

BCA Meeting Notes

Monday, November 1, 2021 at 7 pm, Town Hall + Zoom

Present: Denise Wheeler, Rick Kehne, John Brabant, Marc Mihaly, Jeremy Weiss (Clerk of the BCA), Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Jane English*, Naomi Reid*, Dermont Harvey*, ORCA Media*, Alisha Raby (ORCA Media), Gail Graham*, Jamie Moorby*, Janet Pocarobba*, Richard Hyde*, Stephanie Kaplan*, Dillon Burns*, Jane*, Michael Loignon*, Emily Harvey*, Leslie Matthews*, Rep. Janet Ancel; Bill Powell*, Kristina Bielenberg, Marge Garfield, Art Edelstien, Charlotte Hanna, Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes)*, Scott Bassage

**indicates attendance via Zoom*

1. Call to Order: The meeting was begun at 7 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.

Jeremy Weiss, Clerk of Board of Civil Authority, explained that this is an informational meeting to discuss the proposed legislative reapportionment plan. He shared a power point presentation, beginning with the proposed map. Currently the Town of Calais is in the legislative district of WA-6, which includes the towns of Calais, Plainfield and Marshfield. The proposal creates a new district combining Calais, Woodbury, Worcester, and a portion of East Montpelier (newly proposed WA-3). He shared slides guiding participants through historic context, including that the current representation in the Vermont legislature is based on population (as opposed to one-vote-per-town, and as opposed to total voters). The Clerk then explained the deviation calculations as they pertain to Calais.

In terms of next steps, the BCA can recommend the manner in which district lines should be drawn. The BCA has until November 15, 2021, to submit its comments to the Legislative Apportionment Board.

Clerk Jeremy Weiss reviewed the changes to Calais's voting district over time and the people who have represented Calais in the Vermont House. He presented guiding questions for the group: how does the BCA feel generally about the proposal to move to 1 member district statewide; and, how does the BCA feel about our proposed District?

Representative Janet Ancel commented that she has been involved in at least four different redistricting processes (beginning in a staffing role), and has some experience with how it works. She explained that the Legislative Apportionment Board (LAB), set up by the Constitution, is supposed to have equal representation from all political parties—which is not really reflective of the way Vermont as a whole votes. Therefore it's an interesting body to be making a decision on what is really a political plan. Regarding the question about the single-member district, the constitution clearly sets up one or two member districts. She questioned if

single-member districts may run afoul of other requirements in the Constitution and as the Legislature and the LAB weigh this, there are competing goals.

This reapportionment happens every ten years, but this year, there were many issues around execution of the census as well as pandemic. Petitions for candidates for Vermont office are required filed by the end of May, and this fast-approaching timeline will be impacted by how late this redistricting process is occurring (candidates do not know what the district boundaries definitively will be). Dillon Burns commented in support of the change. Michael Loignon commented that he heard from a resident that districts should follow school lines; he felt the proposed change will be fine. Jamie Moorby asked how common it is to have part of a town in one district, and part in another, and whether this is very confusing? Rep. Ancel noted this is not common and in the past, if the numbers didn't work out, they would make a two-member district and leave it to the local BCAs to divide the boundaries.

Rick Kehne considered a possible solution to the issue of candidates being ready to know their boundaries while running this year, by staggering implementation dates of the redistricting. Rep. Ancel suspected that the constitution would not allow this. Discussion turned to details of the boundaries.

The ideal number is 4,287 people per representative. The Secretary of State (SOS) and reapportionment website has lots of information from the people who put this plan together (including articles, etc.) supporting why they think a one-member district is a better idea. However, the final LAB vote was 4-3 regarding moving forward with this particular plan (other ideas for plans had been conceived). Rep. Ancel assessed that this proposal is not much politically different from the existing plan. She explained that statewide, population has grown in Franklin and Chittenden Counties, while pop has been lost in southern Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom; so there are shifts politically statewide, but not so much in this area.

Denise Wheeler commented that East Montpelier-Calais has exactly the right number of voters to be a single district and Scott Bassage added his support to this idea. Rep. Ancel suggested the BCA share this idea with the LAB. Questions should be posed to the Board directly (Denise Wheeler will attempt to get a response—why Calais and East Montpelier were not made into one district already—ahead of next week's meeting). The Secretary of State's website has a map of the entire state's legislative apportionment districts (as proposed). The Clerk noted that if Calais and East Montpelier BCAs wanted to meet to discuss this, there is a process by which this would be supported by a mediating member of the LAB—the challenge this year being this super-condensed timeframe.

The Calais BCA will also accept written comment from the public until Monday November 8, 2021 via email to Calais.TownClerk@gmail.com or by mail to Calais Town Office, 3120 Pekin Brook Road, East Calais, VT 05650. Alternatively, comments from the public may be submitted directly to the LAB.

After the period for submitting comments closes, the house districts will go as a report to the House; the legislative plan will become a bill. The BCA Clerk explained that the condensed timeframe discussed earlier will likely result in a fast-moving process to get the districts approved and allow candidates to run within statutorily-defined time frames. (There is no weighing in on the senatorial districts at the BCA level.) The Senate has not published any

maps yet, but Rep. Ancel expected the Washington senatorial district is likely to remain fairly the same.

More information is available online at: <https://sos.vermont.gov/apportionment-board/resources/bca-resources/> or at the town office.

4. Adjournment: The meeting ended at 7:45 pm.

Date: 11/3/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas