

Vermont Legislative Apportionment Board (LAB) – 08/05/2021 Meeting

Members present in person:

Tom Little
Jeanne Albert
Robert Roper
Tom Koch (9:07)
Jeremy Hansen (9:58)

Members present remotely:

Mary Houghton

Others present in person:

Michael Chernick (9:30 – remotely then in-person, Legislative Counsel)

Others present remotely:

John Adams (Vermont Center for Geographic Information)
Benjamin Brickner

Tom little called the meeting to order at 9:01am.

The draft minutes of the June 24th meeting were presented. Motion to approve by Rob Roper, seconded by Jeanne Albert. Unanimous (4-0) moved to approve minutes by Tom Little, Mary Houghton, Rob Roper and Jeanne Albert.

Public Comment

No members of the public requested to comment.

Update on Recent Mapping Items and Resources

Tom Little opened discussion on the timing of the U.S. Census results. The final census data has not yet been released, and the deadline has been shifted to August 16th, which is Bennington Battle Day. Individuals in Legislative Counsel and at the mapping software companies advised Tom Little that it will take them some time to get the data into the system before it is available to be used with the mapping software.

John Adams from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information added that another layer is that many of these systems are legacy systems, and at VCGI once they have access to the data they will identify those areas where there are deviations outside of what's desired, to provide to the LAB.

Tom Little asked about the data, as compared to the maps made with the estimated 2019 data, and John confirmed the maps would be updated with the new data.

Tom L. and John discussed the timing of turnaround for this map data – it may take some time but John/VCGI will try to do it as quickly as possible.

Tom L. has done some work in a system called District Builder on exploratory mapping. Tom L. describes the limits of the software; that it tends to be focused more on Congressional district mapping, but can still be used for LAB purposes.

Jeanne Albert has worked to provide an anchor for the deadlines that are required by statute, including the legislation (H. 338) passed to extend those deadlines, and has devised a guidance schedule for the LAB's work. District plans for the House and Senate are due 90 days after the LAB receives the data. Dates from this schedule were discussed by Jeanne, Tom L., Tom Koch, Mary Houghton, and John Adams.

Tom L. asked if there has been any work by members on conceptual ideas for mapping. Rob Roper says that in addition to reviewing public input submissions, he is wondering if the recordings of the Maptitude trainings can be shared again.

Follow-up: Have the links to prior Maptitude training session recirculated.

Mary Houghton asked about other tech support not specific to the mapping tools. Tom suggested she reach out to Mia Kro in the Secretary of State's office.

Jeanne asked if there is a collection of the public input submissions. Rob volunteered to collect them together. Tom L. discussed submissions from Huntington, which all but one felt dissatisfied with inclusion in the Addison Senate District and in a House district dominated by a town in a different county. Challenges posed by this region were discussed by Tom L., Tom K., Jeanne and Rob, including subdivision, or inclusion in other districts, and the deviations created by the possibilities.

Tom L.'s Memo from July 31st

Tom L. discussed his memo (copy attached to these Minutes), including that in addition to his recommendation that the board meet more often, he would encourage board members to do substantial individual or paired mapping work, once Maptitude is ready, so that by the beginning of September the Board has some maps to look at.

House districts that now divide a town between two different House districts were discussed; there are eight of these: Milton, Hinesburg, Springfield, Whitingham, St. Albans, Sunderland, Troy and Hartford.. Rob suggested collecting input from Town or City Clerks in their districts, to solicit their input on balloting, or local sentiment.

Michael Chernick said that he has had multiple confirmations from the U.S. Census Bureau that the data will be released August 16th. He has also heard from Maptitude that they're saying they will have the data in by August 21st.

Rob mentioned that the move to voting by mail may make it easier for voters in districts that have changed, as individuals will receive their ballot in the mail and may not need to figure out where to go to vote, if their polling place has changed due to redistricting.

Jeremy Hansen says that he may be able to get the data into Maptitude before Legislative Counsel does, depending on workload. Tom L., Michael and Jeremy discussed timing and dates.

Statewide Public Hearings

Tom L. is interested in holding a public meeting in every single county, with a combination of in-person and remote. Mary thinks this is a great idea to do, including in the Southern part of the state. Windham and Windsor are easy for her, Bennington is harder. Rob is willing to do some as well, and suggested a single standard PowerPoint presentation to be used by everyone, so that they're communicating the same thing.

Tom L. mentioned that he will approach Chris Winters in the Secretary of State's office to have some remote capacity as well, so that board members could attend remotely in addition to the member there in person.

Tom L. mentioned that in some of these areas the negative population deviations are the greatest.

Tom K. suggests that if there's a PowerPoint, make it very brief.

Tom L. discussed his public hearing experience on the 2019 Governor's Marijuana Advisory Commission.

The board discussed geographic and logistical coverage to hold these meetings.

Jeanne asked if deviations of 10 percent would be considered unconstitutional. Rob suggested that at a minimum they would be considered constitutionally challengeable.

Jeanne and Rob discussed a survey monkey poll and will contact the Secretary of State's office about it. Jeanne discussed what information should be asked of people – town they live in, what district they're in? Tom Koch discussed the survey participant's name being an optional field. Jeremy Hansen provided input.

Rob will take input from LAB members, rewrite the survey, and get to Eric Covey at the Secretary of State's office. Eric will work with Mia Kro to get the survey posted on the website. Board will get final comments to Jeanne and Rob by Monday.

Tom L. says that this should be accompanied by a press release announcing its launch.

Jeanne discussed outreach to specific people/entities – she heard from an Addison Independent reporter, who wants to run a story.

Mary discussed the VTDigger commentary about apportionment in Vermont, and Rob discussed a blog that had responded to the commentary. Rob discussed the national standards from the organization cited, but said that in his opinion they don't apply to Vermont, as there are not many opportunities for gerrymandering in Vermont: the conformation to town lines means that you aren't going to see "octopus districts." Rob said that he has sent a reply to the author of the commentary saying as much.

Jeanne discussed the national conversation around independent redistricting boards, suggesting that the real question is "what are the results, or what have the results been" rather than the structure.

Tom L. asked if, according to this specific national scorecard, how many rank high and how many fail. Jeremy responded that a recently published analysis found six states that conformed to the study's favorable criteria.

Tom Koch discussed single member districts.

Tom L. opened public comment again – there was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:46pm.