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First-ever public process for Minneapolis redistricting gets positive reaction

By [Karen Boros](#) | 03/30/12

For decades, the drawing of Minneapolis ward and park district boundaries occurred behind closed doors, where political appointees did battle in private.

Voters scrapped that system in 2010 when [the redistricting process](#) of line drawing was handed off to the Charter Commission, which is appointed by the chief judge of the Hennepin County District Court.

As a result, the first [political boundaries](#) [PDF] created in public were unanimously approved this week by the Charter Commission.

“What they would do in the old days was each side would create competing maps and lobby behind closed doors to get votes and see what they could cook up,” said Charter Commission Chair Barry Clegg. “The public wasn’t involved in the process of drawing maps and couldn’t watch.”



This year, the whole process was done in public, sometimes painfully, as communities of interest came to make their cases as the Redistricting Group, appointed by the Charter Commission, moved lines and split hairs.

Early on, the Citizens Committee for Fair Redistricting, representing the Somali and East African community, made their case for creation of a ward dominated by African-Americans to increase minority representation on the City Council. They came with their own map of how Ward 6 might look if lines were drawn to give them an opportunity to elect one of their own to the council.

The African group did not get the map they suggested but they were pleased with the map they got.

“We have a better chance than we did before,” said Abdulkadir Warsame of the Fair Redistricting group. “We’re very happy that we actually took part in the process.”

“Politically, we’re much more energized now,” added his colleague, Hussein Ahmed. “We will get a candidate that represents the East African community and who we can all be proud of as Americans.”

“They didn’t get the map they asked for, but it got them more than 40 percent of the African-American community in that ward (Ward 6) and I think their map was 42 or 43 percent,” said Clegg. “In terms of getting the population, I think it accomplished the same thing.”

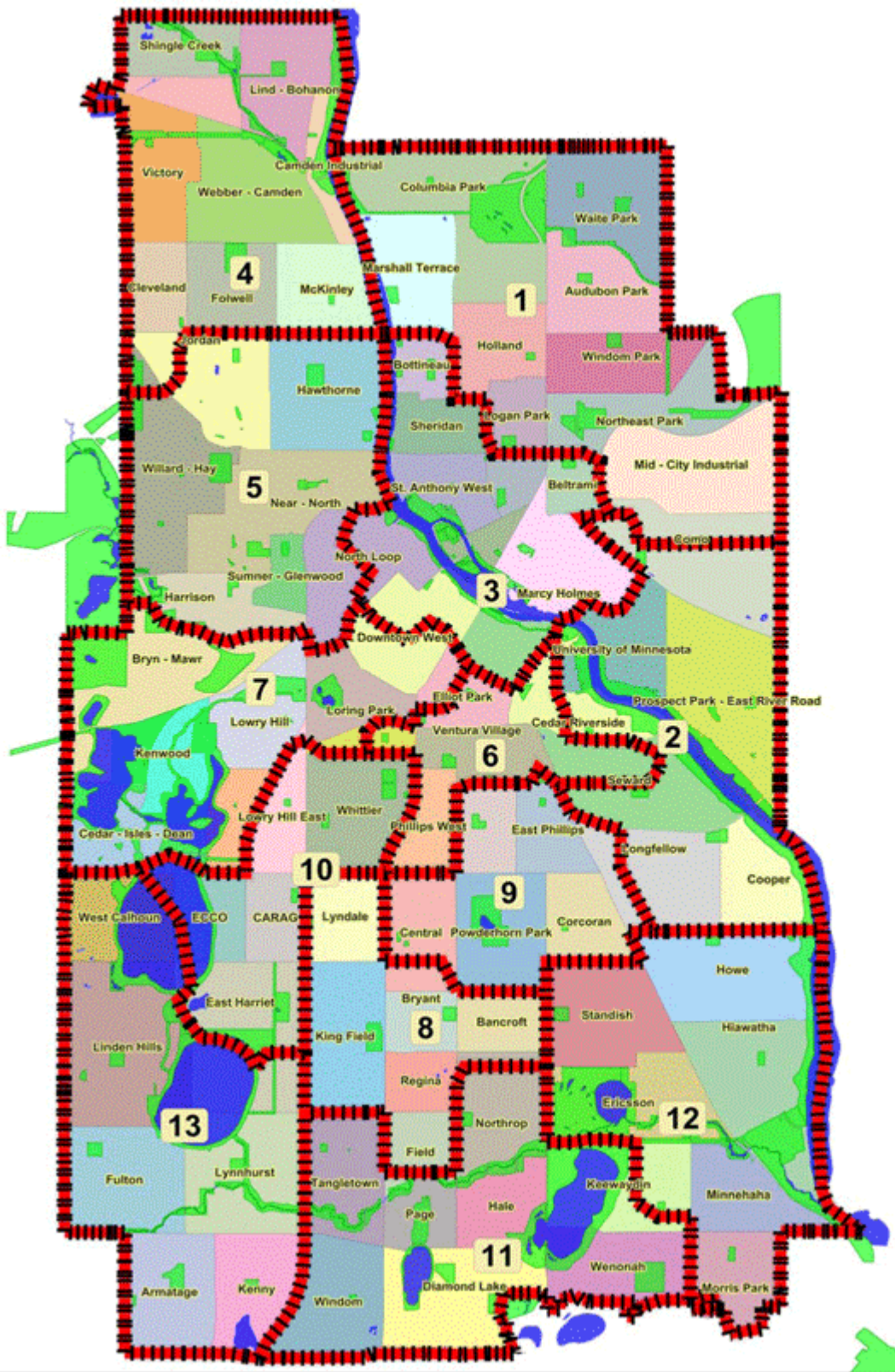
The African group was followed by numerous communities of interest each making a case for moving a line or moving a neighborhood out of one ward and into another.

