Public criticizes proposed Woodland City Council district voting maps

By ELIZABETH KALFSBEEK/ekalfsbeek@dailydemocrat.com

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In its first attempt, the committee assigned to oversee the district voting process for the city failed to impress attendees at Tuesday's City Council meeting with a proposed district map.

In fact, the map presented by Woodland City Council's California Voting Rights Act Subcommittee headed by Vice Mayor Tom Stallard and Councilman Bill Marble was poo-pooed during public comments.

"It's one of the tougher tasks I've ever had in serving in public office because this is very consequential to our community and there are varied interests," said Stallard.

Of Woodland's 55,500 population (2010 Census), nearly half is Hispanic, said Stallard. The proposed map has a Hispanic population majority in three of the five districts.

"The map is unacceptable to me," said Xavier Tafoya, Yuba Community College District board trustee, during public comments. "I see that it's self-serving and we have to do something more than what we have here."

Tafoya said the map lacked identifying where present councilmen reside, noting that about four live within a mile of one another to his knowledge.

"They're in different districts (in the proposed map) but they're still in a hub and that's one of the concerns I have. Is that really a true reflection of representation of the city?" he asked.

Stallard and Mayor Skip Davies are represented in the same district in the proposed map. Davies had previously announced he will be "retiring" after his term is complete in 2014.

"Courts have accepted the rights of people currently serving in office to basically protect their seats," said Stallard during opening comments. "You may not like it but this is the political world we're in and ... we could not come back to our colleagues and throw anybody under the bus.

"I'm just going to put it out there directly. So we weren't going to come back and put two of our colleagues in the same district if it was possible to do it and achieve other objectives."

Stallard went on to say that no map is permanent. Another census will be conducted in 2020, for example, and the Springlake area in southeast Woodland is likely to grow with its 3,000 unbuilt units.

The perimeters decided now are evolving, he said, and "basically have a limited life."

"I am concerned, and I must say feeling ... patronized," said Woodland resident Evelia Genera. "I feel that the citizens in this community are very capable of drawing up very equitable and fair maps that will
Another issue brought up was deciding between the June or November 2014 election for the district vote.

"I think maybe if you look at 142 years back you will see that the voter population during primary election is almost half of what it would be during a November election," said former Woodland Mayor Art Pimentel. "And if we have the interest of engaging and enfranchising more voters, my suggestion would be to move the election to November. I think it makes sense."

If the district election is pushed from June to November, the decision would arbitrarily add about four months to the terms of council members. According to city attorney Kara Ueda this is acceptable, so long as the council amends an ordinance ahead of time.

"It is our recommendation that until the council has determined a map that the council is comfortable with and can act upon, that the council defer actual action ... that includes designation of the mayor and include an actual date for holding the first district election," Marble said.

To that end the council agreed to appoint a five-member citizens advisory committee by Thursday, May 30. The group will bring its findings back to the council at the first meeting after summer recess on Tuesday, Aug. 20.

"Nobody always gets everything they want, that's the first rule in democracy," Davies said. "But we do get there."

Follow Elizabeth Kalfsbeek at twitter.com/woodlandbeat
Woodland's proposed council map draws gerrymander concerns

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Woodland's first attempt at drawing City Council districts appears to protect sitting councilmen living in close proximity and is catching heat from critics who consider it a bad case of incumbent gerrymandering.

**PROPOSED WOODLAND COUNCIL DISTRICTS**
The first effort to draw boundaries for Woodland City Council districts prevents most of the incumbents from facing each other in an election, even though four of them live near each other in a less-diverse part of the city, which has a plurality of Hispanic residents.

The city is drawing a new district-based map as it moves away from at-large elections to comply with the 2002 California Voting Rights Act, which was intended to diversify local governments in areas with large minority populations.

Though Woodland has a plurality of Hispanic residents, none currently sits on the council.

"My initial reaction to the map is that it's unacceptable," said Art Pimentel, a former mayor and one of only three Latinos ever to hold office in Woodland. "The unfortunate issue of the map is that the priority seemed to be around protecting incumbents."

Woodland has scheduled a ballot measure establishing district elections for June 2014, with the first district-based contests set for 2016.

Inglewood schools’ slide steepens despite state takeover - latimes.com

Four of the council’s five members live within about a mile of each other in south Woodland, a less-diverse part of the city. But only two councilmen, Tom Stallard and Mayor Skip Davies, would live in the same district under the proposed map, and Davies plans to step down after 2014.

Under that map, the remaining four incumbents would avoid facing each other.

"That's clearly not the priority," Pimentel said. "There is a lot more work that needs to be done."

The map proposed last week by Councilmen William Marble and Stallard – the two members charged with drawing new boundaries – carves the city into five districts of roughly 11,000 residents each.

Three of the proposed districts have a majority-Hispanic population, though it is unclear how many are of voting age.

Stallard defended the boundaries, saying he "wasn't going to throw any of my colleagues under the bus" by drawing districts that would pit council members against each other.

Still, Stallard acknowledged, "some people have a lot of concern. We're talking about the future of representation" in Woodland.

A special citizens commission to be nominated by the council will work to craft alternative district maps.

The commission will report back to the City Council with its recommendations in August.

"Their charge is to work with the map we sent them," Stallard said on Wednesday. "But they have the freedom to start from scratch. That's really up to their discretion."

In a city where Latinos make up nearly half of the population yet have had historically little representation at City Hall, critics want the new citizens commission to scrap the first map entirely.

"A map should not have been drawn prior to a committee being formed. I just think it will lead to undue influence," retired Woodland educator Evelia Genera said. "You need to trust that the people of the city will do what's best for the city."

Marble said the map was a first draft in a lengthy process.

"That map was a starting point to get the conversation going," Marble said. "At the end of the day, we're going to have a map. What we need to be doing is to comply with the letter and the spirit of the California Voting Rights Act to enfranchise minority voters and all voters."

Call The Bee's Darrell Smith, (916) 321-1040.

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THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE – PE.COM

JURUPA VALLEY: School trustees stick with at-large elections

Jurupa school board member Brian Schafer said at the Monday, June 3 meeting that he believes the entire community should vote for school board members

Photo: WILLIAM WILSON LEWIS III/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

BY SANDRA STOKLEY, The Press Enterprise

Published: June 03, 2013; 09:59 PM

The Jurupa Unified School District board of education voted Monday, June 3, to redraw the boundaries of the district’s five trustee areas to make the populations more evenly balanced.

But trustees opted to retain the district’s election method in which candidates must live in the trustee area they seek to represent but are elected at large.

“I believe the entire community has the right to vote for board members,” said trustee Brian Schafer.

The vote was 5-0.

School board members were presented with two options at Monday’s meeting: retain the existing system or switch to a system in which candidates live in the trustee area they seek to represent and are elected from voters living in that area.

But trustee made it clear that they believe the existing system offers voters the best of both worlds.

School administrators unveiled the proposed changes in April. A community meeting held May 30 to familiarize residents with the proposed changed failed to draw an audience, said Paul Gill, the assistant superintendent for business services.

School districts throughout the state, including several in Riverside County, have been threatened with lawsuits under the California Voting Rights Act.

The act prohibits at-large election when they hinder the ability of a “protected class” of people, such as Latinos, to elect candidates from their community.
LA Canada

Parents want district enlarged for Sagebrush area

Letter calls for transferring Sagebrush students into LCUSD.

By Tiffany Kelly, tiffany.kelly@latimes.com

3:23PM PDT, June 5, 2013

A group of La Cañada Flintridge residents have resurrected an effort to transfer students who live in the westernmost section of the city, but attend Glendale public schools, into the La Cañada Unified School District.

Last month, the residents wrote city officials, asking them to endorse a resolution in support of moving the so-called Sagebrush area, which the Glendale Unified School District has historically fought hard to keep, into schools within their own city.

On Monday night, the City Council approved the resolution, which they called the first step of a lengthy process. Council members said the assimilation of the territory into the city's school district would unite the community and offer students a chance to attend the same schools as their friends in the city.

"What this really is about is community identity and bringing in full segments of the community into one," said Councilman Jon Curtis. "It's about supporting the La Cañada Unified School District and it's about the students within La Cañada really having an equal opportunity."

