Redistricting maps down to three
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After months of public hearings that resulted in dozens of possible new supervisorial district maps, a nine-person advisory committee this week narrowed the possibilities down to three drafts.

The Board of Supervisors at its Oct. 8 meeting will consider the trio of maps — and actually can technically consider any of those not on the short list, too — before choosing how it will redraw the district boundaries for future supervisor elections.

Making the cut is the so-called “community unity 4” plan which leaves northern District Five intact as a majority-minority Asian district and lumps into District Four Redwood City, East Palo Alto, east Menlo Park and North Fair Oaks. Committee Chair Adrienne Tissier, Vice-chair Warren Slocum and public member William Nack abstained from voting but the six other members made this map their top choice. The backers of the April 2011 voters’ rights lawsuit which sparked the boundary changes also favor this map.

The second most popular map was submitted by the county’s Republican Party and will be renamed the “equity” map. The third was Nakamura 1G, one of several submitted by James Nakamura. Those two maps also move Redwood Shores from District Three to District Four and split Menlo Park between the two districts.

San Mateo County, the last holdout county in the state with at-large elections, is changing its method in response to a lawsuit which claimed the system violated the California Voting Rights Act by diluting minority votes and precluding Latino and Asian candidates from securing county office. In November 2012, county voters also chose to change the charter and switch to district elections. The new system requires that only voters within one of five specific districts can elect a supervisor who must also hail from that same district. Previously, voters countywide elected all five supervisors even though each lived and represented a specific district.

The challenge of redistricting has been trying to split the five districts as equally as possible by population while also weighing other factors like race, socioeconomics and voter “diluting.” As the nine-person advisory committee held a series of workshops and hearings, cities proposed for splitting cried foul and cartography experts said there was no possibility of keeping every one intact.

Prior to Tuesday night’s final redistricting recommendation meeting, Slocum told the Daily Journal he expected the Board of Supervisors to have a lengthy discussion before deciding but did not anticipate it requiring more than one meeting.

Once the Board of Supervisors chooses its map, the change should be immediate, according to county spokesman Marshall Wilson.
Along with Tissier, Slocum and Nack, the advisory committee members named by the Board of Supervisors are Daly City Councilman Gonzalo “Sal” Torres, East Palo Alto Councilwoman Laura Martinez, Hayden Lee of Millbrae; Raymond Lee of San Mateo; Barbara Arietta of Pacifica and Rebecca Ayson of Daly City.

More information on the proposed district maps and process is available at www.smcdistrictcommittee.org.
After months of discussions, meetings and a some confrontations, three proposed maps will be unveiled to Woodland residents, one of which -- or a combination of the trio -- could alter city politics for the remainder of the decade and beyond.

Woodland's proposed emergence into district elections for its city council members and mayor has been under review by the Citizen's Advisory Committee for City Council District Boundaries.

The members, appointed by Woodland City Council members, are tasked with advising the council in its efforts to draw up fair boundaries as the city converts from at-large voting to district-based voting to be in compliance with the California Voting Rights Act of 2002.

The Committee has scheduled two public workshops for the public to review three proposed maps.

These meetings are scheduled for 10:30 a.m., Friday, at the Woodland Community & Senior Center, 2001 East St., and also 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 29, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 300 First St.

The five-person committee -- Chairwoman Janet Ruggiero, Rich Lansburgh, Julie Farnham, Tom Galeazzi and Marco Lizarraga -- has been meeting since early July to carry out its task of developing one or two new council District maps and to prepare comments on the district map presented by the Council subcommittee.

According to Ruggiero, who is a former planning director for the city, the advisory committee has held seven meetings since its inception and focused first on developing criteria to be used in drawing the district maps.

Ruggiero said the committee has also individually worked with staff from the Yolo County Elections Office to prepare a map to present to the committee as a whole.
"Based on these presentations, two maps emerged based on similarities between each of the five maps," Ruggiero reported. "These two maps were refined at a subsequent meeting of the Committee and are ready to be presented to the community for their input and feedback."

A third map was prepared as well by the council's subcommittee.

The criteria set forth by the committee is as follows:

- Be as equal in population as possible. Stay within the legal requirements for district population distribution.
- Utilize voting age population including race and ethnic numbers (especially Hispanics and Asians census information) and gender.
- Fairness
- Consider such factors as geography (such as major streets and highways) and cohesiveness, contiguity, integrity and compactness of districts.
- Maintain neighborhoods of common interest (such as school district trustee areas, school population areas).

