

Technical Information and Instructions for Ward Taskforces

Prepared by the DC Subcommittee on Redistricting with assistance from

The Office of Planning, Board of Elections and Ethics, Office of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, and Office of the Chief Technology Officer

Updated 7/12/2011

Congratulations on being selected as a Ward Taskforce member! The redistricting process is an important part of a representative democracy, and we hope this will be an enjoyable and meaningful opportunity to be a part of public life in the District. This document should be read in conjunction with the briefing document distributed to Council Members last month, which describes in more general terms the Single Member District and Advisory Neighborhood Commission redistricting process and provides important deadlines associated with this work. In addition, hard copy maps will be distributed to Taskforce leadership but are available to all members of the public in electronic form at <https://sites.google.com/a/dc.gov/redistricting/>.

This technical memo will help you achieve your redistricting goals, outlining the specific tools at your disposal and describing the mechanisms through which you can reach out to the District government for assistance. The Office of Planning will be your primary point of contact for technical drafting and data questions, while the Council Subcommittee staff will be a resource on any legal and policy questions you may have. The communication methods described below will ensure that we are able to receive, process, reply and keep a record of each exchange you have with the government, with the objective of efficiently providing support to all eight Ward Taskforces. The required status reports will provide a formal way for you to “check in” and allow us to ensure that you are on track toward the completion date required by law and receiving all the support you need.

Background

For Ward Taskforce leaders and participants to understand the technical aspects of adjusting Single Member District and Advisory Neighborhood Commission boundaries for the District of Columbia, it is best to understand how the process ends and work backwards:

- The Council will ultimately adopt final ANC and SMD boundaries in legislation. This means that precise descriptions of these boundaries (in words) are essential. (The Council will be guided by your recommendations, though they are free to make their own decisions.)
- Your Report will need to include precise descriptions of those boundaries (in words) following specific guidelines spelled out below. Maps illustrate your recommendations, but it is the words that matter.

- Unlike in previous redistricting cycles it is important that you validate that your words place the boundaries where you intend (and the resulting populations in each SMD and ANC) by working with the professional mapmakers at the Office of Planning before you submit your Report to the Council.
- The Office of Planning has no role in recommending where boundaries should be, but they will advise the Council on whether the language recommended by the Taskforce describes boundaries clearly. The Office of Planning will also confirm the numbers of persons in each area.
- The Office of Planning has created maps and data tables for your use, has established specific mechanisms for communicating with you about this effort, and will assist you with clarifying proposed boundary text within the limits of available resources.

Your Charge

- You are to develop a Report that recommends specific boundaries (in words) for updated SMDs and ANCs.
- Each SMD is to contain approximately 2000 persons. The law gives preference to maintaining SMD populations plus or minus 5% (between 1900 and 2100 persons), but it also gives exemptions from this numerical range for a variety of reasons, such as to avoid splitting Census Blocks or to maintain neighborhood cohesiveness.
- While it is for you to decide whether it is necessary to split a Census Block, this typically will not be needed and increases the amount of administrative time necessary for the government to process your proposal. If you do wish to split a Census Block, you will need to work with the Office of Planning to obtain their estimate of the numbers of persons living in each portion of that block and provide for an appropriate amount of additional lead time at each stage of the redistricting process.
- Please note that precision counts in delineating political boundaries, and that it can be much more challenging to create clear text descriptions of lines on a map than one might think. The attached appendix provides a number of examples of “preferred” methods of describing boundary lines, such as existing SMD boundaries, center lines of streets or alleys, and property boundaries, among others.

Deadlines

- July 1, 2011, Ward Council Members appoint task force members. At-Large Council Members and the Chairman may each appoint one member to each Ward task force.
- August 1, 2011, a first progress report is due to the Subcommittee on Redistricting from each task force
- September 1, 2011, a second progress report is due to the Subcommittee on Redistricting from each task force
- Within 90 days after the Ward Redistricting Act of 2011 is signed by the Mayor, each Ward task force submits its report to the Council. As of this writing, the Mayor was expected to sign the Act by July 12, 2011.

What You Will Receive From the Office of Planning

- Two copies of a wall-sized map of the entire Ward. This map shows the Census Block identifier and numbers of persons in each Census Block, together with population estimates for existing ANCs and SMDs. This will likely be your principal tool for delineating new boundaries.
- Two copies each of large-format ANC-level map for your Ward. Where multiple ANCs fit on a single page, the Office of Planning will conserve paper and print fewer pages. These maps will show additional detail (i.e., buildings, property boundaries, etc.) They may be useful in considering how a Census Block might be split, should you determine that it is necessary to do so.
- All of this information will be available electronically as well. A central location for all of these documents is <https://sites.google.com/a/dc.gov/redistricting/>. This site is maintained by the Office of Planning, and is accessible to the public.
- This online form (<http://goo.gl/Ldwms>) allows the Office of Planning to track all of your requests and the Office's answers to them. The Office of Planning will only evaluate populations on either side of a proposed split when they are submitted through this form.
- All requests to evaluate split blocks should be made no later than 4 weeks before the deadline for submitting your Report, or 2 weeks prior to a status report deadline.

