

Reapportionment Public Hearing in East Syracuse

Friday, October 29, 2021 10:00 a.m.

Members Present: Mr. Knapp, Ms. Sardo, Ms. Maron, Mr. Czarny

Meeting called to order by Mr. Knapp at 10:12 a.m.

Mr. Knapp:

Good morning everyone – would like to call our public hearing to order - welcome everyone to our fourth meeting – four members here today – introduced themselves – Michele Sardo, Sharon Maron, Dustin Czarny – see map 1 and 2 on the wall – the purpose is to hear your comments and thoughts so as we are discussing this and looking at the various facts that go into this that your thoughts are considered - this is our fifth meeting been all around the county – several people have signed up to speak will call you up to speak – if you could keep it to three to five minutes that would be great

Mary Cunningham:

Start out with a reminder to all of you that 15 out of 17 county legislators signed a pledge for nonpartisan redistricting – nine of those republicans reneged on it as soon as they were elected – so we have an old system that is not good for anyone – nominated four from the majority and two from the minority – that is not nonpartisan our head of legislator appointed his personal lawyer – this is not bipartisan – on top of the leg was last commission was on the last redistricting map he ran in and won – now we are were given three weeks and could have nine months to invest, plan and think about – outrageous – obscene - corrupt – needs to change

Mr. Knapp:

Quick clarification – I'm the Chairman of the Legislature - I was not on the commission ten years ago – I did not design any of the districts and I don't have any appointments on the commission

Mary Cunningham:

I meant Ryan McMahon the County Executive

Robert Murphy

Declined to speak

Barett Howard:

Hello my name is Barett Howard and I'm a resident of Dewitt – dressed like a vampire because this meeting is at 10 a.m. and I had to do it between classes – metaphor for voting power being pulled out of Dewitt being split into 4 dis in map 2 which is more likely to pass at this point – similar things in Geddes and Camillus - district 17 combines Dewitt with city syr – city should not be combined with the city -Dewitt should have its own district combining harms both communities – only reason is for Gerry rigging – there is no perfect map – not in love with map 1 – concerned with southern district in such a large area – cramming this process through in such a short time the time line is toxic for our democracy

Jean R. Reilly:

Good morning I don't have anything prepared – I live in Eastwood on Sunnycrest Road in the town of Dewitt – I have never spoken at a public hearing in all the years I have lived in the community – not sure why this is happening just a few days before election– seems the republican have and will maintain majority after the election is over – the deadlines are so far out in the future – it seems it is rushed, not transparent, I don't have an opinion on what the maps should look like because I haven't seen the maps prior to today and have not had adequate time to look at and study them and understand what they mean – my thoughts and for every other voter that could not make these meetings because they were poorly publicized and the timing is terrible – not fair to the community as to how this commission has been set up – thank you very much

Mark Matt:

Good morning! My name is Mark Matt and I reside at 310 Collin Ave. in the Village of Fayetteville in Onondaga County. Due to lack of time to present, I will keep my comments only to Legislative District #10 the Legislative District that I reside in.

I looked closely at both plans presented. The most notable difference: Map #2 separates Minoa and Manlius from its historical communities. Map #2 continues the separation of the Village of Minoa from the rest of the East Syracuse Minoa School District. Map #2 separates the Village of Manlius from the Fayetteville Manlius School District. These school districts were the results of mergers in the school systems in New York State in the 1950's and 1960's. Those mergers were based on history, commonalities and sense of community with the villages. Those bonds were created before the school districts were merged and have grown stronger.

Both the Village of Minoa and the Village of East Syracuse have common history as neighbors and villages built with and a continuing tradition of the railways

Manlius and Fayetteville have a long history of working together. In the early 1900's freight trains ran between Fayetteville and Manlius. Passenger service on trolleys between the two villages was available in 1910. The villages are separate but they both have Memorial Day Parades and their fire departments march in both. Manlius has a 4th of July Parade that both fire departments participate in. There is a Fayetteville Manlius Soccer club that my children played in and I coached for years. The players and coaches were from Fayetteville and Manlius. There was a Fayetteville Manlius Rotary Club that I was a member for many years and served as president. The members were from Fayetteville and Manlius.

My children both attended the Fayetteville Manlius schools. My daughter returned to live in Fayetteville in 2020 and my son resides in the Town of Manlius. They developed many lifelong friends.

Manlius and Fayetteville are recognized by the county as similar villages in that their waste water systems. In the last few years they are both under control of the County with WEP and sewage treatment through the Meadowbrook system at the Limestone facility. Minoa has its own waste treatment facility. Under Map #2 Manlius would be included with villages that have no relationship with the county on their wastewater systems.

