



Redistricting in Georgia 101

Georgia Redistricting Alliance

The Georgia Redistricting Alliance is a coalition of non-profit, non-partisan organizations with the shared goal of ensuring transparency and fairness of the redistricting process in Georgia. Our coalition strives to engage and educate citizens, work in partnership with our elected officials, and submit a fair, balanced map to the Georgia General Assembly.

Our standards for fair and equitable redistricting in Georgia

- No plan or district shall be drawn with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party or an incumbent.
- Districts shall not be drawn with the intent or result of denying or abridging the equal opportunity of minorities.
- Districts shall consist of contiguous territory; and to the extent feasible, districts shall be compact.
- Pursuant to the principle of “one person, one vote,” districts shall be as equal in population as possible.
- Where feasible, apportionment plans shall make use of existing city, county, and geographical boundaries, and similar communities of interest.

What is redistricting?

Every ten years, the census count gives us a snapshot of how many people there are in the United States and where they live.

Once we know how many people live in Georgia, we redistrict. That is, we draw new district lines that put the same number of people into each electoral district.

Redistricting ensures every person has equal representation by drawing districts with an equal number of people – one person, one vote.

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Why is redistricting important to me?

One of the greatest powers that you have is the right to elect your own representatives to conduct the business of your government. How the district boundaries are drawn can make the difference between empowering and maximizing the voters' voices or minimizing and muting those voices.

Speaking up about your community is critical to ensuring district lines are drawn to keep your community whole and grouped with nearby communities with similar interests. This ensures that your voice is heard by your elected leaders in such decisions as the quality of your child's school or how high your taxes are.

The Timeline

March/April 2011

On Thursday, March 17th the Census Bureau officially released block level census data to the state legislature and shortly thereafter to the general public. The Georgia Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Office is given the task, at the direction of state house and state senate committees, to draw district lines. By Federal law all states must receive their data before April 1st.

May – July 2011

Hearings by the House & Senate Legislative & Congressional Reapportionment Committee to get input from the public.

August/September 2011

The Georgia General Assembly will hold a special session beginning on August 15 to present and approve these district maps. Historically, each body draws their own map and is then approved by the opposite body, typically without opposition. The Governor's signature is required for approval of the map. While the maps are being drawn, each body will submit their redistricting plan and make them available for public comments.

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October 2011– February 2012

Voting Rights Act (VRA) Preclearance Action should be filed with the Department of Justice (DOJ) before October 1, 2011. The DOJ has 60 days to respond to the filing and if needed proceed with motions of summary judgment and possible trials during early 2012 with a decision by February 2012. Georgia is unique as it is still under review of the DOJ under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (See Terms to Know)

April 2012

The new district lines, if preclearance is granted by the DOJ in February, will be set for the upcoming elections. If preclearance is not given before the time of candidate qualifying, traditionally set in late April, then a federal court will have the responsibility to draw a map for the 2012 elections.

Public Hearings

Along with census data, publicly submitted comments will be used to assist the General Assembly when it begins drawing district boundaries. The focus of public testimony is to receive information about the unique characteristics of the public's Communities of Interest from those most familiar with their neighborhoods.

All meetings are open to the public.

Public hearing schedule as of June 6, 2011

Date: Monday, May 16, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Seney Stovall Chapel
201 N. Milledge Avenue
Athens, GA 30602

Date: Tuesday, May 17, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Augusta State University
Jaguar Student Center Ballroom
2500 Walton Way
Augusta, GA 30904

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Date: Wednesday, May 18, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Location: Armstrong State University
Armstrong Center
13040 Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31419

Date: Tuesday, June 7, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Clarence Brown Conference
Center
5450 State Route 20
Cartersville, GA 30121
770-606-5763

Date: Monday, May 23, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Albany State University
Albany State Auditorium
504 College Drive
Albany, GA 31705
229-430-4600

Date: Monday, June 13, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Mercer Medical School
Auditorium
1550 College Street
Macon, GA 31207
1-800- 342- 0841

Date: Tuesday, May 24, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Wiregrass Tech. College
Brooks Hall Conference Room
4089 Val Tech Road
Valdosta, GA 31602
229-333-2100

Date: Tuesday, June 14, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Merle Manders Conference
Center
111 Davis Road
Stockbridge, GA 30281
770-389-5982

Date: Monday, June 6, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Columbus Public Library
3000 Macon Road
Columbus, GA 31906
706-243-2669

Date: Monday, June 20, 2011
Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
Location: Dalton City Hall
300 West Waugh Street
Dalton, GA 30720
706-278-8766

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Date: Tuesday, June 21, 2011

Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Location: Brenau University
Burd Center for Performing Arts
Hosch Theatre
500 Washington Street SE
Gainesville, GA 30501
770-534-6299

Date: Thursday, June 30, 2011

Time: 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Location: Georgia Tech College of Management
LeCraw Auditorium
800 West Peachtree St. NW, Ste. 100 Atlanta, GA 30308
(404) 894-2600

What is a Community of Interest?

