

March 15, 2022

Chair Alton and Committee Chair Freeman, Committee Members and Commission Members:

I want to thank the committee for its work, under challenging circumstances and timelines. I appreciate your service and respect your role. Watching the committee work in recommending option six (O6) to the full charter commission (commission) affirmed that to an extent, O6 recommendations represent minimal ward change while adjusting for population, state district revisions, and have the intention of better serving communities of interest.

In its Resolution PH 20-223 from October of 2020, the City Council (council) passed redistricting guidelines to support the commission in its important, then-upcoming work. The guides were created well in advance of the census completion, and over a year ahead of new legislative districts, in hopes that some of the longer-term disparities with ward boundaries and dramatic population growth could be assessed and reenvisioned during redistricting. With time no longer on our side, it appears that the opportunity to think holistically about these changes will need to wait until a future commission approaches this task.

Understanding that O6 is now advancing for a vote by the commission, I will join several of my colleagues in offering the commission some specific recommendations for consideration in advance of the final vote. The commission will be meeting during the scheduled council meeting on Wednesday afternoon so my attendance and participation in the conversation are unlikely. Please accept my written comments with the respect they are intended and the brevity required for this immediate consideration.

Before my recommendations, I do want to state again, on the record, that the existing boundaries are anchored in the neighborhoods to the West, East, and South. **The most pronounced divisions in communities of interest exist across the city limits on the City's northern boundary.** That, combined with the adjustments that have occurred over time to the interior city ward boundaries, leaves Ward 5 with arguably the most challenged boundaries along with Ward 1 (which we share a long common boundary). **The demographics of Wards 1 and 5 suggest that these communities of color, renters, and high poverty were historically easy political marks to be the place for comprising when drawing boundaries.** In the future, I offer that it would help right this wrong to begin map creation on the city's northern boundary and then design the rest of the boundaries around an ideal Ward 1 and 5 rather than erroneously pitting them against each other.

All this said I offer the following for your final consideration:

- 1) **Maximize your standard deviation for the populations of wards to keep neighborhoods together.** No council member would bemoan having a few hundred fewer constituents than a tablemate if it meant keeping our neighborhoods intact and making more clear who one's elected representatives are.
- 2) **If more of the current Ward 6 can hold the population that is shifting to Ward 5, it should.** Again, the current map O6 proposal has very little population deviation between Wards. Allowing Ward 6 to increase its population compared to other Wards to maintain neighborhood continuity here seems a fair accommodation to this community that has been statistically historically marginalized.
- 3) Railroad Island is a tiny precinct. And Railroad Island is an Eastside neighborhood. **If Railroad Island cannot remain in Ward 5 as has been my request, consider a path to add it to Ward 6 or 7.**
- 4) **If shifting some population back to Ward 6 allows Ward 5 to retain the orphaned blocks alongside Jackson from Cook to Cayuga, it should.** Allowing Ward 5 to increase its population compared to other wards to maintain neighborhood continuity here seems a fair accommodation to this community that has been statistically historically marginalized.
- 5) The Ward 5 and 1 shifts along Front Ave between Lexington and Dale will bring those residents into a community where they were previously wholly isolated and should be maintained. While I continue to believe the CP line would better define and carve out a distinct North End, **the Front Ave adaptation is a good adjustment to version 6 to improve the clarity of ward boundaries for residents.**
- 6) The boundary shift between Wards 4 and 5 corrects an outrageous political gerrymander of yesteryear. The map depicted in O5 is lightyears better than O6 as O5 connects residents to a neighborhood where they were previously disconnected. This course correction on the northwest boundary of Ward 4 and 5 should be maintained but with the O5 map as a guide.
- 7) **Continuing down Hamline from Midway Parkway, I would suggest that the southern end of the western boundary be extended along Hamline to Jessamine before heading east.** This would incorporate McMurray fields and fully bring Como Park into one ward and therefore make community and public service more sensible.

My thanks and appreciation for your consideration as you finalize this important work.

Amy Brendmoen
Saint Paul Council President
Ward 5