or holes represent areas that are not part of the City, but are surrounded by the City, commonly referred to as “county islands.” Any residents in these areas are not city residents and do not vote in city elections. The owners of the properties in these areas have control of whether to become part of the City by requesting and initiating the annexation process for their property.

Can the Council District Boundaries be drawn to allow for anticipated higher growth in a district during the next ten years?

The census data provides a snapshot at a point in time of population and the districts have to be changed to be substantially equal in population based on that actual census data, not on estimates or anticipated changes in population in the future. If the population is not equal, the weight of the vote for individuals is not equal in all districts, violating the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Does redistricting affect the City budget and the resources available to each district?

Redistricting does not impact the City Budget or the amount of resources available for each district. The City revenues are part of the City Budget as a whole regardless of what district was the source of the revenue. Each year the City conducts a budget process with community input and the City Council votes to approve a budget and allocate all resources to specific programs, projects and locations.

Will the new City Council district boundaries change police precinct boundaries?

The City Council district boundary changes will not directly affect the police precinct boundaries. Police “reprecincting” is a separate process of the Police Department for different purposes than City Council redistricting. When the Police Department decides to change police precincts, the City Council district boundaries would be a factor that would be considered.