Ruggiero said the maps will be displayed at City Hall and the Community & Senior Center with cards available for public comments. They may also be viewed at the city's website, cityofwoodland.org.

At a basic level, the Voting Rights Act of 2002 attempts to protect the votes of certain voters, such as minorities, from being diluted in an election leading to "racially polarized voting," explained Kara Ueda, city attorney.

According to City Manager Paul Navazio, the decision to support district-based voting isn't that it's better or worse than Woodland's current at-large voting system, rather it's a move to comply with the law. Namely, if it can be demonstrated that protected groups are disadvantaged by at-large elections then the city is vulnerable to a lawsuit.

The Voting Rights Act doesn't prescribe a formula for what districts should look like, said Ueda, but the most relevant criteria in drawing the districts is making sure the citizens' voting age population is equal and the boundaries are roughly proportionate in size.

Previously, Lizarraga has said the process isn't about making a "Latino district" per se, but to open doors and opportunities. Woodland's Latino population is believed to be 43.3 percent, according to the 2010 Census.

Although the City Council unanimously agreed to support the switch to district voting, the matter will be left to voters -- likely on the June 2014 ballot. If voters reject district voting, Woodland is still vulnerable to a California Voting Rights Act lawsuit.

If the ballot fails, there is a possibility of modifying the map and ordinance and placing it on the November 2014 ballot, Mayor Skip Davies has explained.
If a suit is filed and upheld, the courts will draw the districts taking it out of the city’s hands.

"There are big implications for losing," Councilman Tom Stallard has said, such as a lawsuit against the city, which would cost thousands of dollars."

*Follow Jim Smith at* [twitter.com/newsie2002](http://twitter.com/newsie2002)
An Escondido commission begins a series of public hearings to create city council districts which empower Latino voters.

Escondido residents will get a chance to weigh in on new city council districts at a series of public hearings starting Thursday. The city is moving from citywide to districtwide elections after a lawsuit claimed citywide, or at-large elections diluted the voting power of the city’s large Latino population.

The seven-member independent districting commission will gather input from the public to help determine the geographic boundaries of four council districts. The mayor will continue to be elected by a citywide vote.

Under the U.S. Constitution, the districts must be generally equal in population size. They also must be geographically contiguous and try to preserve the integrity of neighborhoods and communities of interest.

The lawsuit that spawned the change was filed last December by several Latino residents and a labor group. They claimed that Escondido’s at-large election system was discriminatory against minorities and therefore violated the California Voting Rights Act.

Despite the growth of Escondido’s Latino population, which is now half the population, and the city’s largest demographic group, just one Latino serves on the city council. Only a few Latinos have ever served on Escondido’s governing body in the city’s 123-year history.
The city agreed to implement district elections and set up an independent commission to draw the boundaries for new districts as part of a settlement reached in March.

The commission is chaired by Dana Nuesca, a local Rotary Club leader and executive director of a nonprofit that helps victims of sexual exploitation in Costa Rica.

Other members of the commission include Andy Carey, executive director of the U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership, former Escondido Deputy City Manager Jack Anderson and Chicano studies professor John Valdez.

The commission will gather input from neighbors on drawing the district boundaries at six public meetings, scheduled for locations throughout the city during October.

“This will allow people to come in…and share with us what their community of interest is,” Nuesca, the commission chair said.

A community of interest could be anything from mobile home parks, to members of the same racial group to dog owners, Nuesca indicated.

“We want to make sure we know about them before we get the lines drawn and someone says ‘Ah, you didn’t ask me,’” Nuesca said.

Still, racial, ethnic and language groups must specifically be taken into account in Escondido per the legal settlement between the city and the Latino plaintiffs.

Nuesca said she and other commission members had been putting up fliers about the public hearings at schools and churches. She said the city’s public schools planned to robo call students’ homes to tell families about the hearings.

Residents may also submit forms, which are available on the city website in multiple languages, describing their community of interest to the commission.

After the commission draws provisional maps, it will hold three additional hearings in late November to hear concerns from residents. The commission will then vote on a final plan and send it to the city council for approval.

Escondido is the third city in San Diego County to adopt districtwide elections. San Diego switched to district elections in 1988. Voters in Chula Vista opted to switch to districtwide elections last year.