- Please do not wait until your deadline is near to begin sending us language to evaluate. We require a minimum of 2 weeks to verify that your language is clear enough for us to draw the necessary boundaries properly – more if you intend to split blocks.

Format for Proposed Boundary Language

- Maps may be submitted as illustrations included in your report, but it is the text describing each boundary that really matters. This language actually becomes law as part of the District of Columbia Official Code, so using precise language that is clear even to third parties unfamiliar with an individual neighborhood is important. The appendix will show you examples of ways to describe boundaries that are clear to lawmakers and technical support personnel, and you can always reach out with any specific questions you have.
- There can be many ways to describe the same line on a map, but we ask that everyone use the same approach. This helps us validate the proposed language efficiently, and will help citizens once the new boundaries become law.
- In some cases it may be better to revise existing language, even if your intent is substantially the same. Because we have better information than we did a decade ago (e.g., property boundaries) you may be able to describe your intended boundary more accurately or more simply by referring to property boundaries.
- For each Single Member District:
 - Please begin each SMD text on a new line.
 - If you are retaining the existing boundaries of a SMD with no changes at all, please begin with this notation ***[Unchanged from 2002]***.
 - Begin with the phrase “All streets are in the Northwest quadrant” or “All streets are in the Southeast quadrant, except as noted” unless that does not make sense in your area. In locations where all streets are not all in the same quadrant, be sure to add 2-letter quadrant designations for each street.
 - Begin at the northernmost easily identifiable point (at “12 o-clock” -- typically a street intersection) and describe the boundaries in a clockwise direction until returning to the same point.
 - Put each change of direction on a new line. (See the appendix for an example.)
 - Because preference is given to respecting Census Block boundaries, most SMD boundaries will be street centerlines.
 - Where Census Block boundaries (usually street centerlines) are not adequate, these are examples of preferred alternatives to use when splitting Census Blocks:
 - Alleys
 - Property boundaries (these are now widely available)

- “Lines extending” existing features like streets or property boundaries. For these, we will do our best to continue the existing line at exactly the same angle as the last portion of that line.
 - Remember that you will need to use the online form to provide the precise language for splitting a Census Block, and to obtain the Office of Planning’s official population estimate for each portion of that block.
 - Use that same form to obtain the Office of Planning’s official population estimates for blocks that are split using existing language (e.g., for campuses). Existing language is ok as-is.
- Please verify that the description of the SMD on one side of a line matches the description of the SMD on the other side of a line without overlapping or gaps.
- It is extremely rare for a SMD to cross a Ward boundary. Unless you intend to diverge from the recently-adopted Ward boundaries, your language for SMD boundaries at the edges of Wards should track the language in the Ward legislation precisely. That language can be found here: <http://www.dccouncil.washington.dc.us/images/00001/20110623094901.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need to follow these procedures?

- Multiple rounds of technical corrections were required in the last redistricting cycle because the language describing the SMDs was not precise enough to describe boundaries clearly. Advances in technology will allow the District government to provide technical support in a way we were unable to a decade ago.

Can the Office of Planning meet with my Taskforce?

- The Office of Planning is committed to assisting each Ward Taskforce in creating a clear and complete report, based on the best data available. The Office will host an orientation meeting for the leadership of all eight Taskforces. The Office of Planning also stands ready to respond to Taskforce questions submitted as described above. Due to the volume of meetings of Taskforce groups and subgroups, the Office of Planning will not be able to send a representative to all Taskforce meetings, but will assist each Taskforce in meeting the redistricting process guidelines.

What are Census Tracts, Block Groups, and Blocks?

- Census Tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county or state established by the U.S. Census Bureau, and typically have about 4,000 residents. Much of the most detailed Census data available is released at the Census Tract level.

- Census Block Groups are the next smaller unit of census geography. They fit inside Census Tracts, and are themselves collections of Census Blocks.
- Census Blocks are the smallest unit of census geography, and the smallest area for which the Census Bureau distributes data. They are primarily bounded by streets or other visible features, but may also be bounded by governmental unit boundaries. Blocks fit into Block Groups, which fit into Tracts. Only data from the full Decennial Census are available (e.g., populations and housing unit counts, and basic data on race, ethnicity, and age.)
- No Census Data is made available for areas smaller than a Census Block. (The Office of Planning must estimate populations for smaller areas.)

