



Virginia Redistricting Commission

May 24, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

Electronic Meeting

<https://virginiaredistricting.org/>

The Virginia Redistricting Commission (the Commission) met virtually with Greta Harris, co-chair, presiding.¹ The meeting began with opening remarks from Ms. Harris. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's meetings webpage](#).

Census Bureau Presentation

James Whitehorne, Chief, Census Redistricting & Voting Rights Data Office, United States Census Bureau

Mr. James Whitehorne provided the Commission with an overview of the role of the United States Census Bureau in the current redistricting cycle, addressing the 2020 census geography and the 2020 census redistricting data program. The full presentation can be found under the [meetings and hearings page](#).

- Senator George Barker asked Mr. Whitehorne to review the Census Bureau's decision to deliver the data all at once rather than prioritizing states that have legislative elections in November 2021. Mr. Whitehorne explained that the two factors involved in the decision were the COVID-19 pandemic and a process change that prevented the Census Bureau from using a data-driven method to prioritize states.
- Senator Stephen Newman asked if software companies are prepared to use the new data format that the Census Bureau is providing. Mr. Whitehorne assured the Commission that the software vendors, including the Commission's vendor, Citygate GIS, are comfortable with the data format and believe they are prepared to provide a quick turnaround.
- Ms. Harris asked Mr. Whitehorne to elaborate on the topic of differential privacy and to explain who makes the determination of block boundary suggestions. Mr. Whitehorne described differential privacy as a technique that is used to prevent the reconstruction of data as a means of circumventing the safeguards that protect private information. He also noted that the Census Bureau determines the block boundaries by creating an algorithm.
- Mr. James Abrenio asked what the purpose of a block boundary is if the block has no population. Mr. Whitehorne explained that every data point must be a block boundary and that zero-population blocks can be useful in bridging areas together to help keep districts compact.

Ms. Mackenzie Babichenko and Ms. Harris reported that they had visited the Division of Legislative Services for an informal training session with Julie Smith, Senior GIS Analyst,

¹ **Members Present:** Mackenzie Babichenko, co-chair, Greta Harris, co-chair, James Abrenio, Jose Feliciano, Marvin Gilliam, Rick Harrell, Brandon Hutchins, Sean Kumar, Delegate Les R. Adams, Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Delegate Margaret B. Ransone, Senator Mamie E. Locke, Delegate Marcus B. Simon, Senator Stephen D. Newman, Senator George L. Barker, and Senator Ryan T. McDougle.

Members Absent: None

concerning the use of the redistricting software. The co-chairs recommended that all of the commissioners make an effort to become familiar with the software and equipment as the Commission moves forward with determining how to proceed with the map drawing process.

Update from the Budget and Finance Subcommittee

Mr. Sean Kumar and Mr. Marvin Gilliam, Co-chairs, Budget and Finance Subcommittee

Mr. Sean Kumar and Mr. Marvin Gilliam indicated that the Budget and Finance Subcommittee had begun working through the items included in the subcommittee's charge and was focused on finalizing process points in order to make final recommendations to the full Commission regarding (i) a budget for the Commission and (ii) the recommended procurement of services necessary for the completion of the Commission's work.

Update from the Citizen Engagement Subcommittee

Mr. James Abrenio and Mr. Richard Harrell, Co-chairs, Citizen Engagement Subcommittee

Mr. Richard Harrell informed the Commission that the Citizen Engagement Subcommittee's initial recommendations included scheduling a total of 16 public hearings, consisting of eight hearings before the development of redistricting plans and eight hearings after the development of redistricting plans but before submission of such plans to the General Assembly. Mr. Harrell also noted that the Citizen Engagement Subcommittee had submitted a request to the Budget and Finance Subcommittee for a minimum of \$250,000 to be included in the Commission's overall budget to cover anticipated activities, including the mandated public hearings and community engagement efforts. Mr. Abrenio added that the subcommittee will proceed with developing specific guidelines for public comment at the public hearings.

After the update from the Citizen Engagement Subcommittee, Mr. Amigo Wade announced that the Commission's website had been moved from the Division of Legislative Services' website to a new stand-alone site that can be found at: <https://virginiaredistricting.org>.

Public Comment

Prior to commencing the meeting's public comment period, Ms. Harris announced three individuals signed up to provide public comment. Public comment was limited to two minutes each for all public commenters. The public comments covered the following topics: values and criteria to consider in the process of map redrawing, a recommendation for the Commission to reach out to Virginia counties currently using Citygate GIS, and use of the Virginia Counts Coalition to assist the Commission in reaching its objectives. In addition, a response from the Commission was requested on the issue of whether maps showing the current districts will be used for the upcoming November 2021 elections. The Commission has no constitutional or statutory authority regarding the scheduling or administration of Virginia elections, including those held in 2021. Senator Barker responded that the understanding is that the November 2021 elections will use the districts designated in the current maps.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Commission will be held on June 7, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.



For more information, see the [*Commission's website*](#) or contact the Division of Legislative Services staff:

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