

Redistricting in Tompkins County

The Tompkins County Board of Representatives, on May 31, 2001, approved new boundaries for County legislative districts. The 15 districts exist solely for the election of, and representation on, the Board of Representatives and do not change any municipal boundaries, taxation, or representation on any other governmental body. It was necessary to redraw district boundaries due to uneven population growth within the districts, according to the U.S. Census for 2000. The County's Charter Review Committee was charged with making a recommendation on how to redraw the district lines to assure fair representation, following guidelines in the County's Charter and Code. The numbers used for redistricting were prepared by the County Planning Department and contain revisions to correct inaccurate counts in districts that include college dormitories. Dorm populations were assigned improperly; Census officials have indicated that the County's corrections are very likely to be approved. Census figures are expected to be certified later this summer.

NEWS UPDATE, MAY 31, 2001:

The Tompkins County Board of Representatives approved a redistricting plan that has been the front runner among most of the County legislators. At a meeting of the full Board, all members except Rep. Dooley Kiefer voted in favor of a local law that institutes the plan known as 15-D. The plan retains 15 Board of Representatives seats and features three districts – 1, 3, and 5 – that combine parts of the City and Town of Ithaca.

The new legislative districts will be in effect for this year's candidate petitioning and elections. All 15 seats on the Board of Representatives, which have four-year terms, are up for election this fall. City of Ithaca officials have indicated they expect to approve an identical redistricting plan for the parts that fall within the City limits, to go into effect for Common Council elections in the fall of 2003.

Earlier in the day, the County's Charter Review Committee, which has reviewed more than a dozen options, looked at some late entries in the debate. Keifer presented two 15-district plans that do not keep City and County legislative districts congruent. The plans did not receive committee support.

At the Board meeting, Town of Ithaca Supervisor Cathy Valentino, Ithaca Mayor Alan Cohen and others urged the Representatives to take more time in their decision-making. Valentino said the Board's action does not provide adequate representation for Town residents on the County Board because the town falls into several districts, including those that include City residents.

Rep. Peter Penniman pointed out that the issues County legislators typically consider are county-wide issues and not rooted in any geographic area. Rep. Tim Joseph pointed out that County Board representation is based on which district an individual lives in, not the municipality. Joseph also stated that the redistricting process was non-partisan with no efforts to gerrymander boundaries for political gain. Rep. George Totman said he favored the adopted plan as being the least disruptive, and that several Representatives, including him, already represent districts that include more than one municipality.

NEWS UPDATE, MAY 24, 2001:

Tompkins County legislators will continue with plans to adopt a redistricting scenario that retains 15 Board of Representatives seats and features three districts that straddle the line between the City and Town of Ithaca. The plan (*shown on map "15 Districts-Scenario D**) won almost unanimous support from the Board ten days ago and stands as the one that will be put to a vote on May 31.

The County's Charter Review Committee rejected a revised redistricting option (*Scenario D2*) that Town of Ithaca officials presented but only half-heartedly endorsed. Most of the committee members, while conceding that no plan will please everyone, preferred to stick with the option that all but one Board member (Rep. Dooley Kiefer) favored in a straw poll at June 15's Board of Representatives meeting.

The preferred plan minimally adjusts boundaries between the more rural districts but offers significant changes in the districts in and immediately surrounding the City of Ithaca. Districts 1, 3, and 5, traditionally city districts, will pick up voters in the Town of Ithaca and a small portion of the Village of Cayuga Heights.

Members of Ithaca Common Council have worked closely with the Charter Review Committee. Alderman Ed Hershey reiterated the City's desire to keep City and County legislative district lines contiguous. The part of the preferred plan that falls within the city limits will keep an acceptable population balance among the City's five wards. A City redistricting plan must be adopted independently by Common Council.

Updated May 31, 2001. If you have problems with this site, please contact the [web developer](#).