The transfer, he added, is not about one school district being better than the other.

Tom Smith, who authored the letter to the city with about a dozen other residents, said he does not have any children who go to either school district, but knows neighbors who would be affected.

"It struck me as a bit odd that the [Sagebrush] children should not be able to go to La Cañada schools where many of their friends are," he said.

The neighboring Glendale Unified School District has for many decades included a sliver of La Cañada, which feeds into La Crescenta schools. Residents in the area have fought for years to have their children transferred to La Cañada's district, but Glendale Unified has won all legal battles to date to keep the area in its district.

Officials from the GUSD could not be immediately reached for comment on the resolution or confirm
how many students from the Sagebrush area attended their schools. In 2000, they reported that about 250 students from La Canada were enrolled at Mountain Avenue Elementary, Rosemont Middle School and Crescenta Valley High School.

Smith's group will now submit an application, along with the city's resolution, to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization.

Both the City Council and the La Canada school board have formed subcommittees to study the issue and assist the group as needed.

District officials said La Canada would have plenty of room to accommodate the students in the Sagebrush area if the boundaries of the district are shifted. Scott Tracy, president of the La Canada school board, said the district has seen a decline in enrollment over the years and currently has about 600 out-of-district students attending La Canada schools.

While the full school board has not considered the issue, Tracy said he expects that its members will support a resolution in favor of the transfer. He also reiterated council members' comments that the issue is not about the quality of education or real estate values.

"It's about being part of the city," he said. "There's really a deep community identity with the city and they're isolated from the rest of the community."

Follow Tiffany Kelly on Google+ and on Twitter: @LATiffanyKelly.
Inglewood schools' slide steepens despite state takeover

Inglewood Unified's finances worsen despite a state takeover and an infusion of cash; there is even talk of dissolution.

By Stephen Ceasar, Los Angeles Times

5:31 PM PDT, June 9, 2013

Many in Inglewood thought the city's struggling school district had been handed a lifeline last year when the state Department of Education took the reins, hiring new leaders and infusing the school system with $55 million in emergency loans to get it back on track.

But in the nine months since the state takeover, the district's slide has gotten worse.

Inglewood Unified has depleted its reserves, burned through nearly half of the emergency funds in one year and is operating at a $17.7-million deficit that calls for deep cuts. Teachers, parents and students say they are angry at the prospect of suffering the brunt of consequences of inept management while deserving none of the blame.

Many in the community now view the state administrators as intruders rather than saviors and question their qualifications. State officials contend that the anger is misplaced.

Budget woes are exacerbated by students fleeing the district for nearby charter schools that have been wooing them—and the funding that comes with them.

The district, meanwhile, won't get more emergency money. Without scaling back, officials say, the school system could be dissolved.

For the controversy and anger it has incited, the state takeover of the district mirrors others in California. But the way it has unfolded does not: Rarely is the possibility of dissolution discussed so publicly, nor has there been such a dense population of charter schools nearby to pull students from a faltering district.

With state funding tied to student enrollment, steep drops can both contribute to the financial collapse of districts and complicate their recovery, said Randy Ward, the San Diego County superintendent of
schools, who served as the state-appointed administrator of the Oakland and Compton school districts during their respective takeovers.

In Oakland, the district was losing more than 2,000 students a year before the takeover in 2003. Years of overestimating enrollment — and accordingly the expected revenue — damaged district finances, Ward said. And as plunging enrollment continues during a recovery, it creates even more difficulties as districts try to climb out.

"As soon as you filled the hole with cuts, you would lose the revenue and a new hole would be created," Ward said. "You have the perfect negative storm in terms of revenue and expenditures."

Similar miscalculations caused some of the budget problems in Inglewood, officials say.

When the state moved into the debt-saddled school system, Kent Taylor, an alumnus, was appointed as the state monitor — essentially the superintendent in charge of all operations.

But Taylor resigned within two months, after the Department of Education’s discovery that he had made a tentative agreement with the teachers union. State officials say he had no authority to enter into such an agreement.

His deputy, La Tanya Kirk-Carter, took over, to the chagrin of much of the community. She has been met with anger and distrust. Many in the community, among them teachers, parents and unions, contend that Kirk-Carter is not qualified to make the changes necessary.

