Less than 17 months after San Mateo County supervisors blessed the new boundaries of their districts, the county announced Wednesday it would go back to the drawing board to settle a discrimination lawsuit.

The boundaries "weren't drawn with an eye toward compliance to the voting rights law," said Robert Rubin, a civil rights attorney and co-lead counsel for the six Asian and Latino residents who sued the county in April 2011. The plaintiffs alleged that the county's at-large system for electing supervisors diluted the voting power of Asian and Latino voters, in violation of the California Voting Rights Act.

"Fifty percent of the county is Asian or Latino and yet in the past 20 years there's been only one Latino elected and no Asians elected," Rubin said in a phone interview Wednesday.

Until Nov. 6, when 58.7 percent of voters approved a switch to district-only elections, San Mateo was the only county in California in which supervisors were chosen countywide.

In 2010, the board of supervisors rejected a recommendation that the question of district versus at-large elections be put on the ballot. The board asserted that the at-large system is superior because it makes supervisors more accountable to the whole county.

But as a trial date for the lawsuit approached, the supervisors backtracked last year and placed the question on the ballot after all.

In addition to possibly redrawing district boundaries, the county agreed as part of the settlement to pay an estimated $650,000 in attorneys' fees to the plaintiffs' lawyers, said Michael von Loewenfeldt, one of the lawyers hired by the county to fight the lawsuit.

Settling the lawsuit does not mean the county agrees that the at-large system was discriminatory, he said, adding that it just seemed to be the logical thing to do after voters chose to go with district elections. And it was a cheaper route than taking the case to trial, he added.
"It's in no way a concession that, before, anything was wrong; it just doesn't matter anymore," von Loewenfeldt said.

Under terms of the settlement, a nine-person redistricting committee comprised of public officials and private citizens will be selected by the board of supervisors.

The committee, which could include Supervisors Adrienne Tissier and Warren Slocum, will hold public meetings around the county to get feedback on where to draw the boundary lines. It will present recommended district boundaries to the full board Oct. 8, according to an announcement released by the county Wednesday. The aim is to have district lines clarified in time for the June 2015 election, when Supervisors Carole Groom and Don Horsley would either step down or run again.

Von Loewenfeldt said the county didn't agree to redraw the district lines, just to "review" them.

"There's no agreement that anything will change," he said. "The county will appoint an advisory committee that will analyze the boundaries."

Groom, who was board president in 2011, said she feels "very comfortable" that the current boundaries didn't fracture minority populations. At the time, she appointed Tissier and now-retired Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson to the ad-hoc committee overseeing the redistricting effort because they represented diverse districts. Neither supervisor voiced discrimination concerns, she said.

Board President Horsley, who helped negotiate the settlement with Groom and other officials, said the county has budgeted up to $100,000 to hire consultants and do community outreach about the redistricting. He said he doesn't anticipate major changes.

"It's hard to say," Horsley said. "I think they'll incrementally change a couple of streets here or there. I don't think it will be a dramatic shift."

Anyone interested in joining the committee can apply starting Monday by going online at www.smcgov.org/districtlines or picking up an application from the county manager's office on the first floor of 400 County Center, Redwood City.

Email Bonnie Eslinger at beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com; follow her at twitter.com/bonnieeslinger.
Saugus Union Votes 4-1 In Support Of Moving School Board Elections

Thu, 02/21/2013 - 11:44am | Perry Smith

With a 4-1 vote, Saugus Union School District board members approved the moving their school elections from odd- to even-numbered years to line up with the general election Wednesday.

“It’s a huge cost savings, and the intention is to cast a broader net of voters in Santa Clarita,” said board President Judy Umeck.

The next step is for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to approve the move before it can become official.

In addition to saving the district tens of thousands of dollars in election costs, the change also addresses a potential issue that has been brought up in Antelope Valley, where Lancaster Mayor R. Rex Parris is suing the city of Palmdale, which has a school that bears his name, over the California Voters Rights Act.

Parris announced last month that he has signed on as co-counsel for a voting rights lawsuit brought against Palmdale over the California Voter Rights Act.

The CVRA is legislation that was signed into law in 2002, recently upheld as a constitutional extension of the Voter Rights Act of 1965.

The move is meant to help minority voters who sued over disenfranchisement with the electoral process, citing a lack of representation in elections.

The current board reflects the demographics of Saugus Union’s constituency, Umeck said, but it was a proactive move.

