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How does Maryland's new legislative redistricting map change Frederick County?

By Jack Hogan

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A new legislative map the Maryland General Assembly passed this week won't drastically change Frederick County's voting districts, but one redistricting expert said it could influence the type of candidate that finds success in local primaries, particularly in the city.

Under the legislature's map, the county will remain divided into three districts. District 3 will encompass much of the city of Frederick, while District 4 wraps around the city, covering most everything outside the city and south of Thurmont.

District 2A, which stretches west into Washington County, includes Thurmont and everything to the Pennsylvania line.

Prior to the change, a larger District 3 was split in two, with one part covering the city and the other housing areas south of the city between Urbana and Jefferson. District 4 included everything east, west and north of the city.

The new District 3 may play to candidates who are well known both in and around the city, who can use a broader voting population to their advantage, rather than relying on a primarily urban or mostly suburban base, said Walter Olson, writer and senior fellow with the conservative-leaning Cato Institute, a D.C.-based public policy research organization.

Candidates with more local appeal may have previously benefited from District 3 being split in two, with 3A comprising urban voters in Frederick and 3B including suburban residents south of the city, he said.

This year, candidates campaigning in District 3 will have an advantage if they are well-known in both the city and the suburbs.

But the legislature's map likely won't shift the advantage from one political party to another in Frederick County, said Olson, who served as co-chair of the Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission.

The commission proposed a redistricting map on behalf of Republican Gov. Larry Hogan. Though, the Democrat-controlled legislature ended up approving the map that its own redistricting commission created, which drew swift condemnation from state Republicans who said portions of the map exemplified partisan gerrymandering.

State Republican leaders have threatened to file a lawsuit blocking the map's implementation.

Frederick city and its southern suburbs are currently represented by three Democrats. Del. Carol Krimm (3A) has been elected to two terms, Del. Karen Lewis Young (3A) has also served two terms but will be vacating her seat to run for state Senate, and Del. Ken Kerr (3B) has filed for reelection as his first term comes to a close.

Olson said the legislature's map and the one his commission came up with were similar in the changes they proposed to Frederick County. He said both proposals mostly aligned with the region's population shift revealed in the 2020 Census.

"It was one of the less controversial parts of the state," he said.

Of the county's 268,000 residents, 47 percent reside in District 3. Same with District 4, according to state documents. The remaining six percent are in District 2A.

Olson also pointed out that the new map continued a trend of preventing Frederick County from sharing a district with Montgomery County, its neighbor to the southeast.

"I think there's a feeling that Montgomery County politics are more powerful," Olson said, adding that some voters feel separating the two counties would ensure local concerns aren't overshadowed by the more populous Montgomery County.