Should we split blocks or not?

- While that is for you to recommend, you typically will not need to split an individual block, and can increase the speed with which your proposal is reviewed by avoiding splitting blocks. DC Law identifies that each SMD should have approximately 2000 persons. It suggests a +/- 5% tolerance, but also allows exemptions from that range for reasons such as Census Block boundaries and the cohesiveness of neighborhoods. You must balance the value of having a relatively uniform number of constituents per Single Member District against the complexities of setting more intricate boundaries (and explaining them to people for the next decade.) Clarifying exactly how you would split a block and estimating the population in each portion of a block does take time and effort.

What about Census Blocks that are already split?

- Where Census Blocks are split under existing law, the Office of Planning has already generated estimates of the populations in each portion of that block. No special procedure is required if you wish to retain the existing language defining that part of an SMD border.

What about errors in the Census data?

- There plainly are errors in the Census data. However, DC law (and that of most other jurisdictions) requires us to use the official Census data until Census corrects it. We are not confident that we will receive corrections before Taskforce reports are due. Thus, Taskforces should use the official Census data as presented even if errors are visible in it.
- There are cases where housing units (and their occupants) are clearly assigned to the wrong places (like tiny triangle parks.) Sometimes it is clear where those housing units should have been counted across the street or down the block, but in most cases it isn't. Either way, we must use the numbers as they are.

What about group quarters?

- Group quarters are places where people live or stay in a group living arrangement, and is not a typical household-type living arrangement. Group quarters include college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities, and worker's dormitories.
- You have information that identifies where group quarters populations are included in Census Blocks. This information may be helpful if you need to split a block, but all residents must be counted, irrespective of their status.

What about new buildings, new occupants, recent demolitions, etc.?

- Changes since Census Day 2010 (April 1, 2010) cannot be considered in redistricting. What matters is the population on that day, not since then. Even if significant changes have occurred since that time, we cannot consider them when updating these boundaries.

How do you evaluate split blocks?

- The Office of Planning uses DC's own housing unit data as its principal means of estimating populations on either side of a proposed line splitting a block. In some cases group quarters may affect the result. In others, evident errors may cause us to assign populations to one side of a line or another.

Why are some ANC's combined on large maps rather than presented on individual maps?

- For efficiency, we produce the entire ANC map series on the same size page. This large page is required for some of our larger ANC's, but in other cases it can easily cover several. We present them together to save paper and production time.

Can I have more maps?

- Within limits, the Office of Planning can print more maps. Please understand, however, that we have very limited capacity to do this.
- If your Taskforce is organized by ANC and the fact that we have printed some ANC's on the same maps does not work for you, let us know and we will provide 2 copies for each of your ANC working groups.
- Electronic copies of any of our maps are available in .pdf format to browse on your computer, or to reprint at commercial printers like FedEx Office at 325 7th St NW, telephone (202) 347-8730, Automated Graphic Imaging at 1090 Vermont Ave NW, (202) 371-5484, or any of several others. (We do not recommend any particular vendor.) Maps may be found at <https://sites.google.com/a/dc.gov/redistricting/>

Can individual Task Force members or ANC members request more maps?

- The Office of Planning has very limited capacity to respond to individual requests for maps while it is serving the needs of the eight Taskforces.
- We will not be able to provide our customary services to ANC members for maps relating to redistricting at this time.
- Please channel all requests for redistricting maps through the leadership of your Taskforce.

What about Voting Precinct Boundaries?

- The Board of Elections and Ethics would ultimately like to make Precincts more consistent with SMDs. For now they will align Precincts with the new Ward boundaries; sometime next year they will consider making further changes to align them with the new SMDs.

Why do some Census Block boundaries look sloppy while most of them look correct? What lines count?

- In most cases Census Block boundaries are very accurate, especially for boundaries that are streets. In others, especially where boundaries are property lines or other invisible boundaries, the quality of what the Census provides can be quite poor.
- Census Blocks are defined by their boundary features. If a boundary is drawn poorly, what matters is where the bounding features *should* have been drawn, not where they *were* drawn.

- Where a block boundary looks like a poorly-drawn property boundary, it generally is exactly that. If this is material to your work, Chairs and Co-chairs may contact us with the specifics and we can verify if that boundary is in fact meant to be a property boundary.

Appendix 1 – Example format for ANC and SMD descriptions.

The text below is presented in the requested format. (These particular boundaries are from existing law, and may not be the boundaries chosen for ANC 1A going forward.)

