

NEWS

Stanford professor: New School Committee election district maps follow consent decree, fed law

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WORCESTER — Stanford professor Nathaniel Persily said that the School Committee election district maps he drew are only compliant with both the consent decree as well as federal law “generally” at the final public hearing on the topic.

Persily, who drew the two new maps based on the original map proposed by the plaintiffs, said that the two majority-minority districts on each map have above 50% Citizens Voting Age Population (CVAP), as required by the consent decree.

“District 1 is 51% and District 2 is basically 50.1% in terms of combined CVAP,” Persily said.

Per the consent decree, two of the new six School Committee election districts must be majority-minority.

This means that more than 50% of the voting age population of those districts will be Black, Hispanic and Latino combined, and the boundaries of the School Committee districts must contain approximately the same number of residents.

The consent decree required that CVAP data be used to determine those majority-minority district lines.

Vangjeli asked that Persily provide the CVAP data breakdown for each district at the next meeting in July, to which Persily agreed.

Persily will continue working on the maps he drew, making changes such as changing the districts from numbers to letters to avoid confusion with City Council district numbers.

The maps will be presented to the plaintiffs, who will determine which is agreeable per the consent decree, before being presented to the Board of Election Commissioners and City Clerk Niko Vangjeli in July.

The commissioners and Vangjeli will then decide if it is acceptable for the city and, if it is, will be “set in stone,” Vangjeli said.

Number of split precincts reduced

Using the original map presented by the plaintiffs, Persily was able to reduce the number of split precincts from over 20 to six on one map, and nine on the other while also being compliant with the majority-minority districts.

Vangjeli said that the maps presented by Persily are more manageable from an election administration perspective, due to the reduction in split precincts.

“I’ve been saying since last year that my main concern is the election administration piece of this and the reduction of split precincts,” Vangjeli said. “I think we’ve come a long way since the first map of going from 26, 28 to basically a minimum of six (split) precincts, so I think we’re moving in the right direction.”

While attendance was once again low for the meeting, City Solicitor Michael Traynor as well as City Council members Candy Mero-Carlson and Kate Toomey, were present.

Mero-Carlson spoke at the hearing, raising concerns about the West Side of the city.

“One of the things that jumped out at me, almost instantly, is I believe we’ve done exactly what we have not wanted to do,” Mero-Carlson said. “And quite frankly, the West Side, once again, comes out of this pretty much unscathed.”

She questioned how it would be helpful for the minority community when they are running for office.

“If you look at it and run the numbers ... and look at District 1 City Council that has been untouched and that is once again an all-white, quite frankly, district that you’ve made,” Mero-Carlson said. “Now we’re saying that we’re basically going to go back and we’re going to elect the same people that ... we don’t want to elect.”

West Side will remain unchanged

She said that, based on the map presented by Persily, the West Side will remain unchanged and fail to accomplish the purpose of the consent decree.

“If you can make all of these changes in D-2 and D-4 and D-3, the District Council seats, why didn't you move a little of the lines D-1 because, quite frankly, you take out Lincoln Village. Why is that? Lincoln Village was D-1 but now Lincoln Village isn't the one anymore,” she said.

“When you leave all of the West Side the same way it was and yet you move everybody else,” then it is not equitable, Mero-Carlson said.

Persily said that there was not a conscious effort to preserve the City Council districts when drawing the maps, instead, using the plaintiff's map as the starting point for his maps.

He said that the West Side districts could be split in other directions than what is shown on his proposed maps but that he hasn't gotten “a reason for doing that.”

“It's about creating two districts in which minorities have a majority of the Citizens Voting Age Population,” Persily said. “Once those are drawn, then we fill in the other districts and so the question is: What would be the principles that would redraw those other districts?”

He said that while it is “certainly the case” that a City Council District that currently has a large Black or Latino population is going to be disrupted by this “in the sense that the School District will be different,” that is a function of the consent decree, he said.

“The areas that are whiter are going to have less of a disruption just because of the way that the districts are drawn with the population data,” Persily said.

Those interested in providing feedback can reach out to the Election Commission with feedback and that feedback will be given to Persily, Vangjeli said.

Each map that Persily drew and presented to the Commissioners and Vangjeli is viewable on the Board of Election Commissioners website, listed as Map 1 and Map 2, and is interactive, allowing those interested to make changes.