Under Map #2 all that would occur is the isolation of villages from their historical communities to create some type of numbers that haven't been explained.

Map #1 preserves the communities of Fayetteville Manlius and East Syracuse Minoa and I look more favorably on that plan.

I have been informed that Chair of this commission has told the commission the final Maps are due by Noon today. Since this public hearing started at 10AM today, "No Reasonable Man" has the capability to make that deadline. It is impossible to look at the previous public comments and today's comments and prepare a serious plan with a Map. If that is true then these proceedings are a sham of public input in the process. We should not consider this a fair redistricting process.

Cheryl Matt:

My name is Cheryl Matt and I live in Fayetteville. My family came to Syracuse in 1884. I guess you can call me a local. Besides my years away at college, I lived in Syracuse until we moved to Fayetteville 30

years ago. My two children, their spouses, and my 8 grandchildren all currently live in the Town of Manlius. I speak for their future in this community as well.

When they talk about the GOP controlling the County for 60 years, I can attest to that. What is baffling to me and the residents of Onondaga County is that right now there is a significantly larger number of Democrats than Republicans in the county yet there is a significantly larger number of Republicans than Democrats in the county legislature. How would that have happened? 30% of the voters are unaffiliated or registered with a third party. Are they all voting for the GOP? Doubtful. Is the lack of voter turnout in recent years a factor? Maybe. But the truth is that the representation on the County Legislature does not reflect the communities served because of gerrymandered districts. And it's obvious, and has become more apparent over the past couple of years, that the GOP wants to hold on to the control they have.

So, what's the solution? How do you ensure fair maps are drawn? Let's talk about what a person could do in this situation.

They would talk with the voters, their families, their neighbors, members of community groups. They would listen. They would allow time for the information to be digested and questioned and discussed. They would find impartial, nonpolitical people to draw up tentative maps. They would share those maps, again allowing time for them to be analyzed, and again, questioned and discussed.

But this is not happening. We have a commission orchestrated by the county executive, the county GOP, and those who are beholden to them. "Oh, we're following the County Charter." That's a cop-out. This process is not transparent, it's not impartial, and it's certainly not being done with time for true public input.

Look at my own District 10 that covers the Town of Manlius. The District is larger than the others, which means each of us has not received the representation other voters in the county have. Map #2 wants to take the Village of Manlius and put it in with Mr. Knapp's District south of us. Fayetteville and Manlius have their own school District. How can you say these are not neighbors when they are the only two villages sharing that school district? Instead, Map #1 keeps Fayetteville and Manlius together, which is logical because it truly is a cohesive community. Map #1 puts Minoa back in with the East Syracuse school district where it logically belongs. I believe if it makes sense to put villages together into school districts, it makes sense to keep them together as voting districts. I'd like you address the chair of this commission, (who conveniently is not here.). You set up these hearings in order to give the public the assurance that the committee would be listening. But the meetings are at times that people are working, caring for children, or conducting their daily business. Did you know we are not yet out of this pandemic and many people won't attend in-person meetings? Besides smack dab in the middle of the day, these meetings could have also been in the evenings and on weekends. Sure, we could have sent in written comments. But it doesn't have the impact. And your timetable for this entire process is still only a few short weeks.

But you knew that. You didn't care. You already have your agenda and you're following your plan. I was told yesterday that the final maps are due today at noon. So why bother with this meeting? You already have all the information you want? Or aren't you really listening to the public input?

I think the most egregious part of all of this is that you underestimate the voters. You think they're too stupid to understand what's going on and so complacent that they aren't paying attention to this process. Voters are paying attention. They are not happy with the fact that the Districts that have been in place for the past decade are gerrymandered. The maps were cut so that communities were clumped together in such a way that Republicans have an advantage. Now that the voter makeup has shifted and the majority of voters in the county are Democrats, the GOP wants to create a new set of equally gerrymandered maps to insure they still retain, power.

I'll close; there are more speakers here. Many of us are here out of frustration and anger that our elected officials have put this community into a situation that is not a model of Democracy. It's wrong that this process is being conducted this way and rushing this process is, in my eyes, unethical. I commend those members of this committee who are trying to listen to the voters and have had to come up with maps basically overnight. For those of you on this committee who are exercising your opportunity to abuse the system, all in order to put in another decade of unfair maps that ensures unfair representation of the voters, I feel sorry for you. You have lost the respect of many voters and residents of this great County and you will be remembered as part of a grand scheme to divide voters and support voter suppression.

