

# Redistricting Process Report

November 10, 2021

On November 10, 2021, the Alaska Redistricting Board issued its Final Plan and Proclamation of Redistricting in accordance with the provisions of Article VI of the Alaska Constitution. The provisions of Article VI that govern the Board's work are attached to this report as Appendix 1. This report describes the work of the Redistricting Board, and individual districts. Accompanying regional, statewide and interactive maps may be found at [www.akredistrict.org/maps](http://www.akredistrict.org/maps)

## The Board

The members of the Alaska Redistricting Board were appointed as required by the Alaska Constitution, Article VI.

Governor Mike Dunleavy appointed Budd Simpson of Juneau and Bethany Marcum of Anchorage on July 28, 2020.

Senate President Cathy Giessel appointed John Binkley of Fairbanks on July 29, 2020.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Bryce Edgmon, appointed Nicole Borromeo of Anchorage on July 30, 2020.

Alaska Supreme Court Chief Justice Joel Bolger appointed Melanie Bahnke of Nome on August 7, 2020.

Executive Director, Peter Torkelson and Deputy Director TJ Presley were retained in December and began work later that month. The Board's traditional relationship with the Department of Labor was re-established in mid-January 2021. As in past redistricting cycles, the Department agreed to provide the Board with technical expertise of the State Demographer, Eric Sandberg, who supported the Board's efforts in 2011-2013.

## Preparations

On January 11, 2021 the Board issued a Request for Information for Legal Services.

The Board website, [www.akredistrict.org](http://www.akredistrict.org) was launched on February 19<sup>th</sup> with a design that dynamically adapts to both widescreen and portrait mobile environments. The website includes forms for the public to sign-up for e-news updates and submit formal public comment which is included the Public Testimony packet published on the Board's Meeting Information page. The email subscriber list contains 550 subscribers and the public comment form has received nearly 1,200 submissions. Public written comment was also accepted at an email

address dedicated for that purpose, [testimony@akredistrict.org](mailto:testimony@akredistrict.org). More than 2,000 pages of public testimony was received.

On March 12, the Board retained Matt Singer and Lee Baxter of the Anchorage law firm Schwabe Williamson & Wyatt to advise and represent the Board in legal matters.

On April 19 the Board issued a Request for Information for a Voting Rights Act Consultant and on June 21 executed a contract with Bruce Adelson and Dr. Jonathan Katz of Federal Compliance Consulting LLC.

The U.S. Census faced unprecedented delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and alerted the Board that official delivery of the Census data would likely be delayed until August or September of 2021.

With additional time to prepare, the Board directed staff to reach out to local governments and any other interested groups to proactively educate Alaskans about the upcoming redistricting cycle. Between April and August 2021 board staff presented to over 20 local governments and groups who responded to the offer of a redistricting presentation.

On July 20 the Board launched a first-ever web-based redistricting tool customized for Alaska and optimized for use by the general public. This online application allowed anyone with internet access the ability to draw their own legislative districts, track populations and deviations, and overlay maps of existing districts and local government boundaries. The tool was customized to allow seamless map submission through the Board's website and permit collaboration between contributors by saving the plan with a simple URL format which could be easily shared. Throughout the redistricting process, the Board received several complete maps and numerous partial maps which allowed members of the public to express their redistricting ideas graphically.

Legal counsel advised the Board to interpret Alaska Constitution clause in Article VI, § 3, *"Reapportionment shall be based upon the population within each house and senate district as reported by the official decennial census of the United States"* to mean that district lines must be comprised of whole census blocks, since that is the most precise level of enumeration available. Lines which depart from Census block geometry could leave the enumerated population value in question.

While redistricting software is more user-friendly than ever, initial mapping exercises revealed that changes to Census methodology had the effect of reducing the precision possible while drawing new legislative maps.

Between the 2010 Census and the 2020 Census, the Bureau engaged in a block count reduction effort which reduced the number of census blocks in Alaska from 45,292 to 28,568. This 37% decrease in blocks represents a loss of resolution, and a significant reduction in the number of blocks available to build compact and similarly populated districts. While Census blocks are

generally compact in populated areas, there were glaring exceptions – bizarre, salamander-like heavily populated census blocks in Anchorage, Matsu, Fairbanks and Juneau frequently confounded efforts to find compact shapes and precise population assignments.

## **The Process**

On August 5, 2021 the U.S. Census announced that “legacy” formatted redistricting data would be released on August 12, 2021 at 9am Alaska time and on August 9<sup>th</sup>, the Census published a statement that the “legacy” data was “official” and fit for use.

At 9:01am on August 12 Board staff downloaded the Census data and began processing 2020 population information. The 2020 enumerated Alaska population is 733,391. Divided by 40, this sets the ideal House district size at 18,335 persons. In compliance with Alaska Statute 15.10.200, the Board made no adjustments to the Census population numbers for prisoner or military reallocation or for any other purpose. Legal counsel advised the Board that a draft redistricting plan or plans must be adopted by September 11, 2021, thirty days after receipt of official Census data, in keeping with Alaska Constitution Article VI, section 10.

