

DRAFT Districting Discussion

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This is a brainstorming document that is intended to identify issues, facts, and provide both sides of the proposed Districting initiative that will be on the Winfield May 20, 2012 ballot. Since this document is a brainstorming document it is not authoritative, nor is it complete. It also contains some opinions and observations.

Overview

The Districting referendum for the Village of Winfield will be on the March 2012 ballot. If the Districting initiative is supported by the voters, Winfield will be divided into 6 Districts with roughly equal numbers of residents in each district. Winfield has 9,080 residents and 6788 registered voters in 2011. The Village Board would draw the 6 Districts.

In the current At-Large system, voters get to vote for three Trustees every 2 years. A total of 2171 voters cast their ballots in the 2011 election, and Trustees were elected after having received between 1,111 and 1,322 votes.

With Districting, voters get to vote for one Trustee every 4 years. Using the voting from 2011, the breakdown of each District is:

- ~1,500 residents and ~1130 voters per District
- ~362 votes are cast in a given District
- With a simple majority, ~182 votes will elect a Trustee in a given District

Other Communities

At-Large voting systems are the clear majority (69%) in DuPage County communities. DuPage County has 32 municipalities. Ten of these municipalities (31%) have districts or wards. The number of residents per district/ward ranges from 711 to 19,790, with an average of 7,011 residents per District/Ward. Some large communities (Bolingbrook with 73K residents) use an At-Large voting system. Districts are used in all sizes of communities, but seem to be somewhat more common in larger communities. See Table 1.

By comparison to other communities that have Districts, Winfield districts would be almost the smallest in DuPage County, and would be about one-fifth the size of an average DuPage County district.

Overall Comments

- Districting is a good idea if the purpose is to provide better representation to Winfield voters. But, districting needs very close scrutiny if the real purpose is to push a political agenda or if it is for partisan purposes.
- Legal framework - it is critical to understand the political requirements for non-home rule communities. This may affect districting and how it can be structured and/or implemented.