A ***community of interest*** is a group of people concentrated in a geographic area who share similar interests and priorities – whether social, cultural, ethnic, economic, religious, or political.

Communities of interest are at the heart of what many consider to be the point of districts designed to have different character, and behind many of the other redistricting rules: a decision to keep a city together, or to keep a compact group of voters together, is often a proxy for ensuring that people with common interests are grouped within the same district.

The factors contributing to any particular community of interest can – and should – vary throughout the jurisdiction, because different interests will be more or less salient in different geographic regions.

- ***Many people believe that it is best to keep communities of interest whole***, so that each community of interest can have a chance to have its own legislator looking out for its interest in the legislature, and so that individual legislators feel particularly responsible to serve the discrete communities as communities.
- ***Others believe that it is best to split communities of interest up so that districts are more heterogeneous and each legislator must compromise to suit her constituents.***

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- ***There are also instances when a sizable community, like a city dominant in its region, may want to be split into two or more districts, in order to extend its influence in the legislature.***

Each response incorporates a different idea about what representative districts should be meant to accomplish.

In some circumstances, poorly-articulated communities of interest may result in districts that were likely drawn for political reasons with little public support.

- As with other criteria, directly preserving communities of interest may involve tradeoffs. It may be the only way to ensure that pockets of neighborhoods or regional communities with shared political interests are not split when they happen to cross municipal or county lines, or when they appear on the map in geographically irregular patterns.
- However, preserving communities of interest may also make it more difficult to ensure strict population equality, if different communities are different sizes within a state – and may result in non-compact lines if the communities are scattered or spread out.
- And again, since people with shared political interests tend to vote for similar candidates or parties, preserving communities of interest may make it more difficult to draw competitive districts with voters of balanced partisan preferences.

Source: Adapted from *A Citizen's Guide to Redistricting*, Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law, November 2010

What does the Committee need to know?

Although Committee members are from a variety of locations across Georgia, they don't know about all the communities of interest in the state. They need to hear from you where your community is located and why it is important to keep it together. Without that information from you, the Committee won't know which communities to keep together when drawing lines.

How do I talk about my community?

The Committee needs to know three key things from you about your community:

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1. The economic and social interests that bind your community together.

Common social and economic interests can vary a lot from community to community, so it is up to you to tell the Committee what they are. They could include common culture or history, common use of a particular park or transportation, or a common goal or aspiration, such as reducing crime or bringing in more jobs and development.

2. Why your community should be kept together.

You should describe why your community should be kept together in a district, which can also include why it would be harmful for your community to be split up into different districts. For example, if your community has been organizing to improve public safety or to improve public parks, you might highlight how your efforts would be helped by being represented by one representative rather than having to work with two (or more) representatives if your community is split.

3. Where your community is located.

In order for the Committee to be able to take your community into account, you must tell it where your community is located. You should tell the Committee where it is located (county and/or city) and also describe its borders. You can do this by describing physical barriers like streets, rivers, military bases, or shopping malls, and also by describing legal barriers like city or county lines.

In addition, it can be helpful to provide the Committee with a map of where your community is located, including any landmarks or locations that are particularly important to your community. Some online software, such as Google Maps, provide a free and user-friendly method to produce such maps that you can email directly to the Commission or post online for others to comment. Information about using Google Maps to map your community of interest is available at: www.Maps.Google.com.

How can I get involved?

There are two main ways that you can provide testimony:

In person at a public hearing: In May, June and early July, the Reapportionment Committee will hold all over the state where you can provide testimony in person.

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In writing: You can also provide testimony to the Committee in writing at public hearings, or you can send it directly to the Committee.