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Redrawn MUSD trustee map an expensive deal

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The newly drawn Manteca Unified trustee map which brings to seven – up from the current five – areas represented by the elected members of the Board of Trustees was approved Tuesday by a majority vote of 4-3.

Now, the $64 question is whether registered voters living in the school district area will have their say in the June or the November 2014 elections if they approve of the new map.

Scenario D, which is how the newly drawn map is called, mainly affects two of the seven board members – Deborah Romero and board president Don Scholl who would be representing the new trustee areas 6 and 7. Under the current five-trustee map, the populous area 5 in central Manteca is represented by three of the seven trustees – Romero, Scholl and Evelyn Moore. Additionally, the board also approved the proposed change in the election process – with voters choosing only the candidate who will represent them in the area where they reside instead of casting their votes on all the district’s trustee areas.

The next step after the Scenario D map was approved by the board at the Tuesday meeting would have been the submission of a request to the county committee on school district organization asking that the election process requirement to those changes be waived. Those requirements are under the provisions of Education Code Sections 5019, 5020, 5021, and 5030.

While the waiver would save Manteca Unified an estimated $75,000 to $100,000 plus whatever attorneys’ costs the district will incur which would cover education materials relative to what the election is all about, the idea of bypassing the election process did not sit well with district residents Dale Fritchen of Weston Ranch and Bruce Lownsbery of Manteca.

“Let the voters decide their fates,” said Fritchen, a former Manteca Unified trustee and former Stockton City Council member. “They didn’t elect you to waive their opportunity to vote” for the candidate that they want to
represent them on the board.

Lownsberry agreed, saying, “This is something that should come before the voters. We didn’t elect you to bypass the voters (but) to bring to us options.”

By “carving these boundaries around your seats, voters should have a problem with that,” he added.

Karen Pearsall of Manteca also cautioned that if the redrawn map issue goes before the voters, “make sure the voters understand” what this is all about and that they are casting “an educated vote.”

“I can see both sides of the coin,” she told the board, but “you’ll have to do a lot of educating” the public.

Addressing the other side of the coin, and responding to the comments of Fritchen and Lownsberry about the wisdom of holding an election and the drawing of the new map, Trustee Romero said, “we didn’t have input on how they (the trustee areas) were carved out.”

She added, “We were elected to represent you, to save money for our kids.”

The rationale given to the request for an election waiver is to save the district money that could best be used for the students.

The motion put forth before the board on the waiver died in motion, which means there was no majority vote.

Before casting his yes vote in favor of a waiver, board president Scholl, the last one to cast a vote, said he didn’t “want to deprive the public input” into the matter but that “the risk is extremely high if we don’t move forward on this,” while referring to exposing the district to potentially expensive lawsuits.

Redrawing the trustee map and holding trustee elections by trustee area is also a means to protect the district from being sued by advocacy and political groups.

The California Voting Rights Act of 2001, in a nutshell, will make it easier for minority groups to prove that their votes are being “diluted” in at-large elections, and to sue local governments and agencies such as school boards like MUSD. In earlier board meeting discussions on this subject, Messer said there are other places where school districts are already voting by area.
Stockton Unified School District is one of them, and Lincoln Unified in Stockton is also moving into voting by district area. Ripon Unified is also currently exploring this idea, he said.
The College of the Redwoods board of trustees at its monthly September meeting voted to authorize CR president Kathy Smith to begin the process of reducing CR’s elected number of trustees from the current nine to seven.

CR is the only community college district in California with nine trustees. All of the other 71 districts have either five or seven trustees.

“This move will bring College of the Redwoods in alignment with the rest of the state in terms of number of board members,” Smith said.

The resolution authorizes Smith to enlist County of Humboldt personnel to draft maps with the new trustee boundaries in accordance with the California Voting Rights Act.

The final decision on approval of the reduction of CR’s number of trustees will be determined by the California Community Colleges’ Board of Governors (BOG).

Smith suggested that the new trustee area maps be reviewed by the CR board of trustees at its November meeting. After approval of the map, the board will vote on adopting a resolution to reduce trustee areas from nine to seven at either its November or December meeting.

CR would then submit the resolution and map of redrawn trustee areas to the BOG by Dec. 14, 2013, for the BOG’s Jan.13-14, 2014 meeting. If the BOG approves the reduction in the number of trustees it will reduce college expenditures for trustee stipends, trustee health benefits, trustee travel, trustee professional development and election-related expenses.