Kirk-Carter presided over a raucous community meeting last month in which she, along with other state officials, were grilled by teachers, parents and students. The crowd shouted and yelled at them.

"It was without a doubt the worst day of my career," she said.

The anger, though understandable, is completely misplaced, Kirk-Carter said. "I didn't break this district," she said in a recent interview. "It was broken when I got here, and we discovered that it is even more broken than we thought."

Kirk-Carter says she never wanted the position and was not brought in to be the face of the takeover in public, but rather to work behind the scenes to sort out the finances. "I'm the nuts-and-bolts girl," she said. "I was hired to fix the district."

Kirk-Carter plans on closing the $17.7-million hole by moving one high school to a larger site to accommodate more students, converting a K-8 school into a district-run charter to allow students from the entire district to attend, and combining two underremodeled elementary schools. Along with a few other cuts, officials expect that to trim the gap by about $6.6 million.

About 12,000 students attend schools in the district.

In Compton, Ward received threats that law enforcement deemed credible and, like Kirk-Carter, he had a security detail. At one point, he asked the FBI whether he should consider carrying a weapon while off duty and away from campus. "Their response to me was, 'Hurry up,'" he said.

Kirk-Carter has California Highway Patrol security paid for mostly by the state and in part by the district; the cost doesn't exceed $200,000. Community members say the expenditure is unnecessary.
State officials have made one thing clear: Employees will be affected. About 72% of district expenditures are for salaries and benefits.

Peter Somberg, president of the Inglewood Teachers Assn., said the union would not return to the bargaining table. "We have a contract," he said, referring to the agreement made under Taylor.

The state has said repeatedly that the contract is void. The union in turn brought an unfair labor charge against the district.

Somberg said the proposed pay cuts of about 15% would be devastating to many of his members and that the state has yet to develop a long-term plan for stability. Rather, he said, the state is presenting a doomsday scenario to try to bring the union back to the table.

"If someone tells me they want to be my partner," he said, "they usually don't do it with a gun to my head."

At the contentious public hearing at Morningside High School, state officials provided handouts that spelled out the grim budget outlook.

"Despite our challenges, Inglewood's schools are open and educating children every day," the letter said. "The state's intervention means students can keep right on learning as usual."

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Anaheim council rejects ballot measure on district representation

In a boisterous session, council members request more study on efforts to better represent Anaheim's large Latino population. A proposal that would continue at-large elections is approved.

June 12, 2013 | By Rick Rojas, Los Angeles Times

Anaheim has seen a dramatic ethnic shift in recent years, and now about 52% of the city's 336,000 residents are Latino, though only a few Latinos have ever won council seats. The city is the largest municipality in California without council districts.

On Tuesday, after months had passed and with a smaller but boisterous crowd in attendance, the discussion in the council chamber was virtually the same as last year. It was a clear demonstration that, even with time, heated feelings in this city haven't diminished.

The council again voted down, 3-2, a measure that would have put the decision on districts before voters, opting instead for more study and a second proposal.

"If we want to take a ballot measure forward that changes how we govern," said Councilwoman Kris Murray, "I think the most education and the most engagement of our residents is essential to it being successful."

After the motion to proceed with the ballot measure failed, Murray raised a motion of her own, one that would examine adding two more council members and a structure that would continue with at-large elections but would have residency requirements mandating that candidates live in certain sections of the city. That proposal passed on a 4-1 vote.

A neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis of census data by The Times last year revealed the city is deeply segregated along ethnic lines, with many of its elected leaders coming from predominantly white neighborhoods in the eastern hills of the community.

The renewed discussion was prompted by the findings of a panel asked to study the issue last year.

After months of meetings and debate, the panel didn't conclude the assignment with complete agreement, but they did unanimously support a ballot measure. Expanding the four-member council to either six or eight members was among the suggestions. The city directly elects its mayor.

Mayor Tom Tait, who supported the measure last year, pushed again for it to be approved immediately, citing mounting legal bills — nearing a half-million dollars — in the city's fight against a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union charging under-representation of Latinos.