“What we are doing is addressing the concern,” Umeck said.

One of the concerns brought up by board member Stephen Winkler, who was the lone dissenting vote, was that it would lessen the attention to school elections.

“That was a concern that was brought up,” Umeck said. “But we have a community that’s very involved in the education of their kids.

“I would say the percentage of voters that come out do not reflect the level of involvement of parents in our schools.”
The move, if approved, would also extend the terms of its current board members by a year.

Umeck, Paul De La Cerda and Doug Bryce are now up for election in 2014; Winkler and Rose Koscielny are now up for election in 2016.
STOCKTON - Lincoln Unified Superintendent Tom Uslan has presented a proposal to establish geographic trustee areas that, if adopted, would guarantee representation for citizens from throughout the school district. A vote on the proposal could be held in a little more than two months.

Currently, four of the five board members live west of Interstate 5 in the Brookside and Lincoln Village West neighborhoods, even though about 60 percent of district residents live east of the freeway. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Brookside and Lincoln Village West are more affluent and less diverse than the rest of the district.

Wednesday night, Uslan released a map outlining five proposed trustee areas, each with about 9,000 residents, 6,000 of voting age.

After Uslan's presentation, the board unanimously voted to hear public comment on the matter at the next three board meetings, with a possible vote at the May 8 meeting at Mable Barron Elementary.

If the proposed map is approved, the areas west of the freeway would be guaranteed two board members. Uslan said the map could still be "tinkered with."

"There is room for board input and public input in the coming weeks on what the map might look like," Uslan said.

Of the five largest unified school districts in San Joaquin County - Stockton, Lodi, Manteca, Tracy and Lincoln - only Lincoln and Tracy choose their board members in at-large elections.

In 2001, the California Voting Rights Act made school districts and other government entities that use at-large election systems vulnerable to legal attack. In some cases, lawsuits have cost school districts and other governments sizable sums of money.
Advocates for trustee areas argue it is a more democratic system than at-large elections. They say trustee areas can lead to greater diversity on government bodies and also make it less expensive for candidates to run for office.

Board members who spoke on the matter Wednesday were supportive of the proposal, though they said they believe all the current trustees do a good job representing the needs of all of the district’s 8,000 students.

"Our board has always worked for every student in Lincoln Unified," board President Susan Lenz said. "I don't feel anyone because they live near a school has ever favored that school."

Trustee Don Ruhstaller added, "I think this is a good starting point. My concern is we all remember ... we have to continue representing every student."

If adopted, area voting would begin in 2014, the next regularly scheduled Lincoln elections. None of the current board members would be affected.

Contact reporter Roger Phillips at (209) 546-8299or rphillips@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/phillipsblog.
Anaheim's Elections Advisory Committee Faces Problems

By ADAM ELMAHREK

Anaheim's Citizens Advisory Committee, assigned to recommend in less than three months potentially sweeping changes to the way City Council members are elected, is facing the abrupt resignations of three of its 10 voting members and withering criticism from its own chairwoman, raising questions about whether the committee can make a competent recommendation by its May 31 deadline.

Chairwoman Vivian Pham said city staff has refused to provide information relevant to forming council districts by ignoring her requests for specific speakers to present information. Latino activists and an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit have demanded council districts to better represent Latinos.

“I feel that the presentations we have had are more fluff. I feel like they're distracting us from the real issue of districting,” Pham said. “We can't make an informative decision because they won't give us the information.”

Further complicating the committee’s work, one of the new appointees, Keith Olesen, denounced “90 percent” of the committee and its chairwoman as “incompetent” on a neighborhood message board, according to a resident who spoke at the last committee meeting.

Olesen, who wrote the comments before he was appointed, also wrote that committee members have known from the start how they would vote at the end of the committee’s seven-month study, echoing suspicions from Latino activists that the committee is rigged to ultimately reject council districts.
Olesen said he also doubts whether the committee can complete its work.

Finding an answer to the city’s election problems is “certainly not practical, given the makeup of the committee and the subject at hand,” Olesen said. “There is some question in people’s minds as to what it is we’re exactly doing.”

The committee, which according to city spokeswoman Ruth Ruiz has so far cost city taxpayers $18,395, was created after the ACLU filed a lawsuit alleging that the city’s at-large voting system violates the 2001 California Voting Rights Act by disenfranchising Latinos, who constitute more than half of the city’s residents. None of the council members is Latino.

