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# VBH BOT FYI Administration

1 message

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County looks to work on process for redistricting
By KEVIN P. CRAVER - kcraver@nwherald.com
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WOODSTOCK – New software on order could make the process of redrawing McHenry County Board districts following the 2010 U.S. Census easier.

Or maybe it won't.

Board members have some decisions to make, despite the software's ability to take the new population numbers and spit out map options. Do they want to maintain six districts of four members each? Is it time for smaller, single member districts? Are 24 board members too many?

The redistricting process is in the hands of the new Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee created last month by Board Chairman Ken Koehler, R-Crystal Lake. But County Administrator Peter Austin recommended at its Thursday meeting that a committee of the whole be convened to discuss what the whole board wants.

"Before we kick this off, there are some core questions we need to ask," Austin said.

One such core question – should the board chairman be elected by the people rather than the board – is being asked in the Management Services Committee. State law allows counties to make that choice during the redistricting process.

Illinois governments must redraw their legislative boundaries after each census to ensure that each district contains an equal number of people. McHenry County doesn't face the 42 percent population increase it did a decade ago, but its growth over the past decade was substantial nonetheless.

The county grew by 48,683 new residents to a population of 308,760, or an 18.7 percent increase, according to the census data released earlier this month. If the County Board keeps six districts, each must be as close to 51,460, one-sixth the new population, as possible. State law says that county districts cannot cut across township or municipal boundaries for any other reason than to maintain that equilibrium.

One significant issue will be the explosion of Huntley's population, which grew 324 percent from 5,730 in 2000 to 24,291. Huntley sits in

both McHenry and Kane counties – most of its subdivisions lie in McHenry County, but the border splits the massive Sun City retirement community somewhat equally.

Grafton Township, where Huntley is located, as well as parts of Algonquin, Lake in the Hills, Crystal Lake and Lakewood, put the county in a similar conundrum when it last redrew districts.

The board split the township almost down the middle, keeping the western half in rural District 6, and put the eastern half minus three precincts in District 5. Had they not done so, the growing township would have accounted for about 70 percent of the voters in District 6, which now covers the western half of the county.

But some board members have their eye on creating smaller, single-member districts. Cook, Lake and Kane counties have single-member districts, while DuPage and Will counties each have three districts – DuPage with six members per district, and Will nine.

Legislative committee member Kathleen Bergan Schmidt, D-Crystal Lake, said she would like McHenry County to have single-member districts and a 20-member board. She said the move would save money and allow for more interested candidates to run.

"I think the [County Board's] job could be done efficiently with fewer members," Bergan Schmidt said.

The County Board last toyed with downsizing itself in 1991, when it went from three districts to six, but voted against reducing its size by 25 percent to 18 members.

Not that redistricting will be any less contentious if the board stays at 24 members. Several members in 2001 opposed the overhaul of District 5, which added Grafton Township but took away four others. In District 4, five incumbents ended up running against one another for four open seats.

All board members will be up for re-election in 2012. At the first meeting of the new board, winners will draw by lot to determine who ensure staggered elections by giving half of them two-year terms and the other half four.

The software license to allow the county's geographic information system to help with the redistricting process will cost the county $5,100, county GIS Director Nicole Gattuso said.

Redistricting 101

State law sets out the rules by which county boards with districts must redraw them following the decennial U.S. Census:

• Districts must be drawn in such a way that all of them contain the same number of people.

• Districts must be compact and contiguous, and can only cut across municipal and township boundaries as necessary to ensure equal populations in each district. As a general rule, boundaries cannot cut through voting precincts.

• During the process, county boards can alter the number of board members within certain limits, decide if the board chairman should be elected by the people, and set members' compensation starting with the next term.

• Counties have until July 1 to re-draw their boundaries. A map of the new boundaries must be on file with the county clerk and available free to any voter requesting one.

• If the deadline is not met, re-apportionment falls to a commission of the county clerk, state's attorney, Attorney General and the county chairmen of the Republican and Democratic central committees.

• All board members will be up for election in 2012. The winners will then draw by lot to determine who gets two-year and four-year terms, with the division by district being equal or as equal as possible.

Source: Illinois Counties Code (55 ILCS 5/2-3)

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