

STAFF REPORT

Date: May 10, 2023

To: Mayor and City Council

Thru: Doug Thornley, City Manager

Subject: Staff Report (For Possible Action): Presentation, discussion, and potential direction to staff related to the process for redistricting of the City of Reno into six wards, including the possible adoption of principles to guide the redistricting process.

From: Calli Wilsey, Director of Policy and Strategy

Department: City Manager's Office

Summary:

The Reno City Charter requires the City of Reno to be divided into six wards with the transition from five wards effective in January 2024. The changes to the ward boundaries must be delivered to the Washoe County Registrar's Office by September 1, 2023 to complete necessary steps in preparation for the 2024 general election.

Staff recommends a redistricting process similar to the one used in 2021 following the decennial Census. The process included a comprehensive community engagement strategy and working with an independent data analytics firm to prepare the ward boundary map options. The redistricting process and final recommended maps will adhere to federal and state law, the City Charter, and the guiding principles adopted by Council. These principles will be used as the guiding rationale and philosophy during the redistricting process. Staff recommends Council adopt the City of Reno Redistricting Principles as outlined in this staff report and direct staff to move forward with the redistricting process.

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

Not Applicable

Previous Council Action:

- December 1, 2021 – Council approved Ordinance No. 6613 affirming the recommended boundary changes.
- July 28, 2021 – Council adopted the City of Reno Redistricting Principles and initiated the redistricting process to rebalance ward populations following the 2020 Census.

- December 14, 2011 – Council approved ordinance number 6778 affirming the recommended boundary changes.
- August 29, 2007 – Council approved ordinance number 6524 affirming the recommended boundary changes.

Background:

Section 1.050 of the Reno City Charter requires the City of Reno to be divided into six wards, effective January 1, 2024. The transition from five to six wards, which replaces the at-large Council position with a member representing a sixth ward, is the result of state legislation (Assembly Bill 36) signed into law during the 2017 Session of the Nevada Legislature. The Reno City Charter Committee, a citizen committee appointed by members of the Reno City Council and Nevada Legislature, recommended the change.

In a subsequent review of the Reno City Charter several years later, the 2022 Reno City Charter Committee reviewed the scheduled change to the number of wards and recommended the City maintain its five wards. However, the proposed legislation (Senate Bill 12) failed to receive the necessary votes and did not move forward during the 2023 Session of the Nevada Legislature, thus confirming the need to redraw ward boundaries and create a sixth ward.

In order to transition to six wards, the Reno City Charter requires changes to ward boundaries to be adopted by ordinance with a five-sevenths affirmative vote of Council.

Discussion:

Staff recommends a redistricting process similar to the one used in 2021 following the decennial Census, which identified the need to adjust boundaries to balance the population of the City's five wards to be in compliance with City Charter requirements. The process included a comprehensive community engagement strategy and working with an independent data analytics consultant with experience in redistricting.

Using this process, staff would work with the independent data analytics firm to lead the review and preparation of ward boundary maps adhering to federal and state law, the City Charter, and the guiding principles adopted by Council. These proposed principles are outlined below and reflect the framework of the proposed redistricting process for the City. When adopted by Council, these criteria will serve as the guiding rationale and philosophy against which alternatives will be measured throughout the redistricting process.

City of Reno Redistricting Principles (2023)

- State and federal regulations – The redistricting process will abide by applicable state and federal laws, including the Federal Voting Rights Act and the Equal Protection Clause.
- Equal in population – The Reno City Charter states that wards must be as nearly equal in

population as can be conveniently provided. Because it is impossible to have wards with the same number of people, the Charter allows for up to a five percent variance from ward to ward.

- Contiguous – Wards must be geographically contiguous except for non-contiguous areas that may be placed based on Charter requirements.
- Neighborhood integrity – Wards should allow for representation of general areas of the City having similar or common interests or affinities. Geographic neighborhood and natural boundaries will be accounted for in establishing ward boundaries and being used as divisions when practicable and legal.
- Community input – Input on the redistricting process will be solicited from the public throughout the evaluation and development phases.
- Implementation date – For all purposes necessary and appropriate to conduct, administer, and effectuate the 2024 general election, the revised ward boundaries will take effect January 1, 2024 as required by the Charter. For all other purposes, the revised ward map will take effect upon the canvass of returns and declaration of result for the 2024 general election.
- Residence related to Council seats with terms expiring in 2024 – The home of record/residence of current councilmembers with existing terms that extend beyond the 2024 general election will be retained within their ward during redistricting. No deference will be provided to any potential candidate for office.
- Data source – The 2020 Census counts (PL 94-171) provided by the U.S. Bureau of the Census will be the official source of population counts for redistricting. The City may use updated demographic information from the American Community Survey for informational purposes.

The proposed principles reflect several changes compared to the version adopted in 2021. The changes can be summarized as the following:

- The addition of a new principle (*Implementation date*) and a significantly revised principle (*Residence related to Council seats with terms expiring in 2024*) are proposed to address specific issues related to the transition from five to six wards and ensure clarity in the process.
- The removal of a previous principle that suggested new ward boundaries should reflect the core of the existing ward. The transition to six wards will require a higher degree of change compared to 2021. The 2023 redistricting process offers an opportunity to rethink the ward map in its entirety, rather than focusing on changes at existing boundaries to rebalance population counts.
- Several revisions throughout the other principles for clarity.

A redline version of the 2021 City of Reno Redistricting Principles is attached for comparison purposes.

Staff and the GIS analytics firm will use these principles and public input to develop multiple map options for Council consideration. Based on initial conversations with Washoe County, new ward boundary maps need to be provided to the County Registrar by September 1, 2023.

Staff is preparing a robust, iterative community engagement process to meet timeframe requirements. Due to staff report deadlines and the need to confirm several key components of the timeline, staff will present more details about the proposed public input process and timeline at the May 10, 2023 Council meeting. A subsequent memo will be provided and attached to this agenda item in advance of the meeting.

Financial Implications:

The redistricting process will include costs to hire an independent data analytics firm and costs to implement the community engagement process. Staff is in the process of determining the final costs of the consultant contract, associated scope of work, and a budget for the public engagement process. The contract will follow applicable laws and the City of Reno Purchasing Policy. The funding is anticipated to come from the Fiscal Year 2023 contingency account in the General Fund.

Legal Implications:

Section 1.050 of the Reno City Charter outlines the requirements for the creation of ward boundaries. The proposed redistricting process meets such requirements.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends Council adopt the City of Reno Redistricting Principles and direct staff to move forward with the redistricting process as proposed.

Proposed Motion:

I move to approve staff recommendation.

Attachments:

- 2023 City of Reno Redistricting Principles (Redline)