

Martinez Residents for an Independent Redistricting Commission

A Grassroots Effort by Residents in Collaboration with California Common Cause

The City of Martinez Needs an **Independent Redistricting Commission** to Determine City Voting Districts

Martinez, like most California cities, gives incumbents the power to draw their own districts. As explained by the Center for Voting and Democracy, **it is a conflict of interest to have politicians “choose their voters before the voters choose them.”** Such a conflict was apparent in the recent establishment of districts in Martinez. While the City Council technically followed the letter of the law by opening the process to public hearings, little public input was incorporated into the final map and the map which was adopted reflects **the City Councilmembers’ primary consideration... to protect their own seats.**

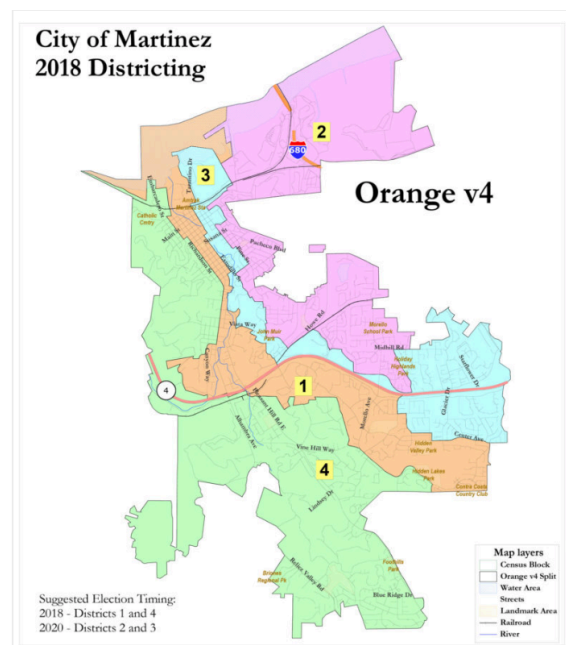
The principle of **“one person, one vote,”** guaranteed by the United States Constitution, requires the redrawing of City Council districts every ten years to ensure that they maintain substantially equal populations. **Redistricting** is at the heart of representative democracy. At its best, redistricting creates **cohesive districts** that keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact, giving these voters a political voice in city decision-making. At its worst, redistricting is an **incumbency-protection plan** or a **partisan tool** for a legislative majority to retain or expand its influence.

The recent establishment of voting districts in Martinez was initiated after the city was under the threat of being sued by a Malibu lawyer for the city’s lack of compliance with the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) of 2001. Our mayor blames pressure applied by this lawyer for the gerrymandered districts that they chose, but the reality is that City of Martinez had been out of compliance with CVRA for 17 years and this lawyer had nothing to do with how the district maps were developed. The City Council directed the demographic consultant who they hired to develop the map to make sure that Council districts ran from North to South so that each district included a portion of the downtown area (where most of them live) and to **“avoid head-to-head contests between incumbents.”** Also, because the location of voting precincts was not considered, **many Martinez voters can no longer go to a polling place to cast their vote** and are being forced to vote by mail.

The new city of Martinez voting district map makes no sense. It is clear that it was adopted by City Council to protect their own seats. For instance, one district border is drawn down the middle of a street with one Council member living on each side of the street. And, to suit these politicians, the districts were contorted into ridiculous shapes. How does that make any sense at all other than to protect the seats of these neighbors? **The new map makes a mockery of the democratic ideal of one person, one vote.**

Cities who put their citizens first adopt independent commissions to draw voting district lines.

The modern trend is to place redistricting in the hands of an **independent commission**. The State of California draws state and federal legislative districts using an independent commission. Five of the ten largest cities in California have amended their charters to create permanent redistricting commissions. Research has shown that **redistricting commissions do a better job** of eliminating political gerrymandering, keeping communities intact, building compact districts, and increasing minority representation.



Does this contorted map make any sense at all?

The citizens of the City of Martinez need to ensure that our city voting districts are selected fairly and in a manner that protects their need for fair representation instead of protecting the seats of our current Council members. Californians voted in favor of independent redistricting for the State... why shouldn't the City's redistricting process function with equal transparency and independence? The Martinez City Municipal Code needs to be amended to create an **Independent Redistricting Commission** to ensure fair and representative districts for our city.

Five Core Principles of a Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission

The following five core principles, based on statewide best-practices, lay out essential elements to building an effective Redistricting Commission:

Principle 1: The Redistricting Commission is established in the City Municipal Code and has the sole authority to adopt new district maps.

The Redistricting Commission should have the power to actually draw Council district lines, and not merely provide recommendations. In the development of our current districts, the City Council hired a demographer consultant to recommend district boundaries and then tied the consultant's hands with restrictive criteria designed to protect their seats. The Council then rejected any maps that did not meet their biased criteria and largely ignored commentary provided by the public in a series of public hearings. Establishing the Commission in the City Municipal Code is crucial to ensuring the Commission's maps are not simply discarded or that public input is ignored.

Principle 2: The Redistricting Commission is independent of political control. Commissioners are unbiased, and not directly appointed by elected officials.

Redistricting should be about creating cohesive and representative districts, not protecting incumbents. If Commissioners are directly appointed by the mayor or City Council, there is too great a risk that they will act on their appointing official's interest over the public's interest. This is why the State of California, Oakland, and San Diego all select qualified commissioner through a transparent, fair process that does not involve direct political appointment and excludes political operatives from serving.

Principle 3: The Redistricting Commission reflects Martinez's diverse neighborhoods.

To effectively redraw Council district boundaries, commissioners must come from different areas in our city, and should reflect, to the extent practicable, the ethnic, economic, gender, sexual orientation, and political diversity that makes up our city.

Principle 4: The Redistricting Commission draws boundaries using fair redistricting criteria that promote representative districts which keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact.

The Redistricting Commission should be guided in its mission with clear and well-accepted redistricting criteria that promote district cohesiveness and reduce the opportunities for gerrymandering, including: population equality, complying with the Voting Rights Act, contiguity, compactness, and keeping intact neighborhoods and communities of interest.

Principle 5: The Redistricting Commission conducts all of its business in public and actively seeks out public participation in the line-drawing process.

There are no better experts on the boundaries of Martinez's neighborhoods and communities than the residents that live there. Transparency and public engagement are vital to a successful redistricting. The Commission should hold public meetings in all corners of the City to receive resident input; any data or reports that the Commission relies on should be placed online so residents can review and comment on it. Finally, to the degree possible, redistricting software should be available online so community groups and individuals can create and submit their own maps and boundaries for consideration.

The Citizens of Martinez need to DEMAND the establishment of an INDEPENDENT Redistricting Commission that will immediately redraw the city's voting district maps so that they are cohesive and representative.

What can you do? Contact all members of the Martinez City Council and tell them to establish an independent redistricting commission charged with redrawing our city's voting districts fairly.