

**Tompkins County
Independent Redistricting Commission**

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To: Members, Tompkins County Legislature
From: Tompkins County Independent Redistricting Commission
Subject: Interim Report
Date: November 21, 2011

The Independent Redistricting Commission appointed by the County Legislature has now held nine meetings since our first session on June 27, 2011. Our meetings have been announced in advance and have been open to the public. To encourage input from throughout the county, we have held meetings in the Enfield Town Court, the Varna Community Center, and the Common Council Chamber of the City of Ithaca, as well as in several Tompkins County facilities. We appreciate the many county officials, members of the County Legislature, supervisors and members of several town boards and the Common Council of the City of Ithaca, village trustees and individual county residents who have attended our meetings and shared with us their views and recommendations. We have also received written comments from individuals who were unable to attend our meetings as well as from one county resident who appeared in person. All have been helpful to our work. We are particularly appreciative for the professional and technical support we have been given by the county staff members who have been made available to the Commission.

Our deliberations have been guided by the detailed “Charge to the Commission” contained in the April 5, 2011 Memorandum from the Legislature’s Government Operations Committee. That document laid out several key factors to consider in developing our recommendations:

- Minimization of population variance among districts;
- Compactness of districts;
- Practicable constancy with existing municipal boundaries and neighborhoods within Tompkins County;
- Balance and reasonableness of representation for the diversity of citizens residing in all parts of the County.

In addition, the comments and recommendations received by the Commission have caused us to keep in mind a number of other considerations such as keeping intact, if possible the boundaries of villages contained within a county legislative district, minimizing the use of “sliver election districts,” reducing potential expenses for the Board of Elections as a result of proposed boundaries, and sensitivity to the workload of county legislators as they perform their policy-making and oversight responsibilities.

The Legislature’s charge to the Commission notes that the County Charter allows for a county legislature that may range in size from 11 to 19 members. Several individuals who have appeared before the Commission have suggested that the County Legislature could function effectively with a slightly smaller number of representatives, while others have expressed concern that the existing workload of the current 15 members is such that any diminution of their membership could result in an undesirable burden on the legislators in a smaller body. Similarly, the Commission has received





comments on the question of whether an even-numbered legislature would be prone to legislative or organizational deadlock.

With all of these factors in mind, the Commission requested its staff to prepare an array of alternative maps with a membership of the county legislature ranging from 13 to 17 and a population deviation for each map not to exceed 10% when adding the deviation from the average for the smallest population district to that of the largest population district. (For example, from an equal population perspective an acceptable map would permit a deviation from the average of +7.0% for the largest district and -3.0% for the smallest.) All of the maps under consideration by the Commission have been posted on the Commission's web site, www.tompkins-co.org/redistricting and are available for public inspection. Each of these alternative configurations has been examined in detail, with some scenarios deemed more attractive than others when evaluated in light of the criteria that have been established.

At the Commission's meeting on November 1, we determined that four of the maps presently before us should be given further detailed attention. These were maps 15-A-v.1, 14-A-v.1, 13-A-v.1 and 13-D-v.1. The Commission believes that these scenarios best meet the criteria in relation to the area of the county outside the City of Ithaca. An alternative to map 15 A v.1, now known as map 15 A v.3, has been defined by the Commission as the best fit for a scenario that retains the current number of legislators at 15 and makes the least amount of change to the current legislative boundaries. However, it continues to have a number of sliver districts extending into the Town of Ithaca and does not keep the Village of Cayuga Heights intact. For these and other reasons, the Commission decided at its November 16 meeting to drop the 15-district scenario from our list of preferred alternatives at this time, recognizing that it can be restored later in our proceedings. The remaining maps reduce the number of legislative districts to either 13 or 14, with all village lines intact and all districts within the City of Ithaca self-contained.

The Commission devoted most of its attention during its meeting on November 16 to alternative district lines within the City of Ithaca. No final determination was reached, but three alternative city boundary configurations, each comprised of four legislative districts, were identified as priorities for further consideration. For purposes of public presentation, these city alternative scenarios are reflected in maps 14 A - v. 3, 13 A - v.3 and 13 D - v. 3. It should be noted that since the proposed legislative districts within these three city alternatives are all self-contained, they are interchangeable and could likely be associated with any one of these three maps.

There has been some discussion of the possibility that the City Redistricting Committee now examining the future number and shape of wards in the City may consider recommending a change in the City Charter to have one alderperson representing an election district, with two election districts per ward. The Commission awaits with interest the ongoing results of the City Committee's deliberations, since we hope to recommend county district lines within the City that are congruent with those of the City's wards. We have been advised by members of the City Committee that any change





in the number of wards or the number of representatives per ward would be subject to a public referendum to amend the City Charter. We are pleased that several members of the City Redistricting Committee have attended one or more of our meetings and members of this Commission have similarly attended meetings of the City Committee. We look forward to receiving additional input from the City Committee prior to the Commission's next meeting on December 15.

In the immediate weeks ahead the Commission welcomes the reactions of members of the County Legislature and the public to our preliminary work. Our plan is to use the month of December to fine tune the proposals under consideration and to then hold one or more public hearings on these recommendations during January. We will conclude this phase of our work in February and submit our recommendations to the County Legislature by the March 1, 2012 deadline.

Thank you for your continuing attention to these matters.

Members of the Commission

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Linda R. Duttweiler, Town of Ithaca
John C. Gutenberger, Town of Lansing
Michael R. Hattery, Town/ Village of Dryden
Margaret Hobbie, City of Ithaca
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