"It's simple," Tait said. "Ask the people! It's their city, it's their government. The charter requires we ask them, so let's ask them."

Tuesday's meeting highlighted the discord that rankles the city. Between the council and the crowd, plenty of accusations were lobbed at each other: corruption, intimidation, lies.

When Councilwoman Gail Eastman asked for the mayor to keep the crowd from making noise during the hearing, she was drowned out by boos. She walked out of the room and didn't return for several minutes.

"Every person who didn't speak in support of the option that is before us right now was ridiculed tonight," Murray said. "And many of you are even out there ridiculing me right now for even having the discussion. I think we're at risk in Anaheim of devolving to where we can't agree to disagree respectfully."

At the core of the disagreement was whether to eliminate the council's long-standing at-large voting.

Those critical of the district plan suggested such zoning would further divide the city. They also argued that an at-large system allowed residents to have more than one person to reach out to.

"I'm represented by five people, not one," said Ron Bengochea, 66, a retired pipefitter, who still wanted a ballot measure despite hoping to keep the at-large setup.

Proponents of the council districts contend that system would encourage better political representation for poorer, predominantly Latino communities. The city's central core, an area dominated by barrios and dense apartment complexes, is nearly 70% Latino. But none of the current council members live directly in that area.

Dr. America Bracho, executive director of Latino Health Access, said she lives in Anaheim Hills but spends time in the city's central core as part of her work. She told the council she had witnessed the disparities in the city. In her neighborhood, parks, libraries and community centers were within walking distance of her home; in other areas, there was no such access.

"There's a moral imperative to let the people of Anaheim choose," she said. "Privileged people receive benefits, and we want everyone to be privileged."

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Anaheim's feeble democracy

EDITORIAL

Anaheim at-large voting dilutes Latino power, enabling politically active members from wealthier areas to dictate city council membership.

June 14, 2013 | By The Times editorial board

The Anaheim City Council showed its contempt for the principle of representative government again this week, defeating another proposal to let residents vote for council members on a district-by-district basis. The decision means that the voting power of the city's growing Latino population will remain diluted for now. But it's easy to envision a day when demographic change overtakes the city's political elite, and the shoe will be on the other foot.

The council has previously stiff-armed efforts to change the city charter and end at-large voting, a practice that enables more politically active residents of the wealthier parts of the city — along with entrenched special interests — to dictate the council's membership. The ethnically diverse city, now more than half Latino, has elected only a handful of non-white council members in its history. The five current members are all white. And over the years, few have come from the densely populated, lower-income parts of the city.

With more than 330,000 residents, Anaheim is the largest city in California that still has at-large voting. Proponents of the shift to district voting argue that it would lead to a more equitable distribution of resources for parks, libraries and other city services. Those resources are now concentrated, they complain, in the better-off neighborhoods. Opponents counter that the change would only lead to intra-council feuding. But if there's harmony at the council table today, it's only because the city's majority has no seats there.

Mayor Tom Tait has been trying for months to persuade the council to let the public vote on the issue. Last year his proposed ballot measure was blocked in favor of creating a citizens' commission to study the issue. The commission agreed with Tait that the city should put the issue of district voting on the ballot and urged that the council be expanded by two to four members. But at a raucous meeting Tuesday night, the council rejected the proposal, 3 to 2.

Instead, the council decided to put an alternative on the June 2014 primary ballot that would make the council seem more representative without actually shifting political power. The proposal by Councilwoman Kris Murray would divide the city into districts, and the representative from each district would have to reside there. But the elections would still be decided by at-large voting, just as they are today. As Jose Moreno, a grass-roots activist and proponent of district elections, neatly summarized the situation on the Voice of OC website, "You may get some Latino candidates elected, but it won't be Latinos that elect them."

Is it so hard to understand why that's wrong?
The council may soon find itself without a voice in the process; the American Civil Liberties Union is suing to force the city to abandon at-large voting on the grounds that it violates the California Voting Rights Act by impairing Latinos' ability to influence elections. And even if the city prevails, it’s swimming against the demographic tide. When Latinos hold the majority not just in the census but also among active voters, the interests that rule today may rue the day they refused to share power.

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