

# Planners propose new ward lines

By ALBERT NICKERSON  
Chronicle Staff Writer

The city Planning Department last week unveiled its long-awaited ward realignment plan to the General Committee of the Board of Aldermen -- only to go back again and redraw the lines again later in the week.

The General Committee delayed voting on the plan pending a review of recent population figures and alterations in the proposal.

Alderman Larry Womble requested that City Manager Bill Stuart and the Planning Department staff attempt to get those figures so he could get a better understanding of the new ward plan.

In 1981, the city revised the ward plans. Since the realignment, the city has annexed two areas which caused inequities in ward population counts.

The ideal mean size for a ward is 17,886. Under the current ward lines, ward populations range from a high of 2,804 above the mean size in the Northwest Ward to 700 below the average in the Southeast Ward.

If the board approves the revisions presented last Tuesday night, the ward population figures would range from 93 above in the Southwest Ward to 206 below the mean size in the East Ward.

The proposed revisions do not cause any radical shifts of populations. The predominantly black wards remain relatively stable, except for Alderman Larry Little's North Ward, which loses black residents to the East Ward.

At the committee meeting in City Hall, James E. Yarbrough Jr., assistant planning director, introduced the plan.

Yarbrough told the alderman that the planning staff tried to make as few changes as possible and that it tried not to uproot communities which historically had been in a ward.

"I believe this plan addresses those particular concerns expressed by the committee," Yarbrough said. He said the revisions would bring the wards into compliance with the ideal mean size of 17,886 persons each.

Under the present ward plan, the predominantly black North Ward was 316 below the ideal mean size. After the change, it will be 90 above the ideal mean size.

Under the revised boundary, the North Ward grows in size from 17,570 to 17,976, an increase of 406 people.

But the number of blacks declined, after the ward lost a section of the Liberty Street and Patterson Avenue section to the East Ward. The black population of the North Ward declined from 12,802 to 11,871, a loss of 931 residents.

North Ward Alderman Larry Little expressed his concerns about the revision, but generally said he could live with the plan.

"I just want the Planning Department to continue to work with us on this issue," Little said.

Before the changes, Alderman Virginia Newell's East Ward ward was 650 people below the ideal mean size, but after the realignment the figure increased to only 206 below the mean.

Overall, the East Ward gained in total population from 17,236 to 17,680, a gain of 444 residents. The number of blacks in her ward climbed from from 16,003 to 16,524, a increase of 521.

The predominantly black Northeast Ward went from 667 below the mean population size to 92 above the average after the revisions.

Northeast Ward Alderman Vivian Burke, however, gained residents and increased the number of blacks in her ward. The revision increased the total population from 17,219 to 17,978, an increase of 759. The ward's black population increas-

ed from 14,098 to 14,824, a gain of 726.

In the Southeast Ward, the ward was 700 below the ideal mean size, but that figure increased to only 193 below ideal size after the realignment.

Although Southeast Ward Alderman Larry Womble gained some areas which the ward lost in the last revision, he was concerned about the present plan because it was based on 1980 census data.

Womble's total ward population increased from 17,186 to 17,693, an increase of 507. The number of blacks increased from 6,558 to 6,788, up by 230.

However, Womble still expressed concern about the plan because the city has changed in population since the 1980 census.

"I want to base my decision on the best information possible," Womble said.

lines be drawn in order to correct the population disparity."

On Tuesday, Womble said he was satisfied with new revisions to the ward boundaries worked out last week. Those changes add Goldston and Timlic streets to his ward, as well as parts of Williamson and an area near Skyline Village.

Southwest Ward Alderman Lynne Harpe and Northwest Ward Alderman Martha S. Wood were generally in agreement with the plan.

Before the proposed revisions, the Southwest Ward was 620 below the ideal mean, but after the revisions it climbed to 93 above the mean. The total population in the ward increased from 17,266 to 17,979, an increase of 713.

In the Northwest Ward, the old

*"My concern is that the the boundary lines be drawn to correct the population disparity."*

*-- Larry Womble*

Womble pressed his point asking City Manager Bill Stuart if his staff couldn't provide more current population counts.

Stuart told the alderman that no other level of government could provide the expertise and resources for an accurate count better than the Bureau of Census.

"In my opinion, I cannot imagine any other level of government that could handle a census count with your deadline," said Stuart, referring to the January deadline when the revisions must be presented to the city Board of Elections. The new plan must be adopted no later than Jan. 21 to allow the elections board to prepare for next year's aldermanic elections.

Stuart said the board could request a census count next year, but the count would be useless, considering the January deadline which confronts the board.

"I feel strongly that we ought to go ahead and move on this issue," Little said.

But Womble persisted, saying, "My concern is that boundary

lines had the ward 2,804 persons above the mean, but the revisions dropped the figure to 58 above. The population in the ward would drop from 20,690 to 17,944, 2,746.

Alderman Robert Northington's West Ward population would not change, remaining at 17,944 under the revision. It is 58 above the ideal mean ward.

South Ward Alderman Ernestine Wilson's ward population would drop from 17,979 to 17,896, a decrease of 80. Under the revision, the ward's population would drop from 93 above to 10 above the mean.

Harpe said the committee would not act on the plan until they receive additional census information from the planning department.

"We'll await the decision of the population experts before acting on the plan," she said.

After it receives the data, the committee will discuss it in November and possibly make a recommendation to the Board of Aldermen.

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