

# Redistricting Fact Sheet

## What is Redistricting?

Redistricting is the process of redefining boundary lines of electoral districts, such as city council wards or school board zones, after each decennial Census for the purpose of rebalancing the population among districts. Population growth occurs unevenly, and therefore must be redistributed after each Census when new data become available.

## Why is redistricting necessary?

Redistricting is necessary in order to ensure equal representation. When the population of electoral districts becomes unbalanced over time, boundary lines must be moved to rebalance the population. The Oregon Secretary of State issues a directive to any local government as defined in ORS 174.116 that "fixes or modifies electoral district boundaries based on census population figures." This directive states that each district must meet a set of criteria, one of which states that districts should be "of equal population". ORS 246.410 specifies that local governments must comply with the applicable directive.

Redistricting is occurring now because the Census Bureau released their redistricting data files from the 2020 Census in August of this year. Now that the state has completed legislative and congressional redistricting, local governments and special districts are directed to redraw their boundaries, with consideration given to those new state boundaries. All new boundaries must be submitted to the county clerks in time for them to develop revised voter precincts by their mandated deadlines in early 2022.

## How is redistricting accomplished?

Redistricting is a collaborative effort in which city leaders and staff, along with input from other interested parties, determine the best way to redefine district boundaries while adhering to the required criteria determined by the Secretary of State. Priorities and issues of importance should be discussed among different groups in order to develop a plan that works for everyone.

The actual drawing of boundaries is accomplished using Geographic Information System (GIS) software, along with data from the Census. Census block geography, the smallest level of geography for which census data are tabulated, is analyzed using the software and blocks are aggregated to form districts. The GIS software calculates data totals as the blocks are being aggregated in order to develop districts with the required population target. Because the blocks are the smallest level of geography, only whole blocks can be aggregated - they cannot be split. There are many ways to combine blocks, so it may take some trial and error to develop districts that meet the required criteria and other considerations.

## What are the required criteria?

The Secretary of State has determined that each district, as nearly as practicable, shall:

- Be contiguous;
- Utilize existing geographic or political boundaries;
- Not divide communities of common interest;
- Be connected by transportation links;
- Be of equal population;
- Not be drawn for the purpose of favoring any political party, incumbent elected official or other person;
- Not be drawn for the purpose of diluting the voting strength of any language or minority group; and
- Give consideration to newly drawn legislative and congressional district boundaries.

For the equal population requirement, a 5% margin from the target population (total city or district population divided by the number of representative areas) is use to ensure that no two representative areas have more than a 10% difference in population between them.

Local governments may have additional considerations that they choose to incorporate into the process in addition to the required criteria.

New districts are in effect for ten years, until the next decennial census is taken and redistricting will be required again.