



**Redistricting FAQ**

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## Contents

Intro .....	3
FAQ.....	3
1) Why is the City going through a redistricting process? .....	3
2) Why does redistricting matter to me? .....	3
3) How can I submit comments about the redistricting process? .....	3
4) How can I share information about my community in the redistricting process? .....	3
5) I want to try making a map myself. How can I do that? .....	3
6) I'm worried redistricting will affect my school district.....	3
7) How will my feedback be used? .....	4
8) Where can I find redistricting maps under consideration? .....	4
9) Why can't the City just keep the old Ward map? .....	4
10) What's the timeframe for redistricting? When will the new maps go into effect? ...	4
11) I really love one map and really hate another map. How can I let the City know? .	4
12) Are these the final maps? .....	5
13) How did the City come up with these maps? .....	5
14) I missed the two community engagement sessions and want to know what was said. How can I watch these? .....	5
15) I want to know what maps other residents submitted. Where can I find these? ....	6
16) I've seen that the City will consider "communities of interest" in the redistricting process. What's a community of interest? .....	6
17) I am concerned that the redistricting will divide my neighborhood between two wards, diluting our ability to influence the City Council's decisions. Can that be prevented?.....	6
18) I've heard that the Wards in these maps are made up of Census blocks. What's a Census block? Why are they important? .....	6
19) I noticed in the last redistricting process some Wards cut through blocks. Why is the City making sure Wards follow block-boundaries this time? .....	7

## Intro

This document answers common questions you might have about the redistricting process in Takoma Park. If you don't see your question answered, please submit it using the redistricting comments form, [available here](#).

## FAQ

### 1) Why is the City going through a redistricting process?

With the completion of the 2020 U.S. Census, the population balance of the City's wards must be reviewed and the boundaries redrawn (if needed) to ensure that wards are close to equal in population and meet other requirements. All cities across the US go through this process every decade with the completion of the Census.

### 2) Why does redistricting matter to me?

Redistricting determines which neighborhoods and communities are grouped together into a district for purposes of electing a Council member. The City is seeking input in selecting the next map for our wards. You have an opportunity to share how you think ward boundaries should be drawn to best represent your community.

### 3) How can I submit comments about the redistricting process?

You can submit comments using the redistricting comments form, [available here](#).

### 4) How can I share information about my community in the redistricting process?

The City has a redistricting survey where you can share information about your community [here](#). The survey can also be found on the [City's redistricting page](#) and the [redistricting engagement portal](#).

### 5) I want to try making a map myself. How can I do that?

You can use the City's District Scenario Modeler tool, found [here](#). Instructions on how to use the tool can be found at the top of the page.

### 6) I'm worried redistricting will affect my school district.

Takoma Park's redistricting process **does not** affect your school district, even if you change Wards. School redistricting is a completely separate process.

Additionally, Takoma Park's redistricting will not affect County Council representation or your representation in any other level of government.

## 7) How will my feedback be used?

The City is still deciding on final map options and whether to make any changes to the map options that have been presented. The City also works to make sure residents' communities of interest are preserved to the greatest extent possible. Your feedback will inform which maps to choose or edit, and what communities to try to preserve as one Ward.

## 8) Where can I find redistricting maps under consideration?

The two-new map options and five-old map options can be found on the City's redistricting page, [here](#). A web map visualizing the new options can be found [here](#).

## 9) Why can't the City just keep the old Ward map?

As the [District Scenario Modeler shows](#), the City's current Wards are not population-balanced. The District Scenario Modeler shows that the current wards have an imbalance of 77.5% between the highest and lowest population ward (the actual deviation is likely slightly lower; blocks are assigned to wards based on which ward the centerpoint of the block falls-in, and in some cases the population-center won't be in the block-center. We cannot know precisely because the old ward map splits blocks, and we don't know how the population of split-blocks is distributed on each side of the cut).

Population-balance is important so residents have equal representation in City government; if 10 people vote for one City Councilor and 100 people vote for another and the two Councilors have equal say in City decisions, that does not follow the principle of one-person one-vote. The generally accepted standard for population balance is to have no more than a 10 percent difference between the ward with the most people and the ward with the fewest people. A lower difference is preferable.

Recognizing that some residents may still prefer not to see their Wards changed, some of the [map options](#) prepared by FLO try to minimize changes to existing Wards.

## 10) What's the timeframe for redistricting? When will the new maps go into effect?

The final decision on Ward boundaries will be made by the City Council at some point in early 2022 and will be effective for the next City election. A tentative calendar can be found on the [City's redistricting page](#).

## 11) I really love one map and really hate another map. How can I let the City know?

You can use the redistricting comment form, [available here](#), and attend upcoming meetings on redistricting. A tentative schedule of meetings can be found on the [City redistricting page](#).

## 12) Are these the final maps?

No. The City will continue incorporating feedback from the community on the maps presented so far, and eliminate maps from consideration or make changes to the current maps based on this feedback. Residents are encouraged to share feedback on maps to inform these decisions.

