

Commission on Reapportionment Public Hearing Minutes

DATE & TIME: May 19, 2022 – 7:00 PM
LOCATION: Frank D. Greco Memorial Senior Citizen Recreation Center, Cantine Memorial Field, 207 Market St, Saugerties, NY 12477
PRESIDING OFFICER: Regis Obijiski
STAFF: Fawn Tantillo and Robert Leibowitz
PRESENT: 1st Deputy Chair Sarah DeStefano (via zoom), 2nd Vice Chair Andy Monk, Donna Lutz, Kenneth Panza, Travis Rask, and Kathleen Waithe
ABSENT: None
QUORUM PRESENT: Yes

OTHER ATTENDEES: Legislator Brian Cahill, Supervisors Michael Baden and Richard Parete; UC Election Commissioner John Quigley; Carol Nolan; Mark Diaz; Kelli Palenkas Greer; Ginger Fitzgerald; Wayne Spanier; Karin Smith Spanier; Lou Simone; Derek Coffey; Laura Hartman; Chris Allen.

Chair Obijiski called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Leibowitz projected a copy of the draft redistricting map and displayed sections as needed.

Chair Obijiski, 1st Vice Chair DeStefano and 2nd Vice Chair Monk welcomed the attendees and gave a brief overview of how the commission was created, the enabling legislation, language of the Ulster County Charter and laws that govern redistricting and the priorities the commission used in creating these districts.

Public Comment

Mark Diaz (Gardiner) – Raised in Saugerties and moved to Gardiner from NYC in 2016. He feels Gardiner is not dominated by the political left or right. He believes we are all gifted with the ability to create problem solving and we need to find a middle common-sense path. He believes Gardiner could be a model of this path and requests the commissioner reconsider dividing the town.

Ginger Fitzgerald (Shawangunk) 1st time – Expressed frustration with entire redistricting process across the state.

Supervisor Richard Parete (Marbletown) – He expressed concern about the new district dividing Kerhonkson and felt it is important to keep the hamlet intact. He quoted state law that says the district lines should not favor or discourage one party over another and noted the current district that includes Marbletown has had a fair political balance and been represented by both Democrats and Republicans over the years. He believes this proposed redistrict map would actually favor one party over another. He believes keeping Wawarsing and Rochester together would be more equitable. He also expressed frustration finding candidates and hoped the current legislator could remain in the Marbletown district he currently represents. Supervisor Parete was also expressed concern that Glenford was across the reservoir from the rest of the district.

Karen Spanier (Ulster) – She described the town of Ulster’s unique qualities but noted it lacks a “town center” . Town of Ulster Citizens, a bipartisan group, has been working to connect citizens to a town identity and to encourage people to vote for town officers when they don't feel very connected to the town. That was when the town was only in two legislative districts so she was alarmed to see this proposal to divide the town into three districts and believe this will only exacerbate local efforts to join the community.

Legislator Brian Cahill (Ulster) -Noted that the Town of Ulster is the business hub of the county, generating 50% of the sales tax revenue for the county. He understands that the population would require more than one legislator and pointed out that the Town of Ulster borders 7 other municipalities, Saugerties, Woodstock, Hurley, Rosendale, Esopus, Town of Kingston and City of Kingston. He said this gives great flexibility to the commission to come up with a map that keeps at least one legislator entirely within the Town of Ulster even if they divide the town into 3 legislative districts. He feels it is crucial to have one legislator who can be devoted to the unique challenges of representing the town of Ulster.

Laura Hartmen (Ulster) – She disclosed that she is the Chair of the Town of Ulster Democratic Committee and Town of Ulster Citizens.org. She said the new map creates three legislative districts in the town and carved out a district that encompasses parts of Hillside Terrace and Eddyville and put them with the Town of Esopus. She described the difficulty getting candidates from these carved out sections to run for office when the majority of voters in the district are in another town. She also expressed frustration that the entire Town of Kingston was included in the Ulster Districts rather than Ulster residence. She feels the proposed Town of Ulster legislative districts dilutes the representation for the town and made it difficult to have a unified voice on town issues.

Supervisor Michael Baden (Rochester) – He offered a map with a few tweaks and highlighted the changes. No changes to Districts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 19 and 22. He proposed that no hamlet in Ulster County be divided. He pointed to the proposed line through hamlet of Kerhonkson and felt that did a disservice to Kerhonkson. He suggested the Village of Ellenville should not be divided and a small part of the Village of New Paltz that should be corrected making reference to written comments from the BOE Commissioners. He made note of a single parcel along the border of Woodstock and Ulster that was probably just a mistake. He posted his proposed map on Maptitude for the Commission to review.

Lou Simone (Ulster) – He is a resident of Eddyville and expressed concern about being cut off from the rest of the town. He fears that if Eddyville is cut off from the rest of the town they will be forgotten and overlooked.

Lenny Walker (Ulster) (Via Zoom) – Mr. Walker had no comments

Derek Coffey (Ulster) – He hopes the county recognizes the value the Town of Ulster brings as an economic center. As a resident of Eddyville he also feels that they will be forgotten if they are in a district that is separated from the town.

Ginger Fitzgerald (Shawangunk) 2nd time – She asked why the districts needed to be of almost equal population, She didn't understand why each town could not have their own legislator and why the process was so difficult. After the commissioners explained the regulations, Ms. Fitzgerald asked how the law could be changed.

Chris Allen (Saugerties) – A former legislator he had some suggestions for redistricting the Town of Saugerties to make it more harmonious. He went into detail about various neighborhoods and offered put the suggestions in writing for clarification.

The commissioners thanked the participants and recognized that this public input was an important part of the process. They briefly clarified some of the math behind the map - that 10 municipalities are so large they must be divided and 14 were so small they required adding populations. They explained that this was not the “final” map, the next steps and timeline for completing their work.

Motion Made By:	Commissioner DeStefano
Motion Seconded By:	Commissioner Monk
No. of Votes in Favor:	7
No. of Votes Against:	0

Time: 8:15 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Fawn Tantillo

Minutes Approved: June 8, 2022