Senate Redistricting Committee:

109 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334
Phone: (404) 651-7738
Fax: (404) 651-5795

*House Legislative and Congressional
Reapportionment Committee:*

402 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Phone: (404) 656-5087

Submit Comments to: redistricting@legis.ga.gov or
http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2011_12/house/Committees/reapportionment/gahlcr.htm

Your checklist for providing comments

Consider incorporating answers to the questions listed below in an effort to assist the Committee in understanding each Community of Interest.

- **What bonds your community – what do you see as the common links in your community?**

- **Where is your community located – what are the boundaries of your community?**

- **Why should the community be kept together – or separate from another area?**

- **Maps are very helpful! Examples include Google Maps, AAA, or even hand-drawn.**

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Sample Questions:

1. What is the vehicle of reporting back to citizens after the scheduled redistricting public hearings?
2. Why is the University of Georgia no longer a partner/component of the process of redistricting?
3. How can citizens/voters/members of the public get access to the maps created before August 15, 2011?
4. How does the Committee plan to make available to the public computers with redistricting software so citizens can see how the mechanics and data points contribute to the decision on how districts are drawn at the state and federal levels?
5. Will the Committee accept potential maps from the public?
6. Where/what point in the State of Georgia will the starting point of the maps be?
7. Once the maps have been presented to the legislature, the governor and public during the special session, will there be a 2 to 4 week period that will allow for public feedback on the proposed maps?
8. Which community organizations and citizen advocacy groups are at the table to provide input during the redistricting process?
9. Who will be accountable to citizens for the maps drawn and presented?
10. We recommend a report be produced at the end of the process, explaining why the districts were drawn as they were.
11. How independent of Party is this Committee?
12. What guidance is the Committee using to create and draw district lines in the interest of citizens?
13. What kind of diversity is a component of the process?
14. What % of variance will be employed in drawing House and Senate districts?
15. What is the population data for House and Senate lines?
16. How will people in prison be counted?
17. Will the Committee use test maps to see what possible consequences are (intended or unintended)?

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EXAMPLE 1

I live in a unique area of Farmers Branch called Oak Knoll Valley. It is also a certified neighborhood council. The neighborhood is bounded between Highway 9 on the west and Sunnyside River on the east side. There are approximately 8,000 residents in Oak Knoll Valley and it is primarily a residential area with some areas zoned for commercial and mixed use especially along the river.

The languages spoken in Oak Knoll Valley are primarily English and Spanish with some residents speaking Portuguese (Brazilian). While most residents go outside our community for shopping and employment, they tend to stay here for their socializing, religious activities and recreation. The Oak Knoll Regional Center provides a variety of activities and is a real hub of the community.

Across the river from Oak Knoll Valley is the community of River Glen which is similar to our community as it is primarily residential. We are in the same school district and the high school which Oak Knoll students attend is in River Glen. It would make sense that we would be included in the same legislative or Congressional district.

On the other side of Highway 9 is Gold City which is primarily an industrial and commercial area. Most of the residents live in multi-family apartment buildings and many of them are new to the area. Gold City is part of a different school district than Oak Knoll. While Gold City is in close proximity to Oak Knoll we have less in common than we do with River Glen.

EXAMPLE 2

In the eight years I've served on the Palmdale City Council, and in my prior 12 years as a Planning Commissioner, I have worked very closely with the League of California Cities to protect the interests of our region. In order to do that, the League has divided the state into several divisions based on communities of interest and similarity of resources and challenges.

The Antelope Valley/East Kern region along with the Victor Valley High Desert is the Desert/Mountain Division of the League of California Cities. The Desert/Mountain communities include Palmdale, Lancaster, Rosamond, Mojave, Victorville, Hesperia, Apple Valley, Adelanto

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as well as several of the San Bernardino Mountain communities including Arrowhead and Big Bear Lake.

We work together so well in this organization because of our shared interests and challenges. Throughout the High Desert, unemployment is a far larger challenge than it is in surrounding communities like the Inland Empire and San Fernando Valley.

Throughout the High Desert, we have water and resource challenges that exist nowhere else in the state due to our separate water and air basins. Additionally, we are quickly becoming the Green Energy Capital of the whole country. In eastern Kern, northern Los Angeles and northern San Bernardino counties, we have the best wind and solar resources in North America.

In order to foster and build on these new technologies we must share a legislative district or risk these vital policy needs being subjugated under the interests of the far off population centers of these counties.

