

REDISTRICTING GOVERNMENTAL WORKSHOP

GADSDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSISONERS MEETING CHAMBERS
9-B EAST JEFFERSON STREET
QUINCY, FLORIDA 32351

January 16, 2024

4:00 P.M.

The workshop was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Ronterious Green, Chairman, District 5 Alonzetta Simpkins, Vice-Chair, District 2, Eric Hinson, District 1, Kimblin NeSmith, District 3, Brenda Holt, District 4, Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator, Opal McKinney-Williams, Attorney, Karema D. Dudley, Chairwoman, District 5, Leroy McMillan, District 3, Steve Scott, District 2, Cathy S. Johnson, District 1, Elijah Key, Superintendent of Schools, Attorney Deborah Minnis, Adriana Quijada, Deputy Clerk; and others. Charlie D. Frost was absent.

Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Green called the workshop to order at 4:00 pm. Commissioner Hinson provided Invocation and asked for a moment of silence. Chair Green led into the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners welcomes and encourages public participation at all meetings of the Board. Citizens are free to speak for up to three (3) minutes on non-agenda items. Public comments and participation are also encouraged for items on the agenda. Additionally, if you are unable to attend a meeting in person, comments from the Public can also be submitted via email to CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.org until noon on the date of the meeting. Comments submitted after the deadline, but prior to the meeting, will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review comments prior to the meeting. Citizens are further encouraged to participate via Zoom using the credentials on the County's website.

Chair Green read aloud the above statement.

General Business

1. Discussion on Redistricting

Mr. Dixon stated they have for discussion Ordinance 2024-01 for redistricting. He stated Mr. Spitzer was present to walk them through.

Mr. Spitzer stated the first thing they do is get the latest census data. Each block could tell them m how many people live there and their race. When they put the current districts on top of the 2020 data, there was a 46-47-point spread, and that was way beyond the acceptable limits. He mentioned that District 1 needed to lose 2,500-2,600 people. District 3 and 4 need to gain population. District 2 and 5 were pretty close to what the new average is. Mr. Spitzer showed examples of census blocks.

Mr. Spitzer stated there were 2 maps. One was what they prepared, and the other was Plan D prepared by the ACLU. He discussed the 1A.2 Plan and stated this plan pulls most but not all of Gretna into District 4. He stated that their plan, and the ACLU plan, takes quite a few folks from parts of Midway and moves them into District 5. He stated that either plan could be amended numerous ways.

Mr. Spitzer went on to Plan D by ACLU and stated they also moved some population out of the Midway area into District 5. It also takes the Hinson community area out of District 1 and into District 2.

Commissioner Hinson asked why Hinson. Mr. Spitzer stated he did not know. Commissioner Hinson also asked how many people were in that area. Mr. Spitzer stated it was around 512 people that would be taken out of District 1 and moved into District 2.

Commissioner Hinson asked Joseph Dye to come before them. He asked if he represents ACLU. Mr. Dye stated he works for them. Commissioner Hinson asked what was his rationale for picking the Hinson community. Mr. Dye stated what they were really trying to do is balance population to make it equal as possible. The reason he picked the Hinson community was because District 1 has to lose a significant amount of population. If they were going to change District 5 and District 2, that precinct made the most sense to him. He stated it was his decision to do that and not the Board so it did not have to be that way if they did not want to do that. Commissioner Hinson asked if he spoke with any Commissioners before the Workshop. Mr. Dye stated he spoke with Commissioner Holt briefly.

Chair Green stated they wanted to keep it as simple as possible.

Ms. Johnson asked if they were taking all of Hinson. Mr. Dye stated they just follow the precinct line. This was just a draft plan.

Commissioner Hinson asked if they received other maps from other organizations. Mr. Spitzer stated to his knowledge, they have not gotten any input from any other groups.

Chair Green asked the Attorney if they have to reach out to other entities legally. Ms. McKinneyWilliams stated they do not have to reach out to them.

Commissioner Hinson asked how they made the spread. Mr. Spitzer stated the spread was a sum of the percent over the ideal population of the largest district, plus the percent under the ideal population of the smallest district. In the case of the current districts, it was 47 points.

Commissioner Hinson asked Mr. Dye how he knew about the workshop last week. Mr. Dye stated he saw it on their website and came out. Commissioner Hinson asked if he was from this area. Mr. Dye stated no, he lives in Jacksonville.

Attorney McKinney-Williams stated if there are any concerns about either map, they could make adjustments and move lines.

Ms. Johnson stated she wanted them to be mindful of the impact on Gadsden County as a whole.

Commissioner Holt stated she likes Plan D. Commissioner Hinson stated he did not feel comfortable giving his opinion. He just wanted to make sure they do not do anything that would impact the County for the next 20 years.

Chair Green stated it would have an impact regardless to the County. He wanted to make sure it was taken into consideration wholeheartedly.

Commissioner Simpkins stated it was about ensuring that all citizens are represented equally. District 2 is at a number it needs to be at, but it would be significantly impacted by this re-drawing.

Commissioner Hinson stated that before the meeting, the decisions were made already. They paid Mr. Spitzer to be a consultant. If they were paying him, why would he be the alternate.

Bishop Green asked how long have they been aware that they needed to redraw district lines. If they were aware, why have they not been working on this problem all along. Ms. Dudley stated she was made aware of this right before the holidays that this had to happen. Mr. Dixon stated the law was changed, giving you X number of days to redistrict if they fail within the variation of 10%. They were not made aware of the change in the law and he then presented it to the Board. The lawsuit was filed as a result of them doing their job. Bishop Green stated some citizens would have loved prior notice on this and he asked what was the deadline. Commissioner Holt stated it needed to be completed by February 8. They will vote on it on January 23.

Commissioner Hinson stated they were about to make a drastic decision that could impact the County. It was a big decision they were going to make. He stated for them to do more research on this. He encouraged Chair Green to study and do research on this before making a vote. Chair Green stated he has.

Chair Green stated the next meeting will be January 23 at 6 p.m. to vote for this.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, Chair Green declared the workshop adjourned at 5:20 P.M.