Thank you for your time.

Darlene Piper:

My name is Darlene – been in the county quite a while – not enough time to make notes –start with listening and hearing – bring up my dog – 2 years ago we adopted a male Rottweiler – if you are listening and you don't change you're not listening – six speakers lasted a whole 15 minutes – LaFayette lasted 30 minutes and had 14 speakers – leg one 14 speaker – 32 total were able to speak – accepting email – not enough time – don't need to keep saying nonpartisan, Gerrymandering, maybe it is maybe it is not – SU professor should be on the committee – maps in place for 10 years and giving the county 21 days – have not looked at maps – why are you not utilizing time to the fullest – every day we wake up to do the right thing so tomorrow we can wake up and say we can wait – you can do better and you should do better

Max Ruckdeschel:

Hello everyone, my name is Max Ruckdeschel and I am a resident of the Town of DeWitt.

As a little background, I have Bachelor's degrees in cartography and geography and a Master's degree in geography. I have also worked with the 2010 US Census drawing community boundaries.

When I first saw the proposed legislative districts for the Town of DeWitt when they were released just two days ago, I was appalled. It is easy to see that they were not drawn with any consideration for DeWitt residents. No other town in Onondaga County is so needlessly dissected into so many legislative districts.

The Town of DeWitt has over 26,000 residents according to the 2020 Census. That is just 700 fewer people than the smallest proposed legislative district. And yet we were carved up into 4 separate districts. The City of Syracuse, with almost 150,000 residents is only divided into 6 districts!

Not only is DeWitt divided up into 4 separate districts, but in each proposed district, the Town of DeWitt is just a minority part of the total composition. No single district in this proposal represents mostly DeWitt residents. It is inconceivable that if this map is approved that there will be no DeWitt resident elected to represent us in the county legislature! And the legislators that are elected to represent us will be beholden to the majority of their districts that are outside the town of DeWitt. This proposed redistricting is unjust and undemocratic for the citizens of DeWitt.

This travesty is easily remedied by redrawing the districts to keep DeWitt whole. A district comprised of the Town of DeWitt and just one or two contiguous election districts from a surrounding neighborhood would be a fair and just solution to make sure the citizens of DeWitt have a voice in their county government. I call on the redistricting commission to redraw the map, create a district that keeps DeWitt whole, and make sure that democracy is preserved in Onondaga County for the years to come.

Thank you.

Karen Docter:

Hello everyone I'm a Dewitt town councilor Karen Docter – not going to speak to the maps per se I'm going to speak to process – I'm an attorney when I'm not a Dewitt town councilor – process is very crucial to what we are attempting to do here is very important – I'm glad I was able to come and move some court appearances and be here – gee 10 am during the day a travesty for process – coming in the evenings and weekends all of those things would have made it more palatable and easier for interested parties from both sides of the aisle to be heard

Speaking of process – what the heck is the rush – these maps are covering the year 2023 I can calculate how old I will be in 2023 – we need to be able to have that time to be able to age and digest what is going on in the legislature – as an attorney I like to speak to process – because we can all can yell and flap our hands but what needs to be done – we need more time as so many of the speakers have said – we need to have transparency and a chance to digest the maps that only showed up in our emails a few days ago – on October 27 Governor Hochul signed a legislative act s.5160-B/A.229c – what is that all about – that piece of legislation “requires county districting to follow specific guidelines requiring districts to be nearly equal in population, contiguous and not to favor incumbents or parties” I strongly stress to the legislature and this business to be done by noon – not this kind of work – very important that all of us take the time to digest what is going on and most important of all that the legislation signed into law be utilized sooner rather than later – having to make a decision the day after election is absolutely appalling – all of us are effected and all need to take time - presenting to Chairman Knapp to be able to cogitate on that – hoping the deadline of noon today – as they said in pirates of the Caribbean – not really a rule just a set of guidelines – thank you

Michael Riley:

Morning town of Dewitt – live in Collamer that was settled in the 1800s - found about the meeting from a neighbor and saw a little blurb on the news – don't care about your political party – not enough time has been allotted – up until today I thought Onondaga County wasn't doing what the rest of our country was doing – was hoping that this process would listen to the people that are voting – give us time to make informed decisions –two daughters are both educators and there is difference between listening and hearing – in order to listen you have to stop talking –listen to me and my fellow neighbors – thank you

Robert Sarason:

