

SPECIAL SESSION

AUGUST 10, 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, Leslie “Les” Rulf, Jr., Patrick J. Hebert, James W. Bennett, Jr., Mark A. Duhon, Dean S. Adams, and Gwendolyn L. Hidalgo.

The Invocation was pronounced by Mr. Hebert and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Rulf.

Dr. Rink informed that at the June 22, 2022 Council Meeting, the Council selected a hybrid plan encompassing Plan 1 for District 1, District 2, and District 3 and Plan 2 for District 4, District 5, District 6, District 7, and District 8 as a working plan to move forward. She stated that Josh Manning, South Central Planning and Development Commission will introduce the plan and public comment will be held for possible modifications to that plan or any other opinions.

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

Mr. Manning demonstrated a Power Point presentation relative to redistricting and stated that redistricting is required by law every ten years. He expounded on reasons redistricting is needed, the redistricting process, baseline plans, the deviation percentage, compactness, the redistricting time line, and the importance of having two majority minority districts. He stated that Alternative 1, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3 are within a deviation of five percent and maintain the two majority minority districts. In regard to Alternative 1 he stated that District No. 1 has the strongest majority minority district population and 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. In regard to Alternative 2 he stated that it will maintain the two majority minority districts and has medium compactness. He stated that Alternative 3 is the most compact plan but has the weakest majority minority districts. He informed that Alternative 4 has a portion of Alternative 1 plan on the west side of the Parish and has a portion of Alternative 2 plan on the east side of the Parish. He further informed that Alternative 4 is the least compact and has 15 precinct splits. He expounded on the process once a plan is selected.

Dr. Rink informed that Rev. Mathews is now present.

Per Mr. Duhon’s inquiry relative to the completion time for Terrebonne Parish’s plan once the ordinance was adopted, Mr. Manning stated that the turnaround time was within two (2) weeks with several corrections that were needed later in the process. He also informed that the redistricting process for Terrebonne Parish Council and the School Board were done at the same time. Mr. Adams stated that St. Mary Parish does not have all single member districts like Terrebonne Parish Council and the School Board.

Discussion was had relative to compactness in Alternative 1 and Alternative 4.

In response to Mr. Hebert’s inquiry relative to the compactness and fairness of Alternative 2 verses Alternative 3 regarding the minority population, Mr. Manning informed that Alternative 3 is the most compact and that the Council will have to make the decision. In regards to Alternative 3 for District 8 and the minority population, Mr. Manning informed that the white population is 49.53 percent, the black population is 14.79 percent, and that other races will make up 50 percent. In regard to Alternative 2 for District 8 and the minority population, Mr. Manning informed that the white population is 40.65 percent and the black population is 24.16 percent. He stated that District 8 in both Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 is considered a minority influenced district. He also stated that the District 5 and District 6 minority population percent will also increase in Alternative 2 and Alternative 3.

Per Mr. Rulf's inquiry relative to Alternative 2 for District 5 and District 6 and the minority population, Mr. Manning stated that Alternative 2 shows a black population of 35.75 percent in District 5 and that Alternative 3 shows a black population of 36.41 percent. He further stated that in District 6 the black population goes from 9.9 percent to 19.11 percent. Mr. Hebert stated that half of the minority population in the Berwick District is being removed and placed in another district. He stated that Berwick currently has 20 percent minority population and if it is cut in half, a minority will never have a chance to serve that district in the future. He stated that Alternative 2 shows that Berwick City Hall will no longer be in the Berwick District but will be in the Amelia District.

In response to Mr. Hebert's request, Mr. Manning read the definition of compactness from the Power Point presentation which states that it is "preservation of community interest and geographical areas such as neighborhoods where residents have common political interest." Mr. Hebert stated that he does not understand why a community needs to be divided and asked the Council to explain reasons for dividing Berwick. Discussion was had relative to Mr. Duhon and Mr. Bennett's inquiry regarding City Hall of Morgan City being located in Mr. Hebert's district. Mr. Bennett stated that he represents a portion of the City of Morgan City and that Alternative 3 shows that City Hall will be located in Mr. Hebert's district. Mr. Olander stated that Morgan City is represented by more than one district because Morgan City's population is greater than Berwick's.

