

THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF CRAVEN COUNTY RECONVENED ITS REGULAR SESSION OF MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021 ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2021 AT 11:50 AM IN THE COMMISSIONERS' ROOM OF THE CRAVEN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, 406 CRAVEN STREET, NEW BERN, NC. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO CONDUCT A RE-DISTRICTING WORK SESSION.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chairman Jason Jones
 Vice Chairman Denny Bucher
 Commissioner George Liner
 Commissioner Thomas Mark
 Commissioner Theron McCabe
 Commissioner E.T. Mitchell
 Commissioner Beatrice Smith

STAFF PRESENT:

County Manager Jack Veit
 Assistant County Manager Gene Hodges
 Finance Director Craig Warren
 Human Resources Director Amber Parker
 Clerk to the Board Nan Holton

Caroline Mackie – Poyner Spruill LLP
 Blake Esselstyn – MapFigure Consulting

Caroline Mackie reviewed the Re-districting Timeline as follows:

- Today – discuss and reach a consensus on the guiding principles and find as a fact population imbalance
- October 18th – LRS consultants to present 2-3 alternative redistricting plans based on adopted principles
- November 1st – hold a public hearing on proposals
- November 15th – adoption of a resolution to redefine the electoral districts

Ms. Mackie then reviewed the one person, one vote principle highlighted in NCGS 153A-22(a). In explaining the population imbalance in Craven County, she stated that the total population for Craven County per the 2020 Census is 100,720. Based upon that data, the ideal district population would be 14,389. With a plus/minus of 5% deviation, each district should fall between 13,670-15,109.

The 2020 Census data indicated that Districts 3, 5, 6 and 7 are not within the plus/minus 5% deviation and will need to be redefined. A Census Block is the smallest unit that can be used in putting together district boundaries. There are Census Block Splits in Districts 1 – 6 so the numbers in the Table below are rounded; District 7 has no Census Block ambiguities.

DISTRICT	POPULATION	DEVIATION
1	14,100	-2.1%
2	15,000	4.5%
3	13,300	-7.5%
4	15,000	4.4%
5	12,800	-11.4%
6	12,900	-10.1%
7	17,589	22.2%

At this time, based upon the data presented, Ms. Mackie sought the Board to find a population imbalance in Craven County.

Commissioner Mitchell motioned to support there is a substantial inequality of population among the seven (7) County Districts. Her motion was seconded by Commissioner Liner and passed in a 7-0 roll call vote.

Commissioner Liner inquired about the City of Havelock's census dispute. Mr. Esselstyn stated the 2020 Census numbers must be used as issued, and redistricting conflicts will be dealt with later. He indicated that even if the numbers were changed, they would not be changed down to the Census Block level.

Blake Esselstyn explained to the Board that he is looking for guidance and instructions on what they want the parameters to be in designing their districts' boundaries. He wants to know what is important to Craven County and its residents.

Ms. Mackie presented the required guiding principles as follows:

- To comply with one-person, one-vote constitutional principles every district's total population should be within plus or minus 5% of the ideal district size
- Minority voting strength should not be diluted, but race should not unnecessarily predominate
- Contiguity (each district shall be composed of territory within a continuous boundary per NCGS 153A-22(c)).

Ms. Mackie expounded on the optional guiding principles:

1. To minimize voter confusion, districts should retain their current configuration, to the extent possible or "core preservation"
2. Alternatively, the existing district lines should not be considered except to the extent legally required, or a blank slate
3. Avoid the pairing of incumbents in the same district
4. Follow natural boundaries and physical features, such as roads, or waterways, to the extent possible
5. Recognize and respect neighborhood boundaries
6. Recognize and respect communities of interest, to be defined by the Board with public input
7. Consider areas of potential future population growth/decline
8. Use precincts as building blocks for the districts, to the extent possible
9. Districts should be reasonable compact, to the extent possible

Commissioner Bucher motioned to adopt principle #1 and retain the current configuration to keep core preservation of each Commissioner's district and modify as needed. His motion was seconded by Commissioner Mark and approved in a 7-0 roll call vote.

Commissioner Liner motioned to adopt principle #3 to avoid pairing of incumbents. His motion was seconded by Commissioner Mitchell and approved 7-0 in a roll call vote.

The Commissioners discussed some of the finer points of the principles and County Manager, Jack Veit, provided more input on the guidelines.

The Board was in consensus to adopt principle #4 to follow natural boundaries and physical features, such as roads, or waterways, to the extent possible.

The Board was in consensus to adopt principle #5 to recognize and respect neighborhood boundaries.

The Board was in consensus to adopt principle #6 to recognize and respect communities of interest.

The Board was in consensus to adopt principle #7 to consider areas of potential future population growth and decline.

The Board was in consensus to exclude principle #8 using precincts as building blocks, and principle #9.

With the defining principles in place, discussion was led by Mr. Veit on each Commissioner's District.

Commissioner Mark's District 1 meets the population range, and he expressed his desire for it to remain unchanged.

Mr. Veit reviewed that Commissioner Jones' District 2 and Commissioner Mitchell's District 4 were within the acceptable population boundaries, but they both abut Commissioner Smith's District 3 which is 7.5% short. Discussion involving Camden Square and Red Robin Road where Trent Road meets Martin Luther King Blvd. were proposed as options to shift from District 4 to District 3. Commissioner Jones indicated that Derby Park is currently split between Districts 2 and 3 and suggested uniting it all within District 3 as another option to increase its population base. Mr. Jones highlighted that with the development of West New Bern, future growth in that area is going to expand his District. Mr. Veit brought up the Lake Tyler community as another development which could affect District 3 demographics.

Mr. Veit reported that District 7 population base is 22.2% above the ideal and it also abuts District 3, as well as Commissioner Liner's District 6 with a 10.1% deficit. Commissioner Bucher referenced using Broad Street as a line of delineation for areas north known as Riverside and some of the historic district to move to District 3.

Mr. Esselstyn provided information about Census Blocks and an illustration about how they are used to adjust districts. Mr. Veit requested a list of the split Census Block locations. Mr. Esselstyn indicated he would provide that both to the Board and the GIS staff.

Regarding Commissioner McCabe's District 5, with a 11.4% population deficit, it only shares a boundary with Commissioner Liner's District 6. Discussion about using Hwy 101 and Hwy 70 as the dividing boundaries ensued.

A recess was taken at 1:22 pm; and Mr. Esselstyn left the meeting.

Discussion continued about increasing the District 5 population with the addition of Belltown Road and Hickman Hill areas.

To provide for District 6 population increase, it was agreed that coming further down the east side Hwy. 70 beyond Caroline Pines and Stately Pines would be necessary, pulling from District 7. Commissioner Bucher stated he wanted to keep the City of New Bern, Carolina Colours, and Taberna in his District.

In closing, Mr. Veit indicated he would meet with each of the Commissioners in small groups to further discuss the shared Census Blocks once provided by Mr. Esselstyn.

At 2:02 pm Commissioner Smith motioned to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mitchell; it unanimously carried.

Chairman Jason R. Jones
Craven County Board of Commissioners

Nan Holton
Clerk to the Board