“Constituents need to know that this is being done for cost savings. We are not eliminating representation for voters of the CR district,” said CR Area 8 trustee Rick Bennett, who lives in Gasquet near Crescent City.
LA QUINTA — To avoid an expensive lawsuit that claims racial inequality, the Desert Sands Unified School District board plans to change the way its members are elected, forcing one current member off the five-member board.

On Tuesday, board members unanimously praised a plan to switch from at-large voting — in which any voter in the district can elect any candidate to the board — to trustee area elections — in which members would represent specific areas of the district and be elected by residents of those districts.

A resolution that will solidify the transformation is set for a board vote in November.

If approved, the proposed trustee areas would require current board members Wendy Jonathan and Matt Monica to compete for a seat on the school board in a future election.

Jonathan said Tuesday night that she believed the trustee area system would reach communities that were not currently represented on the board. She was not concerned that the switch might make her and Monica political rivals.

“It’s not about running against whomever,” she said. “It’s about the best person or that area … If we didn’t draw the map like that, it would have been inappropriate.”

Monica was absent from the meeting due to illness.

Monica has been on the school board for more than 30 years, but in recent months he has been criticized by district teachers for public outbursts and what they considered disrespectful behavior at board meetings. Jonathan, who is in her first term, has the backing of the teachers union.

If this switch is approved, the school district would be split into five trustee areas, each containing about 35,000 residents.
The trustee areas break down like this:

- Area 1 contains portions of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage.
- Area 2 contains Indian Wells, Bermuda Dunes, Thousand Palms and the northern tip of La Quinta.
- Area 3 is the remainder of La Quinta and a western sliver of Indio.
- Area 4 is a small but highly populated portion of Indio south of the interstate.
Appeals court allows Palmdale to proceed with City Council election

A judge had barred the Nov. 5 election, saying an at-large system is discriminatory. The appellate court ruling upends his injunction.

By Jean Merl

8:07 PM PDT, October 16, 2013

A California appellate court has cleared the way for the city of Palmdale to hold its Nov. 5 City Council election, which a trial court had canceled late last month.

Judges in the 2nd District Court of Appeal turned on its head a preliminary injunction, issued Sept. 30 by Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Mark V. Mooney, barring the election.

Mooney's injunction said the city was enjoined from holding an at-large election, counting the ballots or certifying the result. If Mooney had meant to prevent the voting, the word "or" should have been "and," said the order signed Tuesday by Presiding Justice Paul J. Turner and Associate Justice Richard M. Mosk.

Associate Justice Sandy R. Kriegler, one of three judges who heard the Palmdale matter, disagreed with his two colleagues' interpretation that the preliminary injunction did not halt the election.

"The text of the written order plainly enjoins all aspects of the election — voting, tabulation, and certification," Kriegler wrote.

Technically, the appeals court rejected Palmdale's request to overturn the lower court's injunction. But the city got what it wanted anyway — permission to hold the election. The ruling left the certification issue in the appellate court's hands.

Palmdale is one of several cities being sued under the California Voting Rights Act. Plaintiffs in the separate cases are seeking to have the cities' at-large election systems overturned, alleging they are harming minority voters' opportunity to elect a representative of their choice.

Various activists suing Palmdale, Whittier and Anaheim are pressing for council members in those cities to be elected by geographic district. Combing through past election results, they offer evidence of polarized voting — different outcomes in minority precincts than in largely white ones.
In July, Mooney ruled that Palmdale's at-large system was discriminatory and said he would provide direction later for remedying the situation. In the meantime, he granted the plaintiffs' request to halt the election.

Palmdale officials, saying their election preparations had been thrown into disarray by Mooney's injunction, hailed this week's appeal court ruling.

"We strongly believe that the citizens of Palmdale have a right to vote for every elected official," City Atty. Matthew Ditzhazy said in a statement defending the existing system. He added that the city also will appeal the trial court's July ruling.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs could not be reached for immediate comment Wednesday. But they said earlier that Palmdale had had plenty of notice that its elections systems was illegal and likely to be overturned.

Palmdale, with a population that is nearly two-thirds minority, has elected only one Latino and no blacks to its council since incorporating in August 1962. But Ditzhazy noted that three of the four candidates vying for two council seats are minorities, ensuring that at least one minority will be elected.