## 13) How did the City come up with these maps?

The City hired FLO Analytics to develop maps and Bloom Planning to manage community facilitation. FLO developed these maps with City staff and resident input based on the following criteria adopted by City Council resolution:

1. Districts ***must*** be “population balanced”
2. Districts ***must*** be contiguous
3. Redistricting ***must*** be done in compliance with all local, state, and federal laws including the federal Voting Rights Act (1965)
4. Districts should not favor or disfavor a protected class or political party
5. Districts should be as compact as possible
6. Districts should preserve the use of existing administrative and natural boundaries
7. Districts should preserve communities of interest (COIs) ***if possible***
8. In no case shall the difference between the largest and smallest ward populations be **more than 10 percent**.
9. If practicable considering other criteria, the Council has a goal of reducing the difference between the largest and smallest wards to **five percent or less**.
10. **No ward shall be gerrymandered** (changed to favor one party or class) to ensure the election or defeat of any incumbent candidate or potential candidate.

The City held one community engagement session to gather information, and another community engagement session to gather feedback on an initial set of five maps. The consultant and city are currently working to refine the maps presented at the last meeting based on resident feedback.

Balancing all criteria in developing the maps is challenging. The draft-maps represent different options that meet all criteria but may prioritize some more than others.

## 14) I missed the two community engagement sessions and want to know what was said. How can I watch these?

Videos of previous meetings will be posted on the [City redistricting page](#).

15) I want to know what maps other residents submitted. Where can I find these?

In the “Resident Submissions” section of the [City redistricting page](#), linked as a PDF [here](#). The City will continue accepting resident-submitted maps at least through the end of January.

16) I’ve seen that the City will consider “communities of interest” in the redistricting process. What’s a community of interest?

A “Community of Interest” is a group of people in a neighborhood who have some common interests, and who would benefit from being in the same Ward to represent those interest. For interests, members of the same neighborhood association may benefit from being able to elect and express concerns to the same Ward member, rather than expressing their concerns to two different Ward members. It’s a broad term that’s meant to include the many different types of ways residents could come together with their neighbors. You can share information about your communities of interest [here](#).

17) I am concerned that the redistricting will divide my neighborhood between two wards, diluting our ability to influence the City Council’s decisions. Can that be prevented?

Through the community meetings and the neighborhood survey, the City and consultants are collecting information on residents’ “communities of interest,” neighborhoods, and formal and informal neighborhood associations. The City and consultant are working to preserve residents’ geographic-communities as much as possible while balancing other criteria, including preventing gerrymandering, creating compact wards, following natural boundaries, and making wards relatively equal in population. Making maps that meet all criteria is challenging, and the draft maps prepared by the consultant so-far reflect different options for prioritizing certain criteria. We encourage residents to share information about their communities and which draft maps you prefer using the communities of interest [survey](#) and comment [survey](#). It’s also worth keeping in mind that most issues the City Council addresses are city-wide, and you will continue to be able to advocate with your neighbors towards the City Council regardless of what ward you’re in.

18) I’ve heard that the Wards in these maps are made up of Census blocks. What’s a Census block? Why are they important?

Census blocks are small geographic areas designated by the Census, about the size of neighborhoods. The Census formally [defines](#) Census blocks as “Blocks (Census Blocks) are statistical areas bounded by visible features, such as streets, roads, streams, and railroad tracks, and by nonvisible boundaries, such as selected property

lines and city, township, school district, and county limits and short line-of-sight extensions of streets and roads.”

A typical census block would be bounded by streets, so that if you walk around the block and never cross a street, the area you walked around would be one census block. In Takoma Park, some blocks are very large because many of our neighborhoods do not have a typical street grid structure, while others are smaller and more like a typical block in a city.

Wards are made up of blocks, and the Census collects and shares varied data on Census blocks (e.g., the number of households in a block, the demographics of a block). Knowing data about blocks lets us make sure that Wards meet the criteria adopted by City Council, including that Wards are about the same size and not gerrymandered.

19) I noticed in the last redistricting process some Wards cut through blocks. Why is the City making sure Wards follow block-boundaries this time?

Because Wards cut through blocks last time, we cannot know the exact demographics of the old Wards. For instance, if we know there are 100 households in a block and a Ward cuts through a block, we do not know how those 100 households are distributed along each side of the cut. The 100 households could be all on one side of the split, or distributed relatively evenly throughout the split; someone with local knowledge might have a relative sense, but we cannot translate that to data about the City.

Not knowing the demographics of each Ward makes it challenging to make policy-decisions about how to meet the needs of each Ward. This is especially true for issues of racial and economic equity. The Census will make highly-detailed data available at the block-level—including broken-out data on household type, age, sex, and race—and data broken out by race. Being unable to map this data to Wards limits our ability to make informed policy decisions on these issues.

Ward-boundaries that don't follow Census statistics also makes it hard to tell how Wards change over time in important ways. For instance, if a Ward grew in the last decade, or shrunk in the last decade, or if the demographics of a Ward changed in the last decade.

Finally, splitting Census blocks makes it impossible to be certain that the redistricting process itself is equitable. The City's criteria for redistricting include that districts must be population-balanced (following the principle of one-person one-vote), and not be gerrymandered (i.e., that different racial groups should have representation in Wards roughly-equivalent to their population-share; for instance, a group that represents 50% of the City's population should make up a majority of the population in about 50% of the City's Wards, and not 80% of the Wards; a group that represents 25% of the population should make up a majority of the population in 25% of Wards, and not 0% of Wards).

Knowing the precise demographics of each Ward allows us to make sure the final Ward map meets these criteria as closely as possible. If Ward boundaries split blocks, we cannot know the precise demographics of each Ward, and therefore cannot know whether the Ward map meets the criteria established for the City's redistricting process.