

## **Op-ed: Redistricting – An Invitation To Be in the Room Where It Happens!**

The hit song, “The Room Where It Happens,” in Lin Manuel Miranda’s musical, “Hamilton,” immediately conjures up images of backroom deals in a smoke-filled room with a few privileged men deciding the fate of our country. We have come a long way from the historical portrayal conveyed in Miranda’s song which describes the process leading to the Compromise of 1790. Our democracy has evolved, at least in some jurisdictions, as today we plead with City of Dallas residents to be in the “room where it happens” and help us mold the infrastructure of our democracy.

Every 10 years, government jurisdictions are responsible for drawing new district maps based on the population and demographic shifts revealed by the decennial census. To the credit of the Dallas City Council, an open, transparent and fair process has been prescribed to redraw the city council districts — a process known as redistricting. The City Council members have appointed an independent, non-partisan Redistricting Commission, populated with Dallas residents to develop the new districts, which includes eliciting comment, feedback and suggestions.

The premise behind this particular community-driven effort is to accurately reflect population changes, racial diversity and communities of interest resulting in more equitable representation. When politicians use redistricting to manipulate the outcome of elections, however, it’s called gerrymandering — a practice that undermines democracy and suppresses the voters’ voice. Voters should be picking their politicians, not the other way around. Your voice is critical, needed and encouraged, as it serves to help develop an equitable map. We have a chance to show other cities, counties, school districts and states how this process can and should be conducted, independent of the politicians it impacts.

As members of the Redistricting Commission, we are asking residents of Dallas to join us in redrawing these local lines by specifically offering your opinions at town halls and meetings where plans are being presented, including suggesting alternative maps and writing letters of support or opposition to the proposed maps. The need for redrawn district boundaries is inevitable, as population shifts have significantly altered council district balance in our city.

We recognize the challenges of undertaking this process during a global pandemic, and unfortunately public participation so far has been lacking. But there is still time to participate in this 6-month process. The Redistricting Commission will be hosting several town halls over the next few weeks to seek citizen input into this process. Additionally, we encourage citizen participation in our regular Redistricting Commission meetings, especially as we begin the process of narrowing down maps.

Additionally, one of the biggest needs of the Redistricting Commission is to help us identify communities of interest and group them together in local council districts, where possible. Finding these is notoriously difficult since there is no one authority with the requisite expertise. This is where you come in. Whether it is neighborhood association boundaries, schools or worship attendance zones, or boundaries like roads, rivers or trails, we want to see how you group and prioritize communities of interest.

As citizens of Dallas, we want you to hold the commissioners accountable. If we are proposing maps that pack or crack sizable minority populations, we want to know about it. If communities and/or neighborhoods are being cut apart or kept together, we want to know if there is a sensible reason behind it. If a district is carved around an incumbent or a challenger's house and it looks suspect, we want you to tell us.

The easiest place to get started is to visit us at [DallasRedistricting.com](http://DallasRedistricting.com); to get a list of upcoming town halls, to draw your own map or to contact your specific redistricting commissioner. Our democracy is at stake and we want you to be in the "room where it happens".

Jesse Oliver, Chair Redistricting Commission  
Roy C. Lopez, Redistricting Commissioner District 2 (writer)  
13 other members of the commission