“It was often difficult. It was a tug of war between neighborhood interests,” said Charter Commission member Andrea Rubenstein. “Our job was to balance those interests.”

“It’s not perfect, but I think it’s a good piece of work,” added Charter Commission member Natonia Johnson. “It gives the city an opportunity in Wards 6 and 9 — maybe Ward 2 — to bring diversity to the City Council.”

“After looking at the statistics and listening to the testimony we heard from the public, it became clear to me that standing pat was not going to produce the best plan,” said Charter Commission member Andy Kozak, a veteran of redistricting battles in the past.

City of Minneapolis ward boundary plan



Here, Clegg explains the major changes to the Minneapolis ward maps:

Ward 2

“In Ward 2 we took away part of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and part of the Seward neighborhood to accommodate the Ward 6 issues of the East African and Somali communities, to

combine those communities of interest. Taking those out meant that Ward 2 needed to add population, so we extended Ward 2 down into the Longfellow Neighborhood.

Ward 6

“Ward 6 had included the Whittier neighborhood and did not incorporate the Seward neighborhood and that meant there was a divide between Wards 2, 6 and 9 of the Somali and East African community that is concentrated in the Cedar-Riverside and Phillips neighborhoods.

“What we did was extend Ward 6 into the Seward neighborhood along the Franklin Avenue corridor to pick up the Somali and East African community and eliminate the split into three wards. If we’d given them (the African group) the map they asked for, we couldn’t accommodate some of the neighborhoods and other community interests.”

Ward 9

“Ward 9 got extended farther south, but we brought it up and consolidated it into Midtown, East Phillips and the Powderhorn neighborhood. That was largely driven by an attempt to give the Hispanic community an opportunity. The Hispanic community in Ward 9 is now approximately 32 percent.”

North Side

“On the North Side, we had two neighborhoods -- McKinley and Hawthorne -- that were on the west side of the river in Ward 3 and we heard from those neighborhoods that they were really more a community of interest with the neighborhoods on the North Side than with Northeast Minneapolis. So we put those neighborhoods into Wards 4 and 5, which needed to gain population.”

Downtown

“Ward 3 needed to pick up population so we moved it across the river and picked up the river corridor, which means downtown is now divided between Wards 3 and 7. We heard from numerous people that downtown should not be in one ward.”

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COMMENTS (5)

People commenting on Ward 2

SUBMITTED BY CONSTANCE SULLIVAN ON MARCH 30, 2012 - 11:39AM.

People commenting on Ward 2 as newly-designed should also look at, and ask questions about, the far northwest part of that ward, in the Como neighborhood.

There's a strange little hook there, adding population to Ward 2 that does not involve Longfellow. It does, however, add significantly to the minority population of Ward 2, by putting--with some pencil effort of that unprecedented hooking line--a strongly African American and a strongly East African immigrant subsidized housing projects into the Second Ward.

That's a first--the area was always either entirely in Ward 1 or Ward 2--and the dividing line is within, not on the edges of, a neighborhood. It's a quiet, non-travelled residential street south of East Hennepin ave. No reason for such a weird line except to include those minorities in Ward 2. Making up for the minorities from Ward 2 taken for Ward 6.

Strange, how much Minneapolis is into identity politics instead of the politics of place.

Good to have the process out

SUBMITTED BY GARY PETERSON ON MARCH 30, 2012 - 5:06PM.

Good to have the process out in the public's gaze. However, Gerry Mander would be proud of these results; those working on this process should have mixed feelings about feeling so.

This story missed all the controversy

SUBMITTED BY SHELDON MAINS ON MARCH 30, 2012 - 6:57PM.

A lot of people are unhappy with the outcome. Ward 6 is a classic gerrymander--with the piece going into Seward looking like the Guthrie's Endless Bridge, maybe it should be called Guthriemandered. I can walk three blocks due north--starting in Ward 2, walking through Ward 6 for only 3 blocks and ending up in Ward 2. The map also concentrates the lowest income parts of Minneapolis into a few wards--especially the 5th and 6th.

These concerns have been expressed in the hearings and even in the City Council meeting this morning. It would be nice if the opinions from Minneapolis residents would have been included in this article. Getting only comments from the Commission seems to be very one-sided.

Of course the Commission was

SUBMITTED BY MARK FOX ON MARCH 31, 2012 - 12:50AM.

Of course the Commission was going to congratulate itself.

If the City is going to operate this way, why not just establish a Council based on demographic categories and have the city-wide population in each group vote for their own representative.

Gary Schiff should just resign and run for president

SUBMITTED BY JOHN SCHWALBE ON APRIL 3, 2012 - 10:04AM.

The changes to ward 9 might lower the median income of the district, but it also creates a logical geographic block as well as puts mid town people into one district instead of splitting up and diluting their votes as had previously been done. With these changes, Schiff might have to spend time representing and helping the midtown residents instead of using ward 9 as his personal launch pad for higher political ambitions. Now he will have to care about what Powderhorn and Phillips neighborhoods want instead of what looks good for his ambitious plan to challenge Rybak in a few years. Its like watching Tim Pawlenty when being MN govenor took a back seat to presidential positioning and party politics. No wonder Gary Schiff doesn't like the new ward changes. He now has to represent the people of midtown and answer to their real life concerns which he finds so boring and irrelevant to democratic primaries.