

## **New state delegate, Senate district maps proposed for Montgomery County**

Three districts would be redrawn to give each delegate a smaller territory.

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As Gov. Larry Hogan's commission on redistricting nears the end of its work on proposed maps for state legislative and congressional districts, Montgomery County could see some changes.

The commission has worked for months on maps statewide, and is now seeking public feedback. Legislative maps are redrawn every 10 years in response to the latest census data.

Commission Co-Chair Walter Olson, a Republican from Frederick County, said one of the hottest issues during the entire process was whether the state should use more single-member districts or multi-member districts for the House of Delegates.

Currently, Montgomery County has eight state legislative districts, each with one senator and three delegates. All three delegates represent the entire district. In a single-member district plan, the district is divided into three parts, each represented by a different delegate.

The commission's current proposal calls for three single-member legislative districts out of eight in Montgomery County.

The districts that were split were:

- A district that covers the upper ring of the county, one that Olson called the "ag reserve" district since it covers that area and both sides of the county
- A district that covers the Four Corners area of Silver Spring, much of Wheaton and much of Aspen Hill
- A district in the eastern part of the county, which spans from Sandy Spring down to White Oak, and Glenmont to Fairland

Currently, the ag reserve district is mostly represented by two multi-member districts: 14 and 15.

The second proposed new district cuts through what is now Districts 18 and 20, and the last one would mostly split up parts of District 14 in the eastern part of the county.

Olson said the reasoning for picking the three single-member districts in their respective locations was either because of low-density population (such as the ag reserve district) or to better represent minority populations (such as the Hispanic population in Wheaton).

Public feedback on the commission's proposal is open until Oct. 25, Olson wrote in a text.

Olson said the commission is not supposed to look at party registration, past election results or current incumbents when drafting the maps.

"This is not a science. This is a very imperfect art. ... You can't prevent every single split and you can't unify every possible community of interest," Olson said of drawing the maps.

Co-Chair Alex Williams, a Democrat from Prince George's County, agreed with Olson that population density played a role in determining single-member versus multi-member districts.

Williams said he wished more elected officials, especially in larger counties, spoke up throughout the process.

Along with the governor's commission, the state legislature also has a commission tasked with reviewing and drafting two maps. Under state law, the legislature has the final say over what the new maps will look like.

Both commissions also are tasked with drawing new congressional district lines. Many political observers have criticized Maryland's congressional lines as some of the worst gerrymandering in the country.

Currently, Montgomery County has the third, sixth and eighth congressional districts.

A fraction of Montgomery County is in the third district, which also is in Baltimore, Howard and Anne Arundel counties, plus Baltimore city. In Montgomery County, it includes part of Brookeville and other eastern parts of the county, including Sandy Spring and Burtonsville.

The sixth covers the western and central parts of the county and much of western Maryland.

The eighth covers eastern parts of the county, extending down to Silver Spring and Takoma Park, and goes through northern Frederick County and much of Carroll County.

The governor's commission proposes three new congressional districts in Montgomery County:

- The sixth district would include the northern part of Montgomery County, covering the ag reserve
- The eighth district would cover much of the lower half of the county
- The fourth district would include a small part of the southeastern part of the county, and include northern Prince George's County

The commission that made this approval was appointed by Gov. Larry Hogan. It consists of three Democrats, three Republicans and three independents. Under state law, the commission must draw maps with legislative districts that are compact, have “substantially equal population,” and respect natural and political boundaries.

But the governor’s commission’s work is only a recommendation for the state legislature, which has its own commission.

As of Monday, the legislature’s committee had not released any maps for congressional districts or state legislative districts.

The legislature’s committee is seven members, with four Democrats and two Republicans in the General Assembly. It is chaired by Karl S. Aro, the seventh member, a retired state employee who previously was a senior official in the state’s Department of Legislative Services.

Hogan must submit a plan to the General Assembly by Jan. 12, 2022. The state legislature has 45 days in the 2022 session to adopt its own plan if it chooses; if it doesn’t, Hogan’s plan becomes law.

Because the legislature’s commission contains more Democrats than Republicans, some are concerned that it will decide on gerrymandered districts that favor Democrats.

The commission has been meeting and recently heard calls from several political organizations to release its proposed maps before its last public hearing in November.

Aro said at a previous meeting that he hopes the commission can release draft maps by Nov. 15, when the body is scheduled to hold a statewide public hearing virtually via YouTube.

Olson and Williams said that no matter what happens with the legislative commission, they are simply focused on providing fair maps to the governor, using a transparent process.

“Our task is to provide Governor Hogan with maps, so that he can submit as his recommendation maps that are politically neutral,” Olson said. “And that’s all we’re charged with. The politics that happens after he proposes the maps is up to them.”

Del. Marc Korman (D-Bethesda), chair of the Montgomery County House delegation, said he is still waiting to see what the state legislative group proposes for maps.

Korman said he doesn’t completely oppose single-member districts for delegates, but in multi-member districts, each delegate can specialize in a specific set of topics.

For District 16, Korman said, Del. Ariana Kelly can focus on health care, Del. Sara Love can focus on the environment, housing and civil liberties, and he can focus on transportation and budget issues.

“Between us, we get to cover a broader range of issues for our constituents. ... It really rewards specialization and being able to get in-depth on certain issues,” Korman said.

The governor's commission is currently presenting its final maps to communities statewide, and hopes to finish its work by early November.

The legislative commission is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the Montgomery County portion of the map — covering state and congressional boundaries — on Nov. 5 at 6 p.m.