

## NEWS

### City adopts criteria in redistricting process

By: **ANDREW TOLAN**, *Staff Writer*

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The Rockport City Council approved the adoption of criteria for the redistricting process and guidelines for persons submitting comments and specific redistricting proposals at a regular term meeting Tuesday, Aug. 16

The initial assessment for redistricting the city was provided by attorney Cindy Crosby of Heath Delgado Acosta LLP at a special workshop meeting earlier in the day.

Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP is a law firm hired by the council to assist during the redistricting process. Crosby gave a presentation which provided an overview of redistricting law, the process of redistricting, and approaches to developing a redistricting plan within the context of a proposed timeline.

After the 2010 census data was issued, it came to the attention of the council, the boundaries of Rockport's wards needed to be redrawn. The two primary requirements for districts - or in Rockport's case, wards - are they must have equal, or nearly equal populations, and must not abridge the right to vote on the basis of race, or language group.

The "one person - one vote" requirement states districts may not exceed a 10 percent deviation of the median population figure. This median figure is calculated by dividing the city's total population (Rockport's population is 9,357) and dividing that figure by the total number of districts/wards (Rockport has four wards) which gives an ideal size, or median figure, of 2,339 people per ward.

In Rockport, Ward 2 has the highest population (2,829) while Ward 3 has the lowest population (1,463) which results in a total deviation figure between these two wards of 58.4 percent. Thus, the need for redistricting.

The second major requirement outlines the importance of providing an equal opportunity to all voters regardless of race, or language group; this requirement falls under sections two and five of the Voting Rights Act. Section 5 states submitted changes must not have a "retrogressive" effect on protected minority voters in political subdivisions. Section 2 insures the rights of protected minority voters are accorded due weight and consideration. The plan must also take into account relevant law.

The City is also making sure wards are compact and composed of contiguous territory. Compactness, as defined in the criteria, may contain a functional, as well as a geographical dimension. Consideration may also be given to the preservation of incumbent-constituency relations by recognition of the residence of incumbents and their history in representing certain areas, which also goes along with the council's aim to keep districts, to the extent possible, as currently constituted.

Crosby then discussed a timetable for the redistricting process. By the second or third week in September, the council needs to have their plan submitted to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for review in order to have the finalized ward boundaries in place in advance of the May 2012 election.

The City must have at least one public hearing regarding redistricting, in addition to drawing sessions which allow council members to move ward boundaries by census block.

City Secretary Irma Parker is currently organizing meetings for each individual council member to speak with Crosby about their ideas for redistricting. Parker said they are hoping to have a plan in place by the week of Aug. 29. The meetings are being set up individually to stay within the framework of the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The public also has the ability to submit plans. Proposed plans must be submitted in writing and must be legible. Any plan must report the total population and voting age population for all races for each ward based on 2010 Census Data.

Plans must redistrict the entirety of the City. Any plan which fails to consider a ward will not be considered. The plan must also conform to the redistricting criteria adopted by the city council and the mayor. Persons providing comments and those submitting proposed plans must identify themselves by full name and home address and provide a phone number and, if available, an email address.

According to Crosby, once the boundaries are realigned and council members wards are within the ten percentage range permitted by law, the redrawn map must be submitted to the DOJ. The DOJ then has a 60 day period to pre-clear the ward lines. Crosby said the DOJ never misses the 60 day period.

The DOJ can then ask for additional information. Once this information is sent back to the DOJ, they have another 60 day period to accept the redistricting plan.

A motion to approve Resolution No. 2011-11, adopting criteria for use in the City's 2011 redistricting process was made by Adelaide Marlatt. It was seconded by Bill Fisher and unanimously approved.

A motion to approve Resolution No. 2011-12, establishing guidelines for persons submitting comments and specific redistricting proposals was made by Marlatt and seconded by Paul Lippke. It was unanimously approved.

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## NEWS

### City special redistricting meeting set for Sept. 6

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The Rockport City Council will hold a special meeting Tuesday, Sept. 6 to further discuss the redistricting process outlined in the Aug. 20 edition of The Rockport Pilot.

At that special meeting, the Council will present and discuss draft redistricting plans; hold a map-drawing session with legal counsel (if necessary); deliberate and take action to designate one or more draft redistricting plans as illustrative plans to be proposed for public consideration and comment; and deliberate and take action to schedule one or more public hearings at which to receive comments about the designated redistricting illustrative plans from members of the public.

At an Aug. 30 workshop meeting, the Council met in executive session for more than two hours in an effort to formulate a redistricting map.

Each council member spoke with Cindy Crosby of Bickerstaff Heath Delgado LLP in Austin, who is providing legal counsel during the redistricting process. The group was able to agree on one map, which will be presented at the Sept. 6 special meeting.

According to City Manager Tom Blazek, the Council will hold a public hearing on the redistricting map Sept. 13.

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## NEWS

### City redistricting set, hearings scheduled

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The Rockport City Council will hold a public hearing about a proposed redistricting plan Tuesday, Sept. 13, Rockport City Hall, 6:30 p.m.

The Council approved moving forward with the proposed redistricting plan at a special workshop meeting Tuesday, Sept. 6.

"We tried not to split neighborhoods and keep communities of common interest together," said Mayor C.J. Wax, in regard to why the proposed redistricting plan was selected.

The redistricting draft plan consists of a map with the redrawn wards, as well as a breakdown of the persons in each ward.

The Council has been working with Cindy Crosby of Bickerstaff Heath Delgado Acosta LLP in an effort to stay within the guidelines for redistricting.

Under the proposed draft plan, there will be 2,325 people in Ward 1; 2,337 people in Ward 2; 2,314 people in Ward 3; and 2,381 people in Ward 4.

"Of the four plans, this one had the smallest deviation between the four wards," said Mayor C.J. Wax. "In my view, it was also the map with the most discernible borders between the wards."

The City Council was informed after the dissemination of the 2010 U.S. Census totals, Rockport's wards needed to be redrawn to fit within the criteria of a maximum 10 percent deviation.

The criteria states the discrepancy in the highest and lowest populated ward may not be more than 10 percent.

Additional information about the redistricting criteria was published in the Aug. 20 edition of The Rockport Pilot.

Irma Parker, city secretary, said the City has sent out more than 100 notifications to civic organizations, as well as key elected individuals with the map and the population figures. This information has also been included in a newsletter.

The proposed redistricting draft plan, as well as the current map of Rockport's wards, will be available for view at Rockport City Hall during regular operating hours.

There will be sign-in sheet, as well as a sheet for the public to leave comments. The approved resolution outlining how written comments must be presented will also be available. The most important thing, Parker said, is to submit the comments in writing.

The first reading for approval of the redistricting plan will occur Sept. 13. The second reading is scheduled for Sept. 27.

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