The full Board met in late August to formally receive the Census data and review the task ahead. The state demographer was on-hand to assist the Board in understanding population trends. These meetings were webcast and statewide teleconferenced. The following week saw numerous informal mapping work sessions in groups of 2 or fewer Board members often working with staff. These were conducted at the Board’s offices and were open to the public to attend and observe.

The full Board met in a statewide webcast and teleconferenced series of meetings on September 7, 8 and 9 in Anchorage. The Board took public testimony at the start and end of each meeting. On September 9, in compliance with its constitutional mandate and within the thirty-day window, the Board adopted two proposed redistricting plans, titled Board Composite v.1 and Board Composite v.2. Following the advice of legal counsel, the Board did not load racial data into the mapping software, nor did it consider racial composition while crafting v.1, v.2 or subsequent plans, instead focusing on the four Alaska Constitutional criteria of compactness, contiguity, socio-economic integration and drawing districts as near as practicable to an equal population of 18,335.

Board members worked individually and collaboratively the following week to refine and improve on v.1 and v.2. Office sessions were open to the public. In a statewide webcast and teleconferenced public hearing on September 17, the Board took two hours of public testimony from 40+ individuals and then moved to replace v.1 and v.2 with refined versions labeled Board v.3 and Board v.4.

The Board then received presentations from five third-party groups who each offered a unique proposed redistricting plan. After a weekend to consider the various plans, on Monday, September 20 the Board took public testimony and then proceeded to adopt four of the five

presented plans for inclusion in public hearings statewide . The four adopted proposed plans were from the following organization: Coalition of Doyon, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Fairbanks Native Association, Sealaska, and Ahtna; AFFER (Alaskans for Fair and Equitable Redistricting), AFFR (Alaskans For Fair Redistricting), and Senate Minority (the Alaska Senate Minority Caucus). Video recordings of hearings were linked from the Board website.

All six proposed plans were posted on the Board’s website, [www.akredistrict.org](http://www.akredistrict.org), and converted into interactive Google Map products allowing users to dynamically scale each map and toggle on/off underlying satellite or topographic layers. Each district may be individually selected to open an overlay with district number, population count and deviation percentages. A multi-plan interactive Google Map was created which allows users to overlay the boundaries of all six adopted plans over each other to quickly detect areas of consensus and divergence between any combination of plans. The various Google Map plans accumulated over 15,000 views by website users.

Within days, Board staff posted nearly 300 hi-res PDF maps of each plans’ individual districts, regions and statewide maps which have subsequently been downloaded thousands of times.

**Public Hearings**

Board members and staff then embarked on an aggressive public hearing campaign with an emphasis first on outlying communities in hopes of avoiding the worst weather challenges which would become more likely as winter approached.

The following itinerary was implemented. Staff worked to advertise public hearings in local newspapers and regional radio stations for several days in advance of each meeting.

|                              |                  |                         |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Juneau                       | September 27     | 5:30pm – 7:30pm         |
| Haines                       | September 28     | 2:30pm – 4:00pm         |
| Sitka                        | September 29     | 3:30pm – 5:30pm         |
| Valdez                       | September 30     | 4:30pm – 6:30pm         |
| <i>Meet the Maps Virtual</i> | <i>October 1</i> | <i>12:30pm – 1:30pm</i> |
| Anchorage                    | October 4        | 4:30pm – 6:30pm         |
| Kotzebue                     | October 5        | 3:00pm – 5:00pm         |
| Ketchikan                    | October 6        | 4:30pm – 6:30pm         |
| Petersburg                   | October 7        | 12:30pm – 2:00pm        |
| Wrangell                     | October 7        | 4:30pm – 6:30pm         |
| Nome                         | October 11       | 12:30pm – 2:30pm        |
| Seward                       | October 12       | 4:00pm – 6:00pm         |
| Homer                        | October 13       | 5:00pm – 7:00pm         |
| Kenai                        | October 14       | 5:30pm – 7:30pm         |
| Kodiak                       | October 15       | 12:00pm – 2:00pm        |

|                              |                   |                                |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Meet the Maps Virtual</i> | <i>October 15</i> | <i>6:00pm – 7:00pm</i>         |
| Delta Junction               | October 18        | 12:00pm – 2:00pm               |
| Fairbanks                    | October 18        | 5:30pm – 7:30pm                |
| Bethel                       | October 19        | 4:00pm – 6:00pm                |
| <i>Statewide Call In</i>     | <i>October 20</i> | <i>10:00am – 4:00pm</i>        |
| Dillingham                   | October 21        | 12:00pm- 2:00pm                |
| <i>Unalaska</i>              | <i>October 22</i> | <i>Canceled due to Weather</i> |
| Palmer                       | October 25        | 6:00pm – 8:00pm                |
| Wasilla                      | October 26        | 6:00pm – 8:00pm                |
| Anchorage                    | October 27        | 5:00pm – 7:00pm                |
| Utqiagvik                    | October 28        | 4:30pm – 6:30pm                |
| <i>Statewide Call In</i>     | <i>October 30</i> | <i>10:00am – 4:00pm</i>        |
| Cordova                      | November 1, 2021  | 4:00pm – 6:00pm                |

