



Voting Districts Formation

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why is the voting process changing?

In June 2014, voters in the City of Whittier approved Measure W, which calls for Council Members to be elected by and from four geographically defined districts and a citywide Mayor position. This new charter amendment replaces the existing format of Council Members elected through citywide voting. Only the Mayor, with powers prescribed by Charter, will remain a citywide Council representative.

What are district-based elections?

Once approved, each of the four newly developed Council districts will be represented by a single Council Member living within that district. Therefore, City elections will provide a new opportunity for geographic and demographic representation based on each district's constituents. Terms of Council participation will remain the same, as will the rules of voting within each district; the Mayor position will be the only position elected by all voters.

Why by-district voting rather than "at-large" voting?

Measure W calls for the City to have City Council representation across four defined geographic sections of the City, providing opportunities for representation in communities that may not have previously had a Council Member from their neighborhood. Those communities and areas which believe they have issues unique to them may choose their own representation within those district boundaries.

What is the Voting Rights Act and why is it important?

The Voting Rights Act is federal legislation adopted in the 1960s protecting the rights of all citizens to participate in the voting process. This legislation has provisions ensuring underrepresented groups have equal opportunities for voting and representation. The California Voting Rights Act has additional provisions with the purpose of ensuring equal access to voting and representation. All City activities used to create these newly formed voting districts will follow and comply with both the spirit and letter of the law, including those laid out by both the federal and state Voting Rights Acts.

What will be the process for creating voting districts?

There will be both a technical and community input process that will be completed in tandem to inform the City Council as to the best recommendation for creating the four district boundaries. The technical process requires the formation of four nearly equal districts based on population (ideally within 5 percent from smallest to largest). However, secondary factors also play a major role including: topography, geography, cohesiveness, contiguity, compactness, integrity of territory, communities of interest, and significant and sensitive land uses. Consideration of where existing Council Members reside is also permitted.

Community participation is also a vital component to ensure the districts are properly formed. Therefore, an assortment of materials, meetings and other social media communication tools will be utilized to inform and engage the public throughout the technical process. This will include a minimum of two rounds of public workshops as well as an opportunity for interested individuals to meet directly with Compass Demographics, the demographer hired to assist the City with this process, to provide direct input on boundary lines.

What guidelines will be followed in the creation of the voting districts?

A Guiding Principles fact sheet has been developed to guide both the technical and community input process. This document outlines the parameters for how participants and decision makers will assist in the City's effort to develop community-supported voting districts. A copy of the Guiding Principles will be placed on the project website and available at all public meetings.

What is a community of interest?

A community of interest is any distinctive area within the City that has a definable group of people, unique geography or some other distinguishable feature or characteristic that it would be undesirable to divide in the creation of voting districts. Some of these may already be clearly established and others may be defined as a result of this process. This distinction requires strong community input to ensure communities of interest are protected in this process. For example, the Whittier College campus is a definable area that the community may believe should not be split by a district boundary.

Who will approve the final districts?

The consultant team hired to complete the technical study, Compass Demographics, will provide a written report that City staff will use to provide the City Council with a recommendation, following community meetings, public input, and public hearings. The City Council will then vote on the recommendation and will ultimately approve the new voting districts, which will become part of the new charter amendment for the City to follow in conducting elections beginning in 2016.

When will these new districts take effect?

Once adopted by the City the new voting districts will immediately take effect. However, the first election to be held using these newly formed districts will occur in April 2016 with Council seats from Districts 1 and 3 up for election, along with the directly elected Mayor position. Council seats from Districts 2 and 4 will be up for election in April 2018, again along with the directly elected Mayor position.

How will creating voting districts affect me?

Beginning in 2016, residents in the City of Whittier will have the opportunity to vote for candidates who run in the district in which they live. Once elected, these City Council Members will provide direct representation of the unique population, issues and challenges found within each of the four districts, and with the Mayor, will govern and provide direction for issues that involve the entire Whittier community.

Why is my participation important?

This process and the resulting decisions are critical to the leadership and future of Whittier. It is important for the City that these voting district boundaries clearly and accurately represent the varying geographic areas and unique demographic groups found within our community. Your participation will help bring clarity to the process and help us better understand the issues important to you as we look at volumes of data to help create balanced and representative districts.

How will my input be used?

Your input will help inform the technical process which will be based on a collection of data and analytics. We will be asking you to share with us what is important to you, where you think the boundaries should go to protect communities of interest, and other clarifying questions that will help us in the development of voting district recommendations.

Where can I learn more about the process and get additional information including scheduled public meetings?

For this process, the City has set up a host of communication tools and ways for the public to receive information and provide input. The City has established a project webpage at www.cityofwhittier.org/vdf. All meeting information and project materials will be posted on the website for your review. You can also e-mail us with a comment or question at districts@cityofwhittier.org or via regular mail to: City of Whittier, Attn: Kathryn Marshall, 13230 Penn Street, Whittier, CA 90602. For additional information, please call (562) 567-9854.