

Another redistricting map set for DOJ

By T.J. Aulds | Posted: Thursday, March 22, 2012 12:00 am

County commissioners today will once again try to approve a redistricting map that the U.S. Department of Justice will approve so the county's elections can finally move forward.

Despite assertions from the county's redistricting attorneys that the justice department requested only a few minor changes the Democratic minority members of the court as well as a social service charity find the map wanting.

Joe Nixon an attorney with the county's redistricting law firm Beirne Maynard and Parsons said at the request of justice department's civil rights attorneys the new proposed map takes a small portion of an area in West Texas City that had been moved into the Precinct 1 Commissioner's district back into Precinct 3.

Nixon said only 52 residents were affected by the adjustment.

The firm also provided the justice department officials with a more detailed breakdown of the population within each precinct. In particular the justice department sought information on the Hispanic population within each precinct.

Nixon expressed confidence that based on his conversation with the justice department the adjusted map would pass federal muster. If approved by commissioners today it would be the second settlement map within a week after the justice department rejected the county's initial redistricting maps.

County Commissioner Stephen Holmes isn't as confident the new map would receive justice department approval.

The map seems "to split an awful lot of voting precincts and I am not sure for that rationale" Holmes said. "We need to adopt a map that has the current (2001) map as its basis as that is the law map to receive preclearance from the department of justice. I think the radical deviations from that map cause concern for the (justice department) and give the appearance of political motivation for the changes."

There are concerns too from Gulf Coast Interfaith the social service cooperative of regional churches about the map.

"We are disappointed that the proposed settlement map information posted on the county's website is not citizen-friendly" Gulf Coast Interfaith's Joe Compian said. "The map boundaries

are difficult to determine and the demographic chart almost requires a mapping degree to understand the significance of the numbers.”

Gulf Coast Interfaith has been encouraging the commissioners to adopt its “Clean Lines” map. The organization introduced the alternative map last week and Compian said he’s confident the justice department would give it approval.

“An alternative map submitted by Galveston County as an offer of settlement could have quite simply taken the original plan and amended the lines consistent with our ‘Clean Lines’ plan” Compian said. “On an issue as important as redistricting we believe that transparency is paramount. We urge the Galveston County Commissioners Court to avoid further depleting tax dollars in legal fees and adopt our ‘Clean Lines’ map.”

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At A Glance

WHAT: County commissioners meeting

WHEN: 3 p.m. today executive session; 7 p.m. public hearing

WHERE: County courthouse 722 Moody in Galveston