

VVC board adopts five-area redistricting map

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VICTORVILLE — After numerous local residents pleaded their near-unanimous desire for a seven-area district, the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees voted at a special meeting to adopt a five-area map and create a by-district voting system.

Beginning with the November 2018 election, voters will elect board members in one of five areas created with the map that was adopted at Wednesday's meeting. Board members John Pinkerton, Brandon Wood, Joseph W. Brady and board president Marianne Tortorici voted 4-0 for the adoption, while trustee Dennis Henderson was absent.

Also missing from the meeting were alternate maps showing seven districts instead of five, which college officials had previously announced through various means would be presented on Wednesday night.

Before the board adopted Map No. 3 — and, effectively, the new system — more than a dozen residents, including two current VVC students, voiced their opinion during a public comment portion of the special meeting. Nearly all of those who addressed the board favored the potential for a seven-area district and several residents questioned the absence of the maps that would have proposed such boundaries.

Local businessman and former Hesperia Mayor Eric Schmidt was direct in displaying his frustration over the missing map proposals and prodded trustees and college Superintendent/President Roger Wagner for answers.

"I do not see a seven-district map for consideration this evening and I ask, 'Why?'" Schmidt said. "Five (council) members represent 93,000 (residents) in Hesperia, 73,000 in Apple Valley and 124,000 in Victorville. How can it make sense that a similar body of five represent a valley in excess of 400,000 people, especially when at-large positions are converted to district representation?"

Local resident Margaret Kagy similarly raised the issue during the comment period.

“I also was under the impression we would have a seven-district map,” Kagy said. “As far as the maps up here now, I’m not happy with them — I would personally really endorse going to (a seven-area district).”

Following the comment period, Wagner told all in attendance that while the board did ask for the alternate maps to be presented Wednesday night, the holiday season and “noticing requirements” made achieving that goal a challenge.

He also pointed to the potential for revising the districts in two years after the next Census. A consultant with the agency that drew the map proposals told the board in November that Census data is the only legal data to use in redistricting agencies according to the California Voting Rights Act.

“It’s a different game than a regular meeting and we simply couldn’t get them done,” Wagner said. “In 2020, we’ll have newer data (to use). We’re only two years away from newer demographics.”

Brady agreed that waiting until 2020 or 2021 — when the 2020 Census data is scheduled for release — was a more effective scenario in the spirit of properly representing the demographics of voters, the main argument from redistricting proponents.

“We’ve been down this road and not until very recently did we hear (the suggestion for seven areas),” Brady said. “It’s like a football game and we just ran out of time.”

The map Brady motioned to adopt — one of four originally presented in November — has district lines drawn based on K-12 school districts in the Victor Valley.

Pinkerton, a teacher at Silverado High School and the trustee to second Brady’s motion, told the Daily Press after the meeting he was pleased the board selected a map that focused on existing school districts.

“I’m really proud of the work this board has done tonight,” Pinkerton said. “We’re all working together.”

While the map and new system were effectively adopted at Wednesday’s meeting, part of the issue remains unresolved: what districts will be open for election in 2018.

Each map that was proposed to and posted by college officials in November included an implementation schedule based on the current terms of trustees who were previously elected under the at-large system. The schedule attached to Map No. 3 indicated districts 1, 4 and 5 would be up for election in November, while districts 2 and 3 would open in 2020.

The four-year terms of Tortorici, Wood and Henderson will end in 2018, while Brady's and Pinkerton's would continue until 2020.

Under the new map, no trustee currently on the board lives in District 1; Brady and Tortorici live in District 2; Pinkerton in 3; Wood in 4; and Henderson in 5.

The trustees present at Wednesday's meeting agreed it would make more sense for districts 1 and 3 to open in 2020 and the other three this year, but Christina M. Cameron, an attorney with the college's general counsel, told the board they would legally have to repost the adjusted implementation schedule before voting on it.

The four present trustees unanimously agreed to vote on the schedule in February.

With more than 60 people attending Wednesday night, College spokesman Robert Sewell told the Daily Press officials were ultimately pleased with the relatively large turnout. The community's interest in the issue is clear, he said.

"Based on the attendance, it was evident that the community views the college's transition to trustee area elections as seriously as our board of trustees," Sewell said. "Turnout for similar 'redistricting' meetings held by other agencies had traditionally resulted in very low community attendance and so we are appreciative of the time our community members devoted to attending, speaking and sending in their commentary."

The public participation was important, Wagner said, in helping trustees make a "more informed decision." He's pleased the board selected a map that supports the college's mission and efforts to drive dual enrollment with local high school students.

"The 'district area' map selected ensures that our current high school districts are not divided among different districts," Wagner said in a written statement. He reinforced the premise that officials will revisit redistricting, using the most recent data, in 2020. "At that time we will be able to address the new population growth and centers in the High Desert and review the proposal of a seven-trustee 'district area map.'"



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