



BOB BLUMENFIELD

Councilmember, Third District

October 4, 2023

Council President Paul Krekorian and
Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: CF 22-1196-S1 Comments on Effective Date for New Maps, Ex Parte Communications, and Council Size

Dear Colleagues:

I am unable to attend the October 5, 2023, meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on City Governance Reform, and I am writing to share my perspective on the three unresolved issues: the effective date for new maps, ex parte communications, and council size.

Effective Date for New Maps

I support Figure 1, Option Two, which would require elections in every council district after each redistricting cycle. In my view, this is the most non-partisan and neutral option that allows for each council district to be represented by a member elected by the residents of that district.

A true Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) will draw and number districts, which can result in dramatic changes to district boundaries and potentially displace incumbents from their districts. A staggered election means that many (possibly most) Angelenos may find themselves represented by a Councilmember they did not elect, and many members may represent districts in which they do not live and to which they do not have deep ties. That is not good governance.

Therefore, Option Two provides for reset and enables staggered terms for continuity, retains institutional knowledge, and avoids undoing the gains in voter participation we have seen by syncing City elections to gubernatorial and presidential elections. If several members who had been elected to odd-numbered districts in 2030 find themselves in even-numbered districts following redistricting, they are likely to resign their original seats to run in the even-numbered district where they live in 2032 that could result in a series of high-cost, low-turnout special elections to select their replacements.

The State Senate model, where half of the new district boundaries do not take effect until the next election cycle, may be acceptable for a legislative body that is largely policy-focused, but is arbitrary for local council districts, where much of our work involves direct delivery of city services to communities and residents. It is unfair to effectively leave swaths of the City unrepresented at City Hall for two years.

Ex Parte Communications

I strongly believe that the IRC's work should maximize opportunities for true public engagement. That means creating a system where members of the public have opportunities to provide comments remotely and electronically, and not only through public comment at an in-person meeting. Advances in technology allow for open, transparent and public communications, even if not in-person. I recognize that the Brown Act currently places limits on use of new technological methods of communication, and that we therefore cannot prescribe use of alternative methods of communication.

This Committee, however, should instruct the Chief Legislative Analyst to report back with changes to the Brown Act that the City might endorse in order to maximize true public involvement in the decision-making process. Such changes need not be limited to the IRC, but could apply to Council and other City Brown Act bodies.

Finally, although the hope is that the IRC members follow the requirement to only communicate about the drawing of lines in public meetings, it is unrealistic to expect them to remain unaware of social media postings, news articles, and other means of communication where they may be exposed to opinions about the drawing of lines. Without the ability to sequester these Commissioners from media of all kinds, an official authorized publicly available technological method to interact with the public about the line drawing process would be an effective way to enhance participation rather than stifle communication.

Size of City Council

I ask that the committee not decide on the size of the Los Angeles City Council yet and instead establish a Charter Reform Commission to evaluate the governance structure of this City and provide further analysis and recommendations related to the size of the Council, costs associated to expanding Council seats, and the impacts to government operations. I believe there are many points of view on the "right size" of a council district for representation and effective, manageable government. In my view, expansion should be more modest than radical as we proceed into uncharted territory and have many unanswered questions for the operation and implementation of additional districts. I do not have a firm position on what that number should be. A modest expansion of Councilmembers would provide opportunities for continued or new seats at the table for increased representation.

My third term ends in 2026 so these new lines will take effect after I have left office, thus I have less of a stake in this decision than most of you do. Nonetheless, I have concerns that a large increase in the size of Council will result in a permanent shift in the checks and balances in City government, and a reduction of Council's power and authority by diffusing into smaller districts with more members.

More importantly it may have unintended consequences of dividing our city into more fiefdoms tied to smaller, local, like-minded communities, versus working toward representing a more collaborative city with diverse communities in each district. Further, while some champion a larger Council as an opportunity for closer relationships with communities, to be responsive and in touch with

constituents a larger Council will need additional equipment, office and district services locations, and staff to support this work, and the costs for expansion have only begun to be fully explored.

I apologize that I cannot join you in person for this discussion, and I appreciate each of your careful consideration of these issues moving forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Blumenfeld". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BOB BLUMENFELD
Councilmember, City of Los Angeles
BB: jj