

DISTRICTING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Why is the City of Merced making separate districts to elect members of the City Council?

After the 2013 City Council election, the Council was approached by several voters who felt that the way of voting for Council members **citywide** did not follow the California Voting Rights Act. The concerned voters asked for the help of the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF) to draw up an agreement which would allow the voters of Merced to choose whether or not to make changes to the City's Charter, and change the way that Council Members are elected. Rather than have a Court make the decision for the City, the City Council agreed it would be best to let the voters make the choice themselves about changing the City's Charter.

Ballot Measure "T," as it was called, gave the voters in Merced the chance to change the way they elect members to the City Council. Voters were allowed to decide whether they 1) wanted things to remain as they were, that is, to elect City Council members by voting for each member on a **citywide** basis; or, 2) whether they would like to choose each Council member from a separate **district**, or portion of the City. At the City's election of November 4, 2014, **most voters in Merced chose the option to change the election system to elect their six City Council members from six separate districts**, with one Council member being chosen from each district to serve a four-year term.

What is the Independent Districting Advisory Committee?

A Districting Committee has been formed and is made up of seven voting members from the community of Merced. The purpose of this Committee is to make suggestions to the City Council on how to split up the City of Merced into six different parts, called "districts." These six districts must be in harmony with State and Federal election laws, and will be used for all future elections of Merced City Council members, except for the Mayor. The Mayor will continue to be chosen in a citywide election and serve a two-year term of office.

How will the Committee decide where to draw the lines for the districts?

The Committee will be helped by an expert from National Demographics, who has a lot of experience in council districting. But the Committee also needs the help of people who actually live within the community of Merced. Several community input meetings will be held which will allow members of the public to learn more about the making of district maps, and even to present their own maps of how they would like to see the City divided into districts.

Why should I get involved?

You know best the communities or neighborhoods in which you live and the common interests or concerns that bind them together. By sharing this information with the Committee, you can help them make better decisions to keep your community **all in the same district**, rather than splitting your neighborhood into separate voting parts. That way, you can all vote together on the things that concern you or that you share in common with your home community. By electing a member to the City Council who best relates to the needs of the community in which you live, you can be more certain that your neighborhood's own problems and needs will be heard by the City Council.

How can I get involved?

There are several ways you can help the Districting Committee. You may come to one or more of the community meetings to tell the Committee about your community directly. You may even attend any of the Committee's own meetings and share in an open discussion with them. Or, you may write to the Committee at the following address:

Merced Independent Districting Advisory Committee
c/o Merced City Clerk's Office
Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

Or email: districting@cityofmerced.org

What information does the Committee need from me?

Just by looking at a map, it is almost impossible to know what common interests people living in a certain area share, and what concerns and problems tie them together into a single group. This is known as a "community of interest" (or "COI"). Besides, a map might show streets and roads, but does not tell you where one "neighborhood" ends and another one begins. Looking at it this way, a "neighborhood" is not just made up of people living close to each other. A "neighborhood" is an area with its own unique traits and features that separate it from other areas around it.

So, the Committee needs to hear from you about both; that is, about your **community of interest** and about your **neighborhood**. They need to hear from you about what defines your community and where it is located, so they can avoid splitting your community into more than one voting district. *Consider . . .*

Where is your neighborhood?

Where are the borders of your neighborhood? Borders may be marked by streets, train tracks, rivers, creeks, parking lots, or shopping centers. Describe to the Committee important landmarks (such as schools, parks, or religious buildings) located in your neighborhood.

Also, what is your neighborhood called? What do you know about its history and background? Is there a neighborhood organization located there?

Where and what is your Community of Interest?

Tell the Committee what is the common basis—the interests and concerns—that bring you and your community members together. For example, ask yourself these questions about your community:

- Is there a local school or community center where people often come together to share in similar activities, sports, hobbies, etc.?
- Is there a bus line that is commonly used by people in the community?
- Is there a park that is kept up by a group from your community?
- Is there a culture or language shared in common by the community you belong to?

This will help the Committee know what areas should be kept together in districts. As with neighborhoods, the Committee also needs to learn from you where your COI is located. This includes telling the Committee about important landmarks in your community as well as the streets and physical aspects that form its borders.

When will the district elections take effect?

City Council members will be elected from these new districts for the first time in the November 2016 General Election.