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Justice rejects Galveston election plan

By Harvey Rice | October 4, 2011

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GALVESTON - The **U.S. Justice Department** has rejected a Galveston plan to return to a political system that the department had twice rejected as diluting minority voting.

The City Council had asked the Justice Department to withdraw its objections to the plan approved by voters in 1998 that created two at-large seats and four seats elected by precinct.

Assistant U.S. Attorney General **Thomas Perez** said in a fax Monday to attorney **C. Robert Heath**, whose Austin firm was hired to design Galveston's redistricting plan, that the city failed to show that the at-large elections would not weaken minority voting strength.

"It was expected," said **Steve McIntyre**, spokesman for Gulf Coast Interfaith, one of four civil rights groups that asked the Justice Department to reject the plan. "It falls in line with what happened with the Clinton Justice Department and the Bush Justice Department."

The current system in which six council members are elected from precincts and the mayor at large is the result of a lawsuit settled in 1993. The lawsuit argued that the at-large election system for council members discriminated against minorities.

Perez said the city could appeal the decision to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. "I think the odds are pretty steep if they want to spend money on that," McIntyre said.

Heath said the council would decide whether to appeal.

harvey.rice@chron.com

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Harvey Rice | Reporter, Galveston Bureau
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