Activists argue that council districts, which would allow voters to vote only for candidates in their districts, would provide adequate Latino representation by ensuring that heavily Latino areas get their own council representatives.

The committee, which first met in October, was thought to be assigned to recommend potential electoral system changes so that residents could vote on them in the June 2014 primary election. A new electoral system could then be in place by the next council election in November 2014.

And although that is one option, Ruiz said, the committee can make recommendations that don’t include an election system change, like methods to improve voter participation.

“This is a very proactive step the city has taken to bring in citizen engagement to study the electoral system,” Ruiz said.

Yet since its inception, the committee’s critics have denounced it as an underhanded method by the council majority to delay the implementation of council districts.

Latino activists and former Councilwoman Lorri Galloway, who along with Mayor Tom Tait voted for council districts, argued that because each council member made two appointmens, the committee would be stacked 6 to 4 with a majority of members against the move.
“I don’t think it has any validity,” Amin David, president emeritus of Los Amigos of Orange County, the grassroots Latino group, and a plaintiff in the lawsuit, had said when the committee was formed. “It’s structured by the City Council majority.”

Tait had pushed to place the council districts issue on last November’s general election ballot, but a three-member council majority rejected the move.

Members of the council majority — Kris Murray, Gail Eastman and then Councilman Harry Sidhu — hadn’t said they were against council districts but had argued that activists were unclear about what they wanted in a such a system, such as the number of districts. Council elections needed in-depth study before a major election system change, they argued.

Murray appointed Olesen and Sandy Day, both vocal opponents of council districts, to replace two committee members who abruptly resigned six meetings and four months into the process because of scheduling conflicts, according to a city news release.

One other seat, which was vacated by Sidhu appointee Peter Argarwal, remains open. Council members are scheduled Tuesday to consider forming a subcommittee to select Argawal's replacement.

Thursday's was the first meeting of Murray's appointees.

“They [Day's and Olesen's] appointments are a slap in the face to the Hispanic residents of the city and the minorities of this city,” resident Steve Perez said at the meeting. “They are obviously closed-minded to the goals of this committee.”

Olesen wrote in his message board comments that the committee appointees were selected for specific agendas.

Perez read Olesen's writings into the record during last Thursday's committee meeting.

“Everyone who is appointed to this committee is appointed for a specific reason,” Perez said, referring to Olesen's message board post, which was texted to Perez moments before he spoke by Save Anaheim blogger Jason Young. “They already know which way they are voting.”

“I believe that is how this started, yeah,” Olesen replied.
For Eric Altman, executive director of Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development, which has supported council districts, Olesen's comments affirm that the results of the committee's work are predetermined.

“From the beginning, council member Murray has claimed to have an open mind and to be looking for what is best for the people of Anaheim for this committee,” Altman said. “If her appointees have come into this process with preformed opinions, even though she claims not to have a preformed opinion, then I think that pretty much predicts the outcome.”

Altman and Olesen both said in interviews that if they were gambling types, they would bet on the results.

“Most people are going to get appointed to the committee mostly because they reflect the views of the person that appointed them. I don't know if that's a good or bad thing, it just makes sense,” Olesen said. “But who knows, somebody may come up with that one little gem that no one else though of … one of those eureka moments.”

As for his remarks about Pham and 90 percent of the committee members, Olesen said Pham shouldn't be offended. He also said her handling of meetings as chairwoman has improved lately.

“If I was her, I wouldn't care,” Olesen said. “For the same reason I wouldn't care if people said something weird about me.”

Pham said that she would judge Olesen by his actions on the committee. “Unless they personally attack me, I'm not going to react to the statement,” she said.

According to Olesen, Murray monitors and sometimes responds to postings on the message board on which Olesen disparaged committee members and expressed his opinions about council districts.

Murray did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Tait wouldn't address the committee's problems directly but pointed out that he voted against forming the committee.
“It's the most fundamental question of how the people should be governed, and the best way to answer that question is through the ballot. And having districting or not is a relatively simple question,” Tait said.

So far, committee members who have expressed opinions about council districts have followed the split council's fault line.

Gloria Ma’ae, an Eastman appointee, has said that Latinos have had plenty of representation because two past council members have been Latino. "Personally, I want too be represented as an individual, as a human being, as a resident, not just as a Latina," she said at a December committee meeting.

Ma'ae also sent an email to council members last July expressing opposition to council districts.

Pham, appointed by Tait, said she has been strategizing with Altman and others in favor of council districts.

