
Redistricting leaps toward finish

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For the Daily Press

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VICTORVILLE — Voters could be electing trustees to govern Victor Valley College's board by-district as soon as November, but current trustees say they still need more public input before adopting the new system.

The Victor Valley College Board of Trustees will convene for a special meeting Jan. 10, college officials announced, for the sole purpose of further studying options and gauging public input on the potential shift from at-large elections of trustees to by-district.

The meeting could be a short one if trustees can't agree on how to move forward with the process, Board President Marianne Tortorici told the Daily Press by phone last week.

"The very first thing (we must do is decide) do we or don't we want to proceed with redistricting," Tortorici said. She was named board president at the regular December meeting. "If the majority says, 'No, we don't want to redistrict,' then the meeting is pretty much over. I'm hoping that won't happen."

Barring that unlikely scenario, the board will proceed with the session, Tortorici said, where trustees and members of the public will be able to view and study larger versions of proposed district maps originally presented to the board in November.

Attendees should also see for the first time maps that outline seven voting areas instead of five, options trustees asked for during the December meeting.

"Our board decided that might be an option," Tortorici said. "We have five representatives now, but we're (geographically one of the largest) community college districts in the state. It's not a mandate that we go to seven, but we want to gauge public interest."

Drawing in members of the public to measure their interest in a seven-trustee board and other aspects is the key reason the meeting is scheduled in the Student Activities Center, VVC spokesman Robert Sewell told the Daily Press.

“We want to ensure our community is aware of the process and we do not want to rush (the board’s) decision without adequate opportunity for community input,” Sewell said. “Our trustees are taking the idea of redistricting seriously.”

With four months heavily devoted and about a year overall invested into the potential adoption, Tortorici said it’s important trustees have as many voices from voters as possible.

Trustee Joseph W. Brady agrees.

“I’ve been disappointed personally and professionally as a trustee that we haven’t heard from more people in the district,” Brady said.

But Brady doesn’t point the blame at the public and voters for the lack of input — he says the timing of the maps’ release and minimal effort until recently to advertise the possibilities have limited the response.

“With the holiday season, people aren’t thinking about going to a board meeting, looking at district maps — they want to spend time with their families,” Brady said. “And with all the media that exists out there, I haven’t seen something about this meeting other than what’s in the Daily Press.”

With lackluster public response, Brady says he plans to either abstain from voting on adopting a map or he’ll motion to move the vote to the February regular meeting.

“Do I think we’re going to come to a conclusion on the 10th? Absolutely not,” Brady said. “I have no problems having that discussion (about a seven-member board), but we’ve just never talked about it. I want to hear what people have to say before I make an educated vote.”

Meanwhile, Tortorici wants to leave the Jan. 10 meeting with a plan in place to direct college officials on how to proceed further.

“I’m hoping we can come to a closure on this, say ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ ‘Here’s the number of (trustees),’ ‘Here’s our map,’ and give (College Superintendent/President Roger Wagner) direction for the November election,” Tortorici said.

Sewell reaffirmed that the college hopes for a clear decision coming away from Jan. 10.

“It is our intent to determine the path we are taking, whether or not we intend to redistrict or move toward seven- or five-trustee districts,” Sewell said, “and then determine which redistricting map to use.”

The maps previously presented to the board and public featuring five-member boundaries are available at www.vvc.edu/redistricting, “and the maps for a potential seven-trustee board will be added next week,” Sewell said.

The special meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m. on Jan. 10 on the second floor of the Student Activities Center at Victor Valley College, 18422 Bear Valley Road in Victorville.



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