

From: [Giana Magnoli](#)
To: [CEO Redistricting RES](#)
Subject: Comment on improving redistricting process
Date: Monday, May 23, 2022 7:39:14 AM

Caution: This email originated from a source outside of the County of Santa Barbara. Do not click links or open attachments unless you verify the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Chair Glenn Morris and members of the Santa Barbara County Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission,

I'm Giana Magnoli, the managing editor of Noozhawk.com.

As a local news reporter and editor, I spent many hours watching Santa Barbara County Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission meetings and reviewing draft maps on the commission website during the redistricting process.

I want to offer my observations and suggestions on the process to the commission in the hopes that it will help future redistricting efforts.

Map drawing tools:

Clearly there were some flaws with the National Demographics Corporation consultant's online map-drawing tools, which members of the public brought up during meetings in November and December.

Some early-submitted maps were deleted from the system. When someone submitted a map, the system did not send them any confirmation, so people didn't know if theirs was accepted or not.

No contact information was collected with each map, so the commission could not let people know to edit a map, send them meeting information, or otherwise get in touch.

The commission asked people to submit information for communities of interest but did not consider any map that was not complete (drew boundaries for all five districts).

Timing and meeting schedule:

While final U.S. Census data was late, the commission could probably have started accepting and reviewing draft maps earlier. Preliminary Census data was released in September 2021.

The commission gave itself one month to review 100-plus maps submitted by the public, choose focus maps, hold multiple meetings with hours and hours of public comment, create a final map, and adopt it.

The compressed schedule means members of the public did not get a chance to comment on the final map in time for it to matter and allow changes.

Changing the map every meeting made it difficult to give people notice of the proposed map in time to comment in a meaningful way – in time for the commission to hear it and make changes accordingly.

Take the final map chosen on Dec. 8, for example. No version of it was available to view/posted for the public until the Friday night before the Monday meeting. Written comment deadlines were set a day before each meeting, even if materials were posted late.

People made comments on focus maps but the commission substantially changed the draft maps into a new final map that no one had specifically commented on.

In those last few frantic weeks of meetings, people were confused exactly which map was up for consideration, since they were changed so quickly.

Public notifications, outreach and public meeting participation:

The commission's outreach report boasts of social media posts and emails, but information was not put in places people normally look.

There was no redistricting commission information on the Santa Barbara County home page.

Videos of the meetings were not posted on the county's YouTube page and the livestream was not broadcast through county channels either.

As a Noozhawk reporter trying to follow this process, who is very familiar with streaming videos and finding meeting videos after the fact, it was impossible to find the videos until I asked the county PIO, who said they were listed under the redistricting playlist on the CSBTV Youtube page.

They were not on the main CSBTV page, or listed among the county's video uploads, so they could not be searched for, only found by people who know where to look.

I did not realize the meetings were broadcast live until the very last meeting in December. Only three people (including me) were watching the final meeting live on YouTube, so it was clearly hard to find.

Watching a Zoom meeting and commenting is difficult for people who only have a phone, so it limits live participation to people who have a laptop or desktop computer, or can attend in person.

The two final meetings were both held in Santa Barbara for this countywide process.

The email list for interested parties, which was meant to include meeting agendas and updates on the process, did not send out any messages between Dec. 1, 2021 and Feb. 21, 2022, so it completely missed the meetings when the final map was created, decided and adopted.

There were unique circumstances in 2021 with the pandemic and delayed U.S. Census data that are (hopefully) unlikely to be repeated during future redistricting cycles, but the issues with draft map submissions and comments, public meeting participation, and redistricting process notifications should be improved next time.

My suggestions include: moving up the schedule to allow for public comment on draft maps and the proposed final map; test the map-drawing software to make sure submitted maps are saved with the creator's contact information; make sure commission meeting information is properly noticed ahead of time and shared through county channels; improve public meeting participation by broadcasting them live, as other county commission meetings are, and allowing remote testimony by phone.

Thank you for your time, and for soliciting suggestions on improving the independent redistricting process.

Best,

Giana Magnoli

--

Giana Magnoli

Noozhawk managing editor

www.noozhawk.com

gmagnoli@noozhawk.com