Martin Lopez, a Galloway appointee, was one of the activists pushing for council districts before the committee was formed.

From the first meeting, Larry Larsen and Bill Dalati —the former a Galloway appointee, the latter appointed by Tait — tried to raise council districts as the most pertinent issue the committee is facing.

Meanwhile, committee members Anthony Armas, an Eastman appointee, and Vic Real, appointed by Sidhu, have been less forthcoming with their opinions or have yet to form any.

Real said he hasn't formed an opinion on council districts but acknowledges that other committee members were appointed with an agenda.

“I feel like I'm a college student reading a textbook, but I cannot take a test until I finish the textbook," Real said.

Altman said that despite its flaws and potentially fixed outcome, the committee remains the public's only process by which to express opinions on the city's elections system. So far, most public speakers have favored council districts, he said.
Nonetheless, Altman and Pham also argue that the committee appears to be a smoke screen, designed to stall progress on the lawsuit and the issue in general.

The committee has had presentations on the state's Voting Rights Act and information on geographic voting patterns in the 2010 election. But it has yet to receive more detailed information, such as an analysis of racially polarized voting patterns in the city.

This information would be critical to determining whether the ACLU lawsuit has merit, because it would show whether Latinos have consistently voted for the same candidates but have been unable to elect them.

In at least one instance, however, city staffers denied a request for that information, arguing that that solving the problems raised in the lawsuit doesn't fall under the purview of the committee's responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the city has filed court actions to postpone the lawsuit's proceedings, arguing that the committee's work could provide a remedy that would make the lawsuit moot.

It's this kind of circular logic that fuels conclusions dubious about the committee's true purpose, according to Pham and Altman.

“I do feel it's kind of a delaying tactic for the [council] majority to delay the lawsuit,” Pham said.
Abuse pollutes state environmental law

The California Environmental Quality Act, signed into law by Gov. Ronald Reagan, is being used for unintended purposes and needs fixing.

George Skelton

Capitol Journal

1:15 AM PDT, March 11, 2013

SACRAMENTO — State Sen. Jerry Hill grew up in San Francisco and vividly remembers the rare suffocating days of late summer when the fog fled and people sweltered.

The city's natural air conditioner clicked off, temperatures soared into the 90s and — back then — the skies boiled into a toxic soup.

"There'd be four or five hot days, around 1963 and 1964, when I was playing high school football and the smog was so thick I couldn't run 10 yards without stopping and choking to get air," remembers Hill, 65, new chairman of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee.

"We've come a long way. The air is pretty much smog-free now. I don't want to weaken any of the [environmental] laws. A lot of people consider them a nuisance, but we're living longer and our quality of life is much better."

The San Mateo Democrat credits much of the improvement to the 43-year-old California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA as it's called.

Yet, Hill readily acknowledges that CEQA — signed into law by Gov. Ronald Reagan — needs modernizing.

"We recognize there's a problem," he says, speaking for Sacramento Democrats. "Something should be done. There are so many interests that utilize CEQA for so many reasons. When something is used for other than its purpose, it dilutes its effectiveness for that purpose.

"We want to make it work more effectively and more timely, so as not to be a hindrance to [development] projects. We have to address these issues and not hide from them."
Hill wants to return CEQA to what it originally was: a check on environmental degradation. It gradually veered out of control as various interests learned to use the landmark law for their own non-environmental agendas.

It became, too often, a tool of business rivals trying to block competition, NIMBYs ("not in my back yard") attempting to thwart local projects and unions strong-arming developers for labor concessions.

Meanwhile, project delays dragged on for years, money was wasted on consultants and lawyers, and California burnished its reputation as a lousy place to do business.

Hill's views are particularly important because he was recently named by Senate leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) to head the committee that will be a filter for CEQA legislation. He replaced moderate Democrat Michael Rubio of Kern County, a strong advocate of CEQA reform. Rubio suddenly resigned, citing family reasons, to head Chevron Corp.'s lobbying operation in Sacramento.

Turns out Rubio had questionable financial ties to an executive with another oil outfit, San Joaquin Refining Co. The watchdog Fair Political Practices Commission is looking into it.

Rubio had been the great hope of CEQA reformers. And some privately were disappointed that Hill, a liberal with environmental leanings, was chosen as his successor. The committee already was stacked with environmentalists.

But Hill, a former city councilman and county supervisor, represents Silicon Valley, which is pushing hard for a CEQA overhaul. So the political pendulum may not have shifted very far left.

