



November 4, 2021

Dear Honorable Lakewood City Councilmembers:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding comments made at the October 26, 2021 Public Hearing to Receive Input Concerning District Maps for City Council Elections District Boundaries and the Sequencing of Elections item.

The legislative intent of the 2002 California Voting Rights Act is to end the use of at-large voting in local elections if they dilute the votes of a minority group. Elections Code 10010, Chapter 2. District Boundaries [10010- 10010.] subdivision (b) states *“in determining the final sequence of the district elections conducted in a political subdivision in which members of the governing body will be elected at different times to provide for staggered terms of office, **the governing body shall give special consideration to the purposes of the California Voting Rights Act of 2001, and it shall take into account the preferences expressed by members of the districts.**” **

Vice Mayor Steve Croft stated his preference for Map 104 at the hearing, which would delay the vote by voters in district 5 until the year 2024. This is contrary to the intent of the California Voting Rights Act. Under this map, the newly created district 5 (east of the I-605 freeway) is 84% Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and African American, by population, compared with almost 60% in the rest of Lakewood. Latinos are particularly concentrated east of the I-605, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders along Pioneer Blvd. According to the 2020 Census, 37% percent of those surveyed in district 5 reported that they are immigrants, and 24% speak English “less than very well”.

Why would the Lakewood City Council select a map that delays district 5 voters from electing their chosen representative until 2024? This is more than two years from now, and further supports the argument that the City of Lakewood’s election system dilutes the ability for Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and African Americans to elect candidates of their choice, or influence the outcome of the City's council elections.

Additionally, we wish to express concerns about the comments made by Vice Mayor Steve Croft against map 102, where incumbent councilmembers Ari Pe and Vicki Stuckey would have to run against each other in district 3 in 2022. Vice Mayor commented, “I must reject one of those maps that will guarantee less, not more diversity on future councils. Map 102 would force our only woman, and African American councilmember, to compete against our only Asian councilmember. Resulting in one of them having to leave our council if the other candidate runs and wins, or if there is a third candidate, it even opens up the likelihood that both of them would be off council.”

As stated during the City Council’s public hearings in April 2021, race cannot be used as the sole or predominant basis for the drawing of any district without a compelling justification. This is exactly what Vice Mayor Croft has done - he has chosen to eliminate map 102 from consideration because it has an elected Asian American incumbent, Councilmember Ari Pe, running against an appointed African American incumbent, Councilmember Vicki Stuckey. It is also troubling Vice Mayor Croft may have made comments that violate the Federal Voting Rights Act, and are implicitly racially discriminatory by assuming there are no other candidates of color who could successfully run in district 3 and beat both incumbents, or voters of color would only vote for a candidate of color, or successful candidates of color might not emerge in other council districts.

Vice Mayor Steve Croft and the National Demographics Corporation consultant also made troubling political comments. They stated turnout in district 5 would be greater during a Presidential cycle in 2024, justifying a delay in East Lakewood’s voting rights. This is unjustified because the point of creating a district in East Lakewood is so that its voters can choose their own representative. Further, voter turnout in Lakewood was never a consideration when the City held elections in March of odd years over decades, where council members were elected with as few as 2,852 votes.

We are also concerned map 104 divides the “community of interest” of the Bellflower Unified School District among three council districts. This is in conflict with the City’s districting rules and goals outlined at the April 2021 public hearings. Even more concerning is the division of the Mayfair High School neighborhood, where residents have expressed concerns about vehicular, pedestrian, and public safety.

Lastly, map 104 appears to be gerrymandered to include appointed Councilmember Vicki Stuckey’s residence in district 3. Map 104 uses Lakewood Blvd., Bellflower Blvd., and the I-605 freeway as boundaries to divide most of the city’s five districts. However, the dividing line between seats 4 and 3 is the LA County Public Works flood control channel behind residents’ homes. Wouldn’t Palo Verde Ave., which divides the cities of Lakewood and Cerritos, be a better boundary for this neighborhood? Or was this map drawn to amplify the political power of certain incumbents?

To remedy this pending legal issue, we respectfully request the City Council to:

- Schedule the election sequence to **prioritize the election of district 5 (east of the I-605) in 2022.**
- **Reject map 104 entirely** as it violates the City’s districting principles and goals for the districting process by drawing a district for a councilmember who was not elected, but appointed.
- **Schedule two additional public hearings** on the proposed maps and election sequence at **Palms Park and Bloomfield Park.**

In conclusion, in order for districting to promote democracy and fairness, people who have been historically disadvantaged in the electoral process must have more opportunities to get involved and ultimately vote.

We appreciate the work you and the city staff have done on behalf of the residents of Lakewood. Thank you for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,
Members of Lakewood Forward

- Sylvester Ani
- Rebecca Buffington
- Marion Castello
- Aaron Castillo
- Dr. Marisela Cervantes
- Cassandra Chase
- Tom Daly
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Cc: The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senate
The Honorable Alex Padilla, United States Senate
The Honorable Linda Sanchez, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Alan Lowenthal, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Lena Gonzalez, California State Senate
The Honorable Bob Archuleta, California State Senate
The Honorable Anthony Rendon, California State Assembly
The Honorable Janice Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor

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