President Hanagriff stated that District 6 (Berwick) has to cross over into Morgan City in order to comply with the five (5) percent population deviation requirement. He stated that the argument is that District 8 (Amelia) is going around Morgan City to include Berwick, which it is not adjacent to. He also stated that District 8 is a minority district because it includes the African American, Hispanic, and Vietnamese population. He further stated that Alternative 2 shows a higher percentage of minorities in District 8 by taking away from District 6, which is approximately a nine (9) percent difference. Alternative 3 lowers the percentage to five (5) percent that will allow for a more balanced representation of minorities in both districts.

Per Dr. Rink's request Mr. Manning presented Alternative 4 on the Power Point demonstration to compare the current districts with the proposed changes.

Being no objections, Dr. Rink opened the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

Ann W. Poole, resident of District 8 appeared before the Council and asked to keep the maps as they currently are in order to keep minority voters.

Berwick Councilman Raymond Price, a resident of Berwick appeared before the Council and stated that Alternative 3 seems to be the most compact for the east end of the Parish and Alternative 1 is the most compact for the west end of the Parish. He suggested that the City of Morgan City be represented by District 7 (Mr. Bennett) and District 8 (Mr. Duhon) and that the Town of Berwick be represented by District 6 (Mr. Hebert).

Berwick Mayor Duval Arthur appeared before the Council and stated that South Central Planning and Development Commission recommend compactness to make communities better. He stated that Alternative 3 is more compact for Berwick and asked the Council to consider Alternative 3. Mr. Ramsey stated that he spoke with Mayor Arthur and is willing to give his portion of Berwick to District 6 (Mr. Hebert).

Berwick Councilman Kevin Hebert, a resident of Berwick appeared before the Council and stated that his opinion is that the best option for Berwick and St. Mary Parish is to select Alternative 1 and Alternative 3 for compactness.

Dr. Rink clarified that the Council voted to start with the map that is presented tonight to make modifications from and that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to discuss refining lines if needed.

Berwick Councilperson Colleen Nicklas Askew, a resident of Berwick appeared before the Council and stated that no one has answered Mr. Hebert's question relative to why Berwick is being split up. Mr. Adams stated that the only area he is aware of is that a portion in Berwick by

City Hall that is by the railroad tracks and the bridge will be included in Mr. Duhon's district (District 8) and that Mr. Ramsey has the unincorporated area on the south side of Berwick by Thorguson Drive.

In response to Mrs. Askew's inquiry, Mr. Rulf stated that Alternative 3 will affect District 4 and District 5 because he will lose Cotten Road and Crescent Acres to District 4 (Mr. Ramsey). After discussion, Mr. Manning expounded on how the decision to change these lines was done. Mr. Manning stated that South Central Planning is only giving options and not making any recommendations to the Council on which plan to choose.

Dr. Rink suggested that Mr. Manning show modifications of the map on the Power Point screen.

Scott Babin, resident of Berwick appeared before the Council and thanked them for their time and listening to the citizens. He stated that he is running for School Board in the Berwick district. He stated that the school board lines recently cut out 360 residents of Berwick from the Berwick school district and asked Council Members to listen to suggestions. He expounded on compactness and the affect it will have on citizens.

Under public comment, Parish President David Hanagriff spoke at the podium and stated that he is a resident of Centerville. In response to Mrs. Askew's inquiry relative to why Berwick is being split up, President Hanagriff stated that there is no good reason why. He stated that in 2010 he was a Parish Councilman when redistricting was done and that a portion of Centerville was represented by the Bayou Vista District due to population. He stated that Dr. Rink asked Kevin Belanger, South Central Planning Development & Commission why social economics were not considered. He stated that South Central Planning did base it on compactness and communities. He stated that Mr. Duhon does not want the Lakeside area as proposed in Alternate 3 because that area is perceived to have a higher income and more educated people, he would prefer to have the River Road area where there is lower income and less educated people for political reasons. He stated that District 6 will have to incorporate a portion of Morgan City and suggested that Alternate 3 and Alternate 1 be selected.

Almetra Franklin, resident of Verdunville appeared before the Council and stated that the general community was not consulted and that the residents of Verdunville should be represented by someone that has Verdunville at heart.

