

SPECIAL SESSION

JUNE 13, 2022
FRANKLIN, LOUISIANA

The St. Mary Parish Council held a Special Meeting on this date with Chairperson Kristi Prejeant Rink, M.D. presiding and the following members present: Craig A. Mathews, J Ina, Rodney Olander, Scott Ramsey, Patrick J. Hebert, Mark A. Duhon, Dean S. Adams, and Gwendolyn L. Hidalgo. Absent were Leslie “Les” Rulf, Jr. and James W. Bennett, Jr.

The Invocation was pronounced by Mr. Olander and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Ramsey.

Kevin Belanger, Josh Manning, and Thomas Rhodes, South Central Planning and Development Commission appeared before the Council to discuss District Reapportionment.

Mr. Belanger demonstrated a Power Point presentation relative to Alternative 1, 2, and 3 Redistricting Maps for St. Mary Parish and expounded on reasons redistricting is needed, the redistricting process, baseline plans, the deviation percentage, and the redistricting time line. He informed that St. Mary Parish has lost population within the last ten years and that the overall range is 18.9%, which requires redistricting. He further informed that the Council must have everything completed by August 8, 2023.

Josh Manning expounded on Alternative 1 plan and stated that District No. 1 has a majority minority district population. He also stated that Alternative 1 shows District No. 1 to include a portion of Verdunville due to the loss of population according to the 2020 Census Data which will cause District No. 2 and District No. 3 to have some shifts. He informed that Alternative 1 has an overall range of 9.2% and has 13 split precincts with 54.5% black population in District No. 1 and 56.8% black population in District No. 2. He also informed that Alternative 2 has an overall range of 8.1% with 12 split precincts and shows District No. 1 going into the northwestern area of Franklin instead of Verdunville. District No. 2 becomes very condensed and District No. 8 moves further into Berwick. He further informed that Alternative 3 has an overall range of 8.2% with 14 split precincts and is the most compact. It shows District No. 2 to include areas of Verdunville while District No. 1 includes a small portion of Franklin and District No. 8 will include the Lakeside neighborhood in Morgan City. He informed that all three alternative maps follow the Voting Rights Act requirements to maintain two majority minority districts. He explained that the next steps should be selecting one of the alignments for either adoption or further refinement, suggesting only one alternative be submitted, and that after a period of refinement, an ordinance must be introduced, and a public hearing must be held. There must be an adoption of the plan, the plan must be sent to the Secretary of State’s office for implementation, and there must be consideration of precinct mergers/consolidations.

In response to Rev. Mathews’ inquiry relative to Alternative 1 and what percentage is attributed to the Verdunville population, Mr. Manning stated that he will research that information.

Discussion was had relative to configuring the maps according to the law.

In regard to Alternative 2 for District No. 8 and the minority population, Mr. Duhon stated that currently District No. 8 has 24 percent black population. He stated that Alternative 3 would decrease that population to 14 percent and raise the white population from 40 percent to 49 percent. He informed that District No. 8 also includes Hispanic and Vietnamese population.

Per Mr. Ramsey’s inquiry relative to comparing the District Reapportionment plans to the School Board’s redistricting plans, Mr. Belanger stated that he will email the School Board redistricting plans to the Council. Mr. Adams stated that they will not match because the School Board has 11 Districts and the Parish has 8 Districts. Mr. Belanger stated that to his knowledge, the School Board is not splitting precincts.

In response to Mr. Hebert's inquiry, Rev. Mathews stated that he is in favor of Alternative 1; Mr. Olander stated that he is in favor of Alternative 1 and Alternative 3, preferably Alternative 1; Mr. Ramsey stated that one plan can be adopted and split at the Wax Lake Outlet between the east and west side of the Parish. Mr. Belanger stated that pieces from different plans can be combined and presented as one plan. Per Dr. Rink's inquiry, Mr. Belanger stated that he will verify that Alternative 1 will not affect District No. 2.

Mr. Ramsey moved to accept Alternative 3.

Dr. Rink suggested having two alternative plans that show the west side as Alternative 1 and the east side as Alternative 2 and 3.

Duval Arthur, Mayor of the Town of Berwick thanked South Central Planning and the Parish Council for presenting the District Reapportionment plans and informed that Mayors and their Council Members may not be able to attend the Parish Council's Special Meeting on June 15, 2022 due to a District J LMA Meeting. He stated that the Public will give a lot of good input.

Discussion was had relative to giving the public an opportunity to view the District Reapportionment plans before making a decision.

Alfreida Edwards appeared before the Council to ask for clarity of the District Reapportionment plans. Mr. Belanger informed that the plans can be viewed online. Mr. Duhon, District No. 8 Councilman, stated that Alternative 3 would remove 500 of the black population from his District and that currently there is 40 percent white population in Alternative 2, the white population would change from 2,500 to 3,065, the Vietnamese population is approximately 700 and Hispanic population is approximately 1,700. He stated that he is in favor of Alternative 2. Mr. Hebert, District No. 6 Councilman, stated that it would increase the minority percentage from 10 percent to 19 percent for his District. Mr. Ramsey stated that it does not create a third minority district; it just gives a larger minority population in an already white majority district. Mr. Hebert stated that he prefers Alternative 3 because it would put all of Berwick in District No. 6. Mr. Duhon stated that a few years ago, someone from Berwick ran for the District No. 8 seat and lost by 14 votes again in 1995 or 1996 a man from Berwick won. In response to Mr. Duhon's inquiry relative to Mayor Arthur preferring to be represented by six (6) or five (5) Councilman, Mayor Arthur stated that he prefers compactness but the final decision is made by the Parish Council.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discussion and Action relative to Redistricting/Reapportionment.

After discussion, Mr. Hebert moved to accept Alternative 1 from Calumet Cut to the West end of the Parish and moved to accept Alternative 3 from Calumet Cut to the East end of the Parish. Mr. Ramsey seconded the motion, which failed by the following 4-3-2-2 Roll Call vote:

YEAS: Mathews, Olander, Ramsey, and Hebert

NAYS: Duhon, Adams, and Rink

ABSTAIN: Ina and Hidalgo

ABSENT: Rulf and Bennett

There being no further business, Mr. Adams moved for adjournment. Mr. Duhon seconded the motion, which carried.