Aware that some members of the public could be uncomfortable attending in-person events because of COVID concerns, or unable due to scheduling conflicts, the Board offered two statewide all-day dial-in teleconference options on Wednesday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, from 10am – 4pm and again on Saturday, October 30 from 10am – 4pm. These hearings were solely dedicated to taking public testimony. While any caller could participate at any time, to facilitate community conversations, the Board assigned specific call-in hours for each region of the state.

To facilitate engagement and understanding of the proposed maps the public were offered two “Meet the Maps” statewide zoom webinars, October 1 mid-day from 12:30 – 1:30pm and the second the evening of October 15 from 6:00pm – 7:00pm. Staff walked through all six proposed plans and demonstrated interactive map tools, hi-res PDF download options and public comment submission pages. Questions were encouraged.

### **Adopting a Plan**

After the public hearing concluded on November 1, the Board met in Anchorage to take statewide public testimony, receive a Voting Rights Act compliance report from experts and deliberate on all they had learned during the weeks of public hearings. Counsel advised the Board that, in the opinion of their VRA consultants, the Board’s districts 37, 38, 39 and 40 were in compliance with the Federal Voting Rights act and would preserve the ability of Alaska Native voters to elect candidates of their choice. The Board was further advised that while diverse minority populations exceeded 50% in some Anchorage districts, there was no available evidence to suggest that these minorities were voting as a bloc, or being opposed by a bloc of

white voters. Without these legal preconditions being met, counsel advised the Board to avoid subordinating traditional redistricting criteria to racial considerations.

The Board then recessed into an extended three-day intensive mapping work session held at the Board's offices in Anchorage. The public were welcome attend and observe and the meetings were web streamed statewide via a voice tracking virtual teleconference camera appliance which dynamically stitches together video panes of speaking participants.

The 'herculean' task came into focus as Board members wrestled with competing Constitutional mandates of compactness, contiguity, relative socio-economic integration while keeping an eye on population deviations. Learning from past court guidance, the Board did not adopt a fixed target deviation percentage, but instead engaged in a fluid debate comparing more tight deviations which came at a cost to compactness, with less rigid population allowances permitting creating greater compactness and socio-economic integration.

Alaska's vast geography and isolated communities presented the same challenges previous boards had encountered. Cordova, Valdez and Kodiak, which are geographically distant and loosely economically associated with their surrounding areas presented dilemma upon dilemma.

Robust conversation eventually led to a least-worst compromise placing Cordova with Kodiak, Valdez with the Matsu, as it has been since the 2013 plan, and the City of Seward with Kodiak. Public testimony in Seward had favored an association with Kodiak as both communities pursue "outward facing" deep sea ground fisheries. Koniag, the Alaska Native Corporation for Kodiak had also suggested and supported this association. While these choices gave the Board pause, in the final analysis they represented the most socio-economically integrated possibility which also respected long-standing socio-economic relationships in other portions of the state and resulted in modest population deviations.

By mid-day Friday, November 5<sup>th</sup> informal mapping progress had been forged and the Board gaveled back into take public testimony in-person and telephonically statewide. The meeting was web streamed and teleconferenced statewide.

Late Friday, the Board adopted a consensus map labeled v7 as the Final Redistricting map subject only to error correction and cleanup which would be brought back for review the following Monday, November 8.

The Board reconvened on Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, approved several technical changes and took up consideration of senate district assignments and terms allocations. Public testimony was taken in-person and via statewide teleconference.

The Board then debated senate pairings. After lengthy discussion, the Board adopted new senate assignments and house seats in the final plan were renumbered to follow the traditional sequential pattern of House Seats 1 and 2 being assigned to Senate Seat A, and so on.

The Board then reviewed a purely numerical report of Senate district core constituency. No senate seat labels or geographic data were included. Members unanimously set the truncation cutoff limit at 16.3% new constituency or greater. The Board then considered setting Senate term allocations and adopted a pattern of alternating election terms for the coming decade: Seats A, C, E, G, I, K, M, O, Q, S standing for election in 2022/2026/2030 and Seats B, D, F, H, J, L, N, P, R, and T standing for election in 2024/2028/2032 in keeping with Alaska's constitutional requirement for alternating 4 year Senate terms. *See Appendix: Senate Constituency Report*

The Board met again on November 10, 2021 and adopted a final proclamation of redistricting.