"We were thrilled at the choice of Jerry Hill," says Carl Guardino, head of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, part of a business-oriented CEQA reform coalition. He said Steinberg and Hill have assured him that "they want to do something bold, not modest."

Gov. Jerry Brown also wants to do something, although it's not clear what because he hasn't proposed anything. He has characterized reforming CEQA as "the Lord's work." But he seems to be waiting for the Lord to do it.

Brown and Democratic legislators are leery of ticking off labor, their biggest financial benefactor and, therefore, the strongest influence in Sacramento.

Labor is the principal protector — along with environmental organizations—of the CEQA status quo.

So why not just buy off labor with a backroom deal and get on with reforming CEQA — get on with development and job-creation? Require that any private construction project that falls under CEQA regulation have a labor agreement.
That would be illegal under federal law, says Jennifer Hernandez of San Francisco, a CEQA attorney usually on the developer's side.

But labor is pretty good at bargaining. Surely it could work out some CEQA compromise.

If not, Democrats should dunk right over their behemoth patron, to use a basketball analogy. Should, but inconceivable.

Many union leaders deny there's even a problem.

"We just see another cry by business for deregulation," says Robbie Hunter, president of the State Building and Construction Trades Council of California. "The history of deregulation the last 20 years has been horrible."

Change advocates insist they're not trying to weaken environmental regulations — just trying to stop them from being misused for non-environmental purposes.

One union leader — Daniel Curtin, director of the California Conference of Carpenters — candidly asserts: "Everybody has to stop abusing CEQA. It's abused by business, it's abused by unions, it's abused by anti-development people, it's abused by NIMBYs."

Steinberg recently introduced legislation offering a framework for modest reform.

Among other things, it would encourage "infill" developments, reducing urban sprawl. It would expedite the CEQA process for green projects, such as renewable energy and transportation. It would streamline court paperwork and prohibit so-called "late hits" by project opponents.

"I'm getting it from both ends," Steinberg told me, reporting that neither side is particularly pleased. "But people have to decide whether they want to fix the problem or be partisan warriors."

Maybe too many people benefit from the abuse. Maybe the policy is too complex and the politics too perilous for the Legislature. If so, there's no hope — unless the governor starts doing the Lord's work.

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School district boundary changes face hurdles

By ASHER KLEIN
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A boundary change could be in the works for the Newport-Mesa Unified School District, if a luxury apartment developer manages to persuade two school districts and a county commission to go along.

The 1,244-unit Uptown Newport Village project was discussed at the most recent meetings of the Newport Beach City Council and the school district board. The project site is in the northern-most part of Newport Beach, near John Wayne Airport, but the land is in the Santa Ana Unified School District.

Developer Bill Shopoff said his company is pushing to have the development and the land south of it moved into the Newport-Mesa district in the four to six years it’ll take to complete the first phase of the project. Shopoff said discussions with SAUSD haven’t been fruitful.

“We’ve spent a year and a half, two years with them and we’re not seeing the movement we’d like to see. We will take action to go elsewhere,” Shopoff said, adding, “that doesn’t mean we’re going to get what we want.”

Santa Ana Unified School District includes parts of Newport Beach, Irvine and Costa Mesa near John Wayne Airport. Shopoff’s development, planned for the area around 4311 Jamboree Road, is in the attendance area of Santa Ana Unified’s Century High School. If it is moved to Newport-Mesa, it likely will be included in Corona del Mar High’s attendance area, district officials said.

The last time Newport-Mesa’s boundaries changed was in the Bonita Canyon deal in 1996, Newport-Mesa Deputy Superintendent Paul Reed said, when affected districts were lined up with what became the 73 toll road.

During that deal, he worked for Irvine Unified School District, where he worked for 26 years. Reed said that, in his experience, boundary changes are rare.
Since the beginning of 2011, district boundaries have been changed or adjusted in Orange County three times, according to minutes from OC Department of Education County Committee on School District Organization meetings posted online.

Generally, Reed said, “a change of boundary requires the concurrence of both school districts or it doesn’t happen.” For Santa Ana Unified, more students mean more revenue; Newport-Mesa gets more money solely from collecting more property taxes. A Santa Ana Unified spokeswoman said she couldn’t offer any information on boundary changes.

For Newport-Mesa, whether to go forward with changing the district boundaries is the school board’s decision, said district Superintendent Fred Navarro. He said his office had yet to receive any direction from the board, but will bring information to its members.