Description of ANC 1A Boundaries

- *All streets are located in the Northwest quadrant.*
- *Beginning at the intersection of 16th Street and Spring Road;*
- *East on Spring Road to New Hampshire Avenue;*
- *Northeast on New Hampshire Avenue to Rock Creek Church Road;*
- *East on Rock Creek Church Road to Park Place;*
- *South on Park Place to Columbia Road;*
- *West on Columbia Road to Sherman Avenue;*
- *South on Sherman Avenue to Harvard Street;*
- *West on Harvard Street to 15th Street;*
- *North on 15th Street to Columbia Road;*
- *West on Columbia Road to 16th Street;*
- *North on 16th Street to Spring Road to the point of beginning.*

Description of Single Member District (SMD) 1A01 Boundaries

- *All streets are located in the Northwest quadrant.*
- *Beginning at the intersection of 16th Street and Spring Road;*
- *South on Spring Road to Spring Place;*
- *East on Spring Place to Ogden Street;*
- *East on Ogden Street to Hertford Place;*
- *South on Hertford Place to Oak Street;*
- *East on Oak Street to Center Street;*
- *North on Center Street to Ogden Street;*
- *East on Ogden Street to 14th Street;*
- *North on 14th Street to Otis Street;*
- *West on Otis Street to Center Street;*
- *North on Center Street to Parkwood Place;*
- *East on Parkwood Place to 14th Street;*

- North on 14th Street to Spring Road;
- West on Spring Road to the point of beginning.

Example: "Line Extending" a street or other feature

- ...
- South on 32nd St to E St;
- West on E Street to its end;
- Continuing West on a line extending E St in the same direction to the centerline of the Anacostia River;
- Continuing North on the centerline of the Anacostia River to East Capitol Street;
- ...

Example: Property Line Description

Note that property lines do not extend to the street centerlines, so we include language projecting those property lines to the streets.

- ...
- North on Reno Road to Upton Street;
- West on Upton Street to a projection of the property line between 4020 Reno Road and 3610 Upton Street;
- Southwest on the projection of said property line and on that property line to the rear property line of 4020 Reno Road;
- Southeast on the rear property line of 4020 Reno Road to its intersection with the rear boundary line of 3505 Tilden Street;
- West along the rear property lines of all properties on Tilden Street and along the projection of the rear property line of 3642 Tilden Street to its intersection with 37th Street.
- ...

Example: Alley Boundary and Property Boundary

- ...
- South on Champlain Street to a projection of the property line between 2380 and 2384 Champlain Street;
- West on the projection of said property line and on that property line to the alley;
- North on the alley to its end;
- Continuing on a line extending said alley in the same direction to its intersection with Euclid St;
- West on Euclid St to Columbia Road;
- ...

Example: No change from prior SMD boundary line

- **[Unchanged from 2002]**
- All streets are located in the Northwest quadrant.
- Beginning at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Underwood Street;
- East on Underwood Street to Piney Branch Road;

• ...

Appendix 2 – Online form for considering splitting blocks

Request to split a Census Block for redistricting purposes -- For use by Ward Task Force Chairs and Co-Chairs only, please.

This form gives the Office of Planning the information it needs to estimate populations on either side of a line that would split a Census Block.

DC law sets both a 2000-person target for the population in a Single Member District and a goal of respecting Census Block boundaries. Neither is clearly more important than the other. Neighborhood cohesiveness is also a factor in deciding whether a block needs to be split.

All of the information on this form is required. OP will respond to you as soon as possible, typically within 3 business days. Please note that if your proposed language is ambiguous, unclear, or inconsistent with guidance from the Redistricting Committee, we will not be able to act on your request.

Although we understand that many citizens have questions about splitting Census Blocks, including individual Task Force members, at this time we are only able to process requests from the Task Force leaders.

We will respond as soon as possible, and aim to get back to you within 3 business days.

Please do not wait until the last weeks before your deadline — we expect to be extremely busy at that time and may not be able to respond to you in a timely fashion.

* Required

Your name *

Your email *

Confirm your email *

2010 Census Tract number *

This 1 to 4-digit number appears on maps from the Office of Planning (e.g., 1, 40.01, 109, etc.).

2010 Census Block number *

This is a 4-digit number and appears on maps from the Office of Planning

What SMD was this block in prior to redistricting? *

This helps us find it quickly and is a check against typos

What type of split is this? *

The Committee recommends the types of splits specified below

- ☐ Preferred: An existing SMD boundary (where this block is already split today)
- ☐ Preferred: An alley centerline
- ☐ Preferred: A property boundary
- ☐ Preferred: A line extending an existing street or other feature
- ☐ Preferred: Including or excluding buildings with specified addresses
- ☐ Preferred: A combination of other "preferred" options listed above
- ☐ Other:

Specific language (as it would be written in legislation) describing the proposed split *

Your language should be as simple as possible while being unambiguous