



September 17, 2023

City Council President Bas

City Council Members Ramachandran, Reid, Gallo, Kaplan, Fife, Jenkins and Kalb

RE: Task Force to Correct and Improve the Charter language and legislation on Redistricting

Members of the Oakland City Council:

Ten years ago, the League of Women Voters of Oakland worked with other members of the Oakland Votes Coalition to bring an independent citizens' redistricting commission to Oakland. More recently, when the 2014 law was first applied in 2020 through 2022, the League observed and participated as the commissioners were selected and as they drew new district lines for the Oakland City Council and the Oakland Board of Education.

We commend the commissioners for their hard work in successfully concluding the first iteration of an independent redistricting commission in Oakland. However, as might be expected with any debut, the first application of Charter provisions revealed the need for some amendments. The commissioners' report includes their recommendations for improvements and changes to the legislation and process. The League also has suggestions for refinements and corrections. I have attached as Appendix A some notes that reflect, in draft form, some of the issues we believe should be examined.

We request that the City Council act on the commissioners' report and others' input, including that of the League, while the process is fresh in all participants' minds. Specifically, rather than just receive the report on redistricting, we urge that several Council Members convene a working group to effect the necessary changes through a Charter amendment for the 2024 ballot and amendment of related legislation.

We recommend that appropriate community and good government groups, as well as any commissioners who are interested, be included in that working group. Ten years ago, the Oakland Votes Coalition included Council Members Schaaf, and Kalb, the League of Women Voters, the Urban Strategies Council, ACCE, Oakland Rising and the Greenlining Institute. A similar inclusive working group would allow revisions to reflect the full breadth of experiences and observations from the recent redistricting process. I have

attached as Appendix A some notes that reflect, in draft form, some of the issues we believe should be examined.

The League monitors redistricting processes via independent citizens commission at the state and local level throughout California. We would welcome the opportunity to bring that expertise and background to the table. As always, confidence in government is a primary League concern. Taking the time to clarify and improve Oakland's redistricting law will make it easier for voters to have that confidence.

Sincerely,

Gail Wallace, President
League of Women Voters of Oakland

**APPENDIX A
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS AND NOTES FOR REVISION OF OAKLAND CITY CHARTER
REDISTRICTING PROVISIONS
(REVISED 9/2023)**

Charter and Rules Changes:

1. Timing of the Process:

Realign dates with those in state law. For example, start the clock after the census data is released. This changes the timeline in Oakland from a fixed calendar to one based on the election schedule.

Note: The dates in the state code have been carefully calculated to provide the maximum possible time for the actual redistricting process, while still ensuring that elections officials have the time required to create the precinct maps required for the next election.

2. Budget provisions

a. there is typo in the Charter that defines timeline for the City Budget Section 220 (L)5 Oakland City Charter.

b. change the base year for calculating budget to account for factors such as inflation or develop a staffing plan with defined FTE and levels.

3. Quorum provisions for meetings and for the vote on the final map.

4. Role of City Clerk:

Consider designating the City Clerk as the entity to handle meeting notices, agenda production and minutes. This would follow the procedure used when the CC did the redistricting. This function is too big a burden for City staff who are not formally trained or for contract employees to handle.

5. **Specific staffing mandates:**

Selection Process:

What worked: applications were available, a good variety of outreach channels were used to attract commissioners, the selection process was thoughtful and resulted in a good cross-section of Oakland residents.

Improvements:

- a more complete description of the time commitment

Orientation and Training of the Commission

Using the experience of the first independent redistricting commission, create a handbook for future commissions. It should include:

- the basics of what it means to be a city commissioner, including how to work with staff and get things done
- an explanation of what redistricting is and the legal parameters of their decision making
- clarity regarding their role as representing the whole city even though they are residents of different districts
- recommendations for training that is staged according to the different phases of the Commission's work rather than front loaded.
- an explanation of the role of the specialized consultants used in redistricting – how to find them and how to work with them
- a description of the Commission's organization: chair/vice chair, subcommittees, and meeting frequency
- guidelines for the conduct of meetings: the role of the chair, reminders of priorities at each meeting, interacting with the public, and making comments more productive

Commission Budget

Stipend:

Given the time commitment required for commission members, consider whether there should be a stipend for commissioners, as there is in the state law.

Staffing:

The Commission needs a high-level fulltime staff member to lead the Commission and 1-FTE Analyst to assist with the tasks below, in addition to the City Clerk having a role in handling meeting notices, agenda production and minutes. This staff would assure the Commission receives adequate support in the following areas:

- to ensure that meetings are noticed appropriately, and that draft meeting minutes are posted quickly after each meeting, and

- outreach and communications assistance for public outreach and for public hearings.
- support for sub-committees
- support to review and redact all the comments submitted
- manage the meetings with Roberts Rules, Sunshine, etc.
- manage the Website on Redistricting
- manage Records Requests
- RFP and contract process with redistricting consultant and outreach consultant.

Transparency

The Commission's website should be well organized and updated in a timely manner. All material, including public comments, should be posted timely and easily searchable.

Public Participation

There should be consistent and persistent public outreach throughout the redistricting cycle. Planning in advance for outreach to neighborhood districts should be a key focal area, as this did not happen in a timely manner in the 2020 cycle raising many community concerns. This should be tailored to different audiences, and to what is needed at each step of the redistricting process. The outreach and communications staff person should be responsible for this work.

The public should be provided with multiple modes of participation. We hesitate to prescribe those modes, given the changes in technology we have seen over the past several years.

All input received by the commission, no matter how it is received, should be organized, searchable, and available at a single site.

Special Circumstances

We acknowledge that this inaugural independent redistricting commission was challenged by a number of special circumstances.

The challenges created by the COVID pandemic led to a need to quickly change plans from in-person events to the use of technology. Further, the commission had difficulty making productive use of the unexpected time while waiting for the delayed census numbers.

One silver lining was that the use of Zoom for meetings likely contributed to greatly expanded participation from a wide range of community members.

