

~AD HOC REPORT~
Reapportionment (2022) Meeting #3
Thursday, March 23, 2023

Chairman Knapp called the meeting to order at 7p.m. on Thursday, March 23, 2023. Present were Committee Members Nancy Cammisa and Ben Chianese. From the City were Bob Yamin, Corporation Counsel, Joseph Mortelliti, Outside Counsel; Dan Casagrande, Outside Counsel; Joan Bielizna, Democrat Registrar of Voters; MaryAnn Doran, Republican Registrar of Voters. Ex-Officio members; Paul Rotello, Duane Perkins, Michael Esposito, Joseph Britton, Vinny DiGilio, Warren Levy, and Joseph Cavo. From the public were Tom Brown, Andrea Gartner, and one unidentified individual.

Mr. Knapp noted that former committee member Councilman Fred Visconti was replaced with Councilman Ben Chianese at the March 9, 2023 City Council meeting. He then provided a brief overview of the previous committee meetings.

A motion was made by Councilman Ben Chianese, second by Councilwoman Nancy Cammisa to recommend to the City Council to keep the current voting wards, and voting boundaries in the seven wards, of the City of Danbury as currently constructed. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Casagrande explained that a Demographic Expert (Dr. Peter Morrison) was hired by the city to review existing plans (A and B) and to report on their compliance of the Voting Rights Act. He noted that Dr. Morrison's report stated that both plans could expose the city to litigation, and summarized the requirements of reapportionment. Dr. Morrison agreed that the current wards are still valid and should remain the same. He also suggested that a qualified demographic expert be used in any future redistricting plans.

Mr. Chianese discussed additional information within the demographic expert's report and noted that some of the population figures may not be accurate since the expert focused on the ethnic breakdown of each ward, not the population size. He noted the following data based on the redistricting software; Total City of Danbury population is 86,518, there are 7 Wards, the target population distribution in each ward would be 12,360. The greatest population growth occurred in the 6th Ward which grew by 20% (+2,458 people). The lowest population growth is in the 3rd Ward with about 0 growth. He noted that the 6th Ward is above the 10% population threshold required for reapportionment, and that the previously proposed Plan A does not meet reapportionment requirements due to a lack of data.

Mr. Casagrande explained that Section 2-4 of the City Charter currently requires that "all wards be substantially equal in population, consistent with Federal and Constitutional standards", and he noted that that is a very vague threshold. He also discussed the age of the existing City Charter and therefore, noted that the Voting Rights Act were not considered in the reapportionment section. He urged that an amendment be made to the City Charter to address this discrepancy. He explained that the demographic expert discussed the extensive work that needs be completed for proper reapportionment, and that his final recommendation and immediate solution is to keep the wards as they exist.

Mr. Rotello agreed that the best option is to move forward with keeping the current wards, however, he did express concern over the unverified population discrepancy in Ward 6. He notes that a higher population in Ward 6 could mean that the people in that ward are under-represented. Mr. Britton asked about the population deviation in Ward 6, he discussed his concerns with time constraints, and asked for the cost of the demographic expert's work (about \$26,000 per Mr. Casagrande). Mr. Yamin noted that the current wards are in compliance with the Voting Rights Act. Mr. Casagrande and Mr. Mortelliti agreed that the Secretary of State does not need to approve keeping the same wards and map. Mr. DiGilio and Mr. Levy thanked the committee and attorneys for their hard work, and they agree with keeping the current wards until a Charter Revision occurs. Mr. Perkins expressed his concern with the use of population versus ethnic data for future reapportionment. Mr. Casagrande addressed questions regarding the Federal Voting Rights Act statute.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Cammisa, and seconded by Councilman Knapp, to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Knapp, Chair
Nancy Cammisa
Ben Chianese