My name is Robert Sarason and I live in Dewitt where my county legislator is David Knapp, Chairman of the County Legislature

Since there is a possibility of a lawsuit regarding the procedure and the final product of the reapportionment "process", or the alleged reapportionment process. I have a few questions for Attorney Kevin Huslander, who is both the campaign attorney for Ryan McMahon and Chair of this Reapportionment Commission. Since he wears two hats, I have the following questions:

- 1) Since you wear both hats as Campaign Attorney for the County Executive and Chair of the Reapportionment Commission, will you cooperate and provide all payments, the County Executive has provided you in the past two years?
- 2) Since you wear both hats as Campaign Attorney and Chair of the Reapportionment Commission, do you accept the fact that you cannot claim attorney client privilege for your discussions with the County Executive regarding reapportionment.
- 3) Even if you have done all of your work pro-bono, do you accept the fact that Ethical Rules prevent you from handling the litigation for the Commission since you cannot be both a lawyer and witness in the same case?
- 4) For the same reasons, do you accept the fact that your firm will also not be able to handle the litigation for the Commission.

After reviewing the alleged process of the reapportionment commission, where I predict an extremely short victory on the procedure with a final product of a lousy substantial result, I want to use analogies that are relevant.

First, the election of 2019 where almost all of the Republicans made a pledge for a non-partisan independent commission to do the reapportionment process before the election. This pledge was a short-term victory pledge was immediately broken after the election.

Second, building the aquarium. Please note the estimated cost is \$85 million, which doesn't cover the over-runs, which is inevitable in a project of this magnitude. This project alleges that a multitude of people will come to an aquarium from 200 to 300 miles away, the same allegation used by Destiny which proved so financially unsuccessful that it is under the water in the language of finance and real estate. The project was put on a timeline of a speeding bullet. After the Republicans realized the negative consequences of this project at the ballot box, they put a temporary hold on this project before Election Day though it should be noted it remains in the contingency budget. Once again, a very short-term victory since unless the Flip the Legislature project is successful, you can count on the Republicans to give the green-light to the aquarium shortly after the election.

We now get to the Reapportionment Commission Procedure and Project. The bare procedural equities, assuming you did not have an independent, non-partisan redistricting commission, should include the following:

- 1) Wide distribution of the number of previous numbers in each legislative districts, towns, and election districts and the current members in each legislative district, towns and election districts.
- 2) Statement of the redistricting principles of the Commission or statements of the redistricting principles by groups or individual Commission members.
- 3) Public hearings at accessible hours on these principles and public input on the legislative districts before the Commission draw their initial map
- 4) Wide distribution of the proposed legislative redistricting by the Commission or groups or individual Commission members.
- 5) Public hearings, giving adequate time for the public to digest the data and boundaries at accessible hours and discussions on these proposed legislative districts.
- 6) Revised submission of the legislative redistricting by the Commission or groups or individual Commission members.

Once again, the whole process was put on the timeline of a speeding bullet. Since there will be negative consequences of the procedure and substance of this project, I predict there will be some sort of lengthening of the procedure redistricting process. Once again, this will be a very short-term victory for republicans since you can count on the Republicans to give the green-light to the proposed redistricting maps of the Republicans.

A few items that seem to be lost in the hearings is that the public does not get much time to understand the proposed districts and further there is no opportunity for discussion. These hearings also assume that I only have choice of one of the two proposed maps. While I prefer map 1, one reason being that map 2 smashes Dewitt even more into further smithereens, one cannot assume that I wouldn't have time to study the proposed districts and there was further opportunity for discussion.

While I'm not a scholar of Yiddish, one traditional definition of the word "chutzpa" is the orphan pleading for mercy after killing both of his parents. The procedure and substance of redistricting now equals the traditional definition of chutzpa.

Ray Grabowski:

Ray Grabowski Town of Dewitt, in Legislative District 5 which encompasses portions of North Syracuse, Salina, Cicero, Clay, and a small portion of Dewitt.