Clerk of the Council Lisa C. Morgan read the following emails received from Brandon J.H. and Amber Monceaux and also from Debbie Monceaux relative to District Reapportionment:

“President Hanagriff and Members of the St. Mary Parish Council,
Hope this email find all of you healthy and in good spirits!
I am writing today to request that you vote for Berwick to **NOT** be separated in the District Reapportionment now or anytime in the future. As a long-time resident, business owner, and property owner in Berwick, I feel that separating Berwick will be a complete detriment to its citizens and will serve no purpose other than to satisfy the agenda of individuals with political aspirations. I ask that you vote for “Alternative 3” to keep Berwick in one district.
Thank you for your time and vote to **NOT** separate Berwick. Please feel free to contact me via email or the numbers listed below if needed.
Thank You,
Brandon J.H. Monceaux and Amber L. Monceaux”

“President Hanagriff and Members of the St. Mary Parish Council,
As a Voter, property owner, family business owner and 35+ year resident (my husband a lifelong resident) of Berwick, I graciously request that you vote to *NOT* separate Berwick, now or at any point in the future. Realizing a vote must take place, whether the citizens like it or not, I ask that you please cast your vote for “Alternative Plan 3”.”
I feel separating Berwick would be detrimental and serve no reasonable purpose other than to satisfy those with lopsided political ambitions. Alternative Plan 3 makes the most sense and is the better choice, since one has to be made, for our parish.
There is enough separation, corruption, upheaval and chaos in this world today, don't bring it into our district. YOU have the opportunity to take the least disruptive path, for the people you were elected to SERVE. Vote for “Alternative Plan 3”.
Thank You! Debbie Monceaux

Per Mr. Ramsey's request, an excerpt of the recording of the Council's June 22, 2022 meeting was played relative to portions of Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 plans that were selected by Roll Call vote by the Council. Mr. Ramsey stated that these alternatives were selected because the Council had to start with something to make modifications to. Dr. Rink informed that she stated several times in the meeting that the selection was a starting point and that the approved minutes and listening to the recorded meeting from June 22, 2022 clarified several times in the meeting that this was a starting plan, not a definitive plan.

Scott Babin asked the Council to review this again and consider what the citizens want.

In response to Dr. Rink and Mr. Hebert's inquiries, Mr. Manning showed real time modifications to mirror Berwick that is similar to Alternative 3. Mr. Hebert stated that it does not matter where his area of Morgan City is and that his main goal is to keep Berwick as one district. Discussion was had relative to proposed line changes for District 6, District 7, and District 8 regarding Alternative 4.

Rev. Mathews clarified that the timeline to have redistricting finalized is August, 2023. Dr. Rink stated that Council Members that have debate regarding changes can meet with Mr. Manning. Mr. Bennett suggested that he, Mr. Hebert, and Mr. Duhon meet with Mr. Manning to discuss options. Mr. Manning suggested having a working session with them and then have a special meeting to present the information to the Council and to the public. Mr. Hebert stated for the record, that Dr. Rink previously arranged a meeting with herself, Mr. Hebert, and Mr. Duhon. Mr. Hebert stated that he rearranged his schedule and drove to Houma to South Central Planning for that meeting and he was the only Council Member that showed up. Mr. Hebert stated that Mr. Bennet can have all of Morgan City. Mr. Bennett apologized and stated that it is obvious that Mr. Hebert has to have a portion of Morgan City to meet requirements and also stated that he would like Mr. Hebert to attend.

Mr. Ina stated that District 1 and District 2 are large minority districts. He also stated that according to the plan statistics the minority population is so small in District 6 and District 8 that a minority candidate may never win those districts. He further asked that the Council not use the small minority population to evoke emotion and make a decision.

In response to Mr. Duhon's inquiry relative to whether his district (District 8) needs change, Mr. Manning stated that is correct according to population but District 6 (Mr. Hebert) needs to lose population. He stated that the question is does District 6 lose population in Morgan City or does it lose population in Berwick. Mr. Duhon stated that he would like to keep District 8 the same as it is. Mr. Manning explained that because this will cause a shift change, District 8 (Mr. Duhon) will have to pick up population in District 6 (Mr. Hebert). Discussion was had relative to where population will be lost and keeping the same area that Council Members have been representing and campaigning in the past.

Mr. Ramsey expounded on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and black voting strength. Mr. Manning stated that districts need to be balanced.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discussion and Action relative to Redistricting/Reapportionment.

After discussion, several Council Members suggested a meeting with Mr. Manning to discuss reapportionment relative to District 6, District 7, and District 8 and inform the Council of the discussion and suggestions.

There being no further business, Rev. Mathews moved for adjournment. Mr. Olander seconded the motion, which carried.