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Members of the La Cañada school board on Tuesday expressed hopes that a territory transfer of homes near the city’s western border from the Glendale Unified School District into the LCUSD could be on the horizon. And they read a resolution placing a $450 seven-year parcel tax on a March 4 ballot.

While that meeting was taking place, their counterparts on the Glendale Unified School District board considered allowing parents in the affected neighborhoods, long known as the Sagebrush area, to choose whether to send their children to Glendale or La Cañada public schools. They hope such a move will resolve a decades-old dispute between the districts.

La Cañada Unified officials say about 260 students who live in the Sagebrush section attend Glendale schools; GUSD officials say the figure is closer to 400. Also, Glendale
officials say property taxes due its district under voter-approved bonds would continue to be collected under an open-enrollment plan, even if parents choose to send their children to La Cañada schools.

“It would be just as though all of the students were coming to Glendale Unified as they are now,” said Eva Lueck, chief business and financial officer for Glendale Unified. “There would be no change in how taxes are currently being assessed.”

But La Cañada officials are not talking about an open enrollment plan; they want the entire territory transferred to the LCUSD.

**Millions of dollars at stake**

If La Cañada Unified’s proposed parcel tax is approved by voters next spring, it would bring in approximately $2.7 million without the Sagebrush area parcels. But if La Cañada is successful in having all Sagebrush properties transferred to its district, the $450 tax collected from the approximately 870 parcels there would bring La Cañada schools an additional $391,000 per year, for a total of approximately $3.1 million into the LCUSD coffers annually.

The board assured that school choice would be respected through permits if an agreement between the districts were reached and that after the transfer, residents will only have to pay La Cañada property taxes and the parcel tax, should it be approved in a spring mail-in ballot election.

Sagebrush residents have long complained their unique status unfairly sets them apart, something Glendale school board member Mary Boger said at Tuesday’s GUSD meeting that she was “stunned” to hear.

“I think of all the children who live in La Cañada who go to private schools. Do they feel equally left out of La Cañada community?” she asked. “The only truly ethical and moral decision to be made here is a quite simple one,” Boger added. “We simply create Sagebrush as an open enrollment area.”

Glendale Unified currently receives as much as $46 per assessed $100,000 in property taxes annually to pay for Measure S, a $270 million school bond passed in April 2011. If the Sagebrush area were to be transferred, GUSD would lose about $500 million in assessed value, amounting to 2% of its tax base and about $210,000 in property taxes each year.

Audience members at the La Cañada school board meeting, some of whom live in the Sagebrush area, expressed their concern at the prospect of having to remove their children from GUSD and broached worries of double paying for Measure S and La Cañada Unified taxes, in addition to a possible new parcel tax.

“I applaud you for seeking a parcel tax,” said parent Sandy Russell. “We don’t want to pay for both, though.”
Transfer effort began in June

The most recent request for the territory transfer, made by a citizens committee in June to the La Cañada Flintridge City Council, was followed by a supportive resolution from the council, then moved to the La Cañada school board, which also passed a resolution in favor of the transfer.

School board president Scott Tracy said officials are hoping negotiations lead to an orderly system of transfers to La Cañada and a permit process for Sagebrush families wanting to stay put.

He said La Cañada has offered to pay the GUSD $3 million to offset the loss of bond money raised through the voter-approve Measure S in 2011. In addition, La Cañada offered to pay the fair market value of a lot near Mountain Avenue Elementary School, which could be turned into park space.

GUSD stands to lose up to $2.6 million per-pupil state funding if students are transferred to another district; the larger the number, the larger the loss. Tracy said Glendale school officials asked for “additional remuneration” to compensate for this.

Court challenge may be in order

If Glendale and La Cañada cannot come to terms, Tracy said the city of La Cañada Flintridge is prepared to take the matter to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Reorganization.

“That [compensation] would not be provided if the county committee process were pursued and we were victorious,” Tracy said.

Despite the rhetoric, Glendale school board member Greg Krikorian said dialogue between officials has been largely positive.

“My whole concern is the transfer and how we’re trying to protect our taxpayers,” he said, and hoped officials would avoid a “legal war” over the issue.

Glendale Unified Supt. Dick Sheehan said the matter would return to the Glendale school board during its next meeting in early November.

“We’re getting to a point where I do believe a decision will be made shortly,” he said.