The populations of Palmdale, Lancaster, Rosamond, Mojave, Ridgecrest and Tehachapi are nearly perfect for an Assembly District. Likewise, the population in the High Desert communities of Apple Valley, Adelanto, Victorville, Hesperia, and Barstow in San Bernardino and Inyo counties is nearly perfect for another Assembly District. Together, these districts would give the High Desert united and fair representation.

Our regional Board of Trade supports a similar concept, for these same logical, geographic demographic and economic reasons. I would strongly urge the commission to adopt this concept.

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EXAMPLE 3

I am a resident of Pacific Palisades and am writing to urge you to consider the communities surrounding the Santa Monica mountains as a critical common area of interest and keep them together in your redistricting decisions.

Protecting our open space, watersheds, wildlife corridors, and recreational opportunities are important to our communities. Having elected representatives that share this priority is vital to the best interests of our district. Eight incorporated cities are within this common area of interest. West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Malibu, Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills and Westlake Village, and the Westside (BelAire, Brentwood, Westwood, UCLA, Pacific Palisades) and valley communities(Studio City, Sherman Oaks, Encino, Tarzana, Woodland Hills and West Hills) of the City of Los Angeles.

EXAMPLE 4

I live in Sierra Madre, the west end of the 59th AD and poster child of gerrymandering ignoring all principles of proper districting. This district takes slices off numerous communities as it wends along the foothills, eventually crossing the San Bernardino mountains and ending in Hesperia. Neither Sierra Madre nor Hesperia nor most of the communities with whom we are joined has much community of interest with one another.

My thought would be that a district incorporating Sierra Madre's community of interest would focus its northern boundary along the foothills of the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests and the I-210 transportation corridor. I would like to see it wholly within the San Gabriel Valley, which, itself, has a substantial community of interest and should remain within the fewest possible number of districts.

I could envision a district starting at the west end at the westerly boundaries of Pasadena and Altadena and ending at the easterly boundary of Claremont, and dropping south as necessary, including communities such as Covina, and West Covina. I also heard proposals suggesting a district ending at or near the easterly boundary of Pasadena. If that were the commission's thought, we should still retain the rest of the district along the foothills/I 210 corridor, though it would obviously have to dip farther south. If that were the case I would personally prefer to be

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in the easterly of the districts, but either would be a great improvement over what we have now.

At the hearing one or more of the commissioners asked about Altadena which apparently looked like an orphan on some maps. I cannot envision a responsible plan for Altadena that does not take account of its ties to Pasadena (the Pasadena Unified School District includes not only Pasadena, but Altadena and Sierra Madre).

Sierra Madre's community of interest in the remainder of the foothill communities of the San Gabriel Valley includes the fact that we abut (and deal with) the National Forests in relationships that include both the recreational aspects, but also the physical dangers of fires and slides. Water is a major element tying these communities together.

Similarly you should recognize the substantial community of interest to be found in the San Gabriel Valley, and keep it politically together. For further information I refer you to the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership www.valleyconnect.com

Terms to Know

Reapportionment occurs every 10 years after the Census according to the U.S. Constitution. Reapportionment is the act of dividing the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on census population data.

Redistricting is the act that occurs to redraw district boundary lines following reapportionment. Redistricting happens on all levels: Congressional, state legislature, county commission, city councils, and school boards.

Gerrymandering was first coined in 1812 after Massachusetts Governor Gerry Elbridge redrew districts maps in his favor. This term is now commonly used when the lines are draw in a way to favor one politician political party, or community over another.

Malapportionment is the act of creating districts with less population than other districts to favor or disfavor certain groups.

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Cracking is dividing groups of similar interest into separate districts.

Packing is forcing people of similar interest into as few districts as possible.

Tacking is taking a distant area of population and adding them to a district to include certain groups.

Voting Rights Action of 1965 (VRA) as passed by Congress was designed to combat discrimination that denied opportunities to minorities and established oversight of elections administration in states with a history of discriminatory voting practices. **Section 2** prohibits denial or abridgement of the right to vote based on race, color or minority language status including opportunity to participate in the political process and elect representative of their choice. **Section 5** provides that the states under review of the VRA cannot implement any change affecting voting without first obtaining the approval of the Department of Justice, a process known as **preclearance**.

Helpful Resources

US Census Bureau www.census2010.gov

League of Women Voters of Georgia www.lwvga.org

Common Cause Georgia www.commoncausega.org

Georgia WAND www.gawand.org

Redistricting Game www.redistrictinggame.org

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