“Any time you have an opportunity to bring in some revenue through property taxes, you want to look at that carefully,” Navarro said.

Reed indicated that on paper the move seems beneficial. “Since we’re funded under the basis of property value, then arguably greater property value is in our interest,” he said.

Staff writer Deepa Bharath contributed to this report.

3/12/13
Ruben Hueso and Tyron Hampton will meet in a runoff election on April 16 to decide who will represent the Pasadena Unified School District’s newly formed District 3 on the Board of Education.

With all precincts reporting, Pasadena City Clerk Mark Jomsky said Hueso bested Hampton with 846 votes — or 48.7 percent of the ballots cast. Hampton received 662 votes, or 38.1 percent.

Hueso almost avoided the runoff on March 5, when he picked up 756 votes, giving him with 49.9 percent — two votes shy of the 50 percent plus one vote needed to win the election. However, more than 500 provisional ballots remained uncounted at that time. After all the votes were counted Monday, Jomsky said the top two vote-getters were pushed into a runoff.

“I am really happy the community turned out the way they did,” Hampton told the Weekly Monday. “The community really cares about our youth. This is about propelling our youth and making sure they can build a great future.”

Hampton, who attended local schools and graduated from John Muir High School, surprised some political observers by raising less than $1,000 in campaign contributions.

“I plan to raise some money this time,” Hampton said. “Like I said election night, I am putting on my running shoes.”

Hueso, brother of former Democratic Assemblyman Ben Hueso of San Diego, raised $6,175, including a $5,000 contribution from former Democratic Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez, who is also from San Diego.

United Teachers of Pasadena rescinded its endorsement of Hueso days prior to the election due to conflicting information found on different forms regarding Hueso’s endorsements from individuals and organizations.
Hueso did not return phone calls.

The new district boundaries were created last year by special task force in hopes of staving off potential lawsuits that might be filed against the district under provisions of the California Voting Rights Act. In all, seven minority candidates competed for the four open board seats in Tuesday’s elections. In the end, three white incumbents running for four available seats — Kim Kenne, Elizabeth Pomeroy and Scott Phelps — won back their respective positions.
A group of Latino leaders in Stanislaus County is threatening suit against the city of Patterson unless it changes how it elects City Council members because they believe the city is violating state and federal civil rights laws.

The Latino Community Roundtable, a group of elected and appointed officials, sent a letter to the Patterson City Council on Feb. 6 demanding that council members be elected to represent specific districts within the city, replacing the at-large election process.

Maggie Mejia, the roundtable’s president, wrote that at-large elections violate the federal 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 2001 California Voting Rights Act.

“If Patterson does not immediately adopt district elections, we will file a lawsuit to seek judicial relief on behalf of Patterson residents,” Mejia wrote. “We will ask the court to impose district elections immediately, to draw the new district maps and to enjoin any attempts by Patterson City Council to perpetuate the current election scheme.”

Modesto lost a challenge to a lawsuit making similar claims in 2007 and paid a $3 million settlement to a San Francisco law firm, according to Doug White, Patterson’s deputy city attorney.

White said this week that no one who has challenged this type of lawsuit has been successful, and monetary damages have been large.

But Mejia said the group is looking for fair representation for all ethnic groups in the city, not money.

Rod Butler, Patterson’s city manager, said the council is doing what it can to cooperate.

“(The City Council) really doesn’t want to rush into this,” Butler said. “They are open to investigating the idea but don’t want to be threatened or pushed into a corner.”

He said the council is waiting for extensive information from White and his law firm that should explain what the city faces.
Mayor Luis Molina and Councilman Dominic Farinha declined to comment this week and referred questions to Butler.

Council members Sheree Lustgarten, Deborah Novelli and Larry Buehner did not return calls.

Mejia said Monday, March 11, that her group had not heard anything yet from Patterson officials.

She said the roundtable had received positive responses from other cities, including Turlock and Ceres, but had not heard from Oakdale, Riverbank or Hughson.

“Right now, we believe no news is good news,” said Mejia, who believes the cities are looking into the matter. “It was just a matter of time, and the time is now.”

The Patterson Joint Unified School District, which received a letter from the roundtable in January, recently decided to institute district elections for its seven trustees.

• **Contact Nick Rappley at 892-6187, ext. 31, or nick@pattersonirrigator.com.**

Read more: [Patterson Irrigator - Latino group wants City Council districts](#)