- Looking at the map, it looks like a convoluted puzzle piece.
- Why is my town (Dewitt) broken up into 4 Legislative Districts
- Difficult to understand how a single Legislator can represent all of these communities with varying issues--This makes no sense to me - Frustrated to see Mr. Knapp's comment that he is "not expecting any monumental changes"....once again, have you seen how District 5 is broken up?
- Additional Concerns as expressed by many other citizens within Onondaga County
- County Legislature pledged "a fair and open process with increased public participation and access". GOP led legislature said they intended to improve process barring partisan and elected officials from sitting on the committee. So how is Mr. Knapp sitting on this committee?
- Plus, why is this being done during an election? Early voting is going on now, every single County Legislator is up for re-election! **WAIT FOR THIS UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION. SLOW DOWN THIS PROCESS!**
- Voters have many priorities and redistricting is absolutely one of them. If you think they don't care, you are wrong.
- My understanding is that new district maps have until 2023 election to be in place. We have TIME.
- New hearings should be scheduled after the maps are released.
- Listen to community feedback and explain how the new maps have been developed.
- This happens once every 10 years, let's get this right and take out the partisanship. It's wrong and your duty is to represent the people, in a nonpartisan manor.
- Finally, the new hearings and maps should be scheduled when the majority of people can partake in these meetings. After all, people do work. **THANK YOU.**

Mark Briggs:

Black Friday, October 29, 2021

Mark Briggs
412 Maple Drive,
Fayetteville, NY

Dear Legislature:

It would be impossible for me to prove that gerrymandering is wrong, and I don't have to because you know it. In the past both of the major parties have indulged themselves in this immoral practice. Now our country is in an existential crisis. This means we are determining if we are going to exist, and, if we wish to exist, we can no longer indulge ourselves in this anti-democracy practice.

For five or more years, our country has been engaged in its latest, sometimes very uncivil conversation about whether to have another civil war. I intend no hyperbole. The success of our democracy rests on our citizenry's trusting that they elected their public officials through free, accessible, and fair elections. At a certain tipping point, abused people think, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more". Civil unrest breaks out when people feel abused with no peaceful opportunity for redress of grievances.

Mentioning Hitler in connection with modern American, politics gets people booted off the stage, so I won't do it. I'll just mention the historical fact that Germany went from being a liberal democracy to being a fascist dictatorship in about four years. And the majority of successful coups are preceded by unsuccessful ones. I'm requesting that you practice some internal restraint.

I'm here to ask the folks who are falling all over each other to push an unfair county redistricting plan through to curb their enthusiasm, out of morality, if they can find theirs. If not, I encourage them to set aside their short-term self-- interest in favor of their own long-term self-interest. They could well land on the wrong side of a civil war which they are contributing to precipitating. Our frayed republic is stressed to the breaking point.

Lately those on the right are wrongly complaining that the presidency was stolen from them in a rigged election. Believing that the election was rigged, they are now engaged in a massive national operation to rig all elections, and we see here in this redistricting gamesmanship one local arm of that operation

As a psychotherapist, I saved many clients from creating extra problems for themselves with this one injunction: The more it's an emergency, the more you should go slow. Legislators, take heed. There's no need to make this decision quickly, because it won't affect an election until 2023. Besides, we really have not had enough convenient and accessible hearings to allow for a public examination of this proposal. We don't even know if it's legal under recent State legislation signed into law on October 28.

And finally, the proposal is an attempt to steal elections for the next ten years. If successful it would have a hugely antidemocratic impact locally. Nationally, it would appear to be a tiny power grab-a scratch on the flesh of a great nation which is dying the death of a billion cuts!

Sincerely,

Mark Briggs

Heather Waters:

Good morning – locked myself out of my car but wild horses would not have kept me away from this hearing – Im here because there are so many that can't be here because getting kids off to school or are working at an office – it's the middle of the morning – chuckled at pirates of the Caribbean because I feel like we are in a situation with Disney villains in this process – being facetious– Manlius town councilor and running for Onondaga County legislator in district 10 which is mostly the town of Manlius which is an easy way to describe – honestly trying to get people to participate and not just vote for me because that's who I am and this is the community that I care about– neighbors on all sides and I just want people to vote – this disenfranchises folks - not sure people know that village of Manlius is getting pulled out of the town of Manlius in this process – that would cause a lot of conversation and feedback – there's no debate as to here's why the district is big and needs to be adjusted – I was speaking to the group but will speak to the two of you and the people that are pushing this – you have the power to make a difference – but if you think that we will not show up and not pursue this to the bitter end – because those that are running for office now for the first time or are passionate for local government we know that this is where democracy sits – trying to make things better and have a community to be engaged in giant projects to bring visitors – or manage the infrastructure because of severe weather all the things we need to do this is a distraction – craven behavior – love this word because it's so appropriate for this process – I walk the district because I'm running in the district – easy to see the lines because of political signs – but no one has a chance to talk about this – thank you

Mr. Knapp

Concludes our public hearing – appreciate your attendance – thank you for coming and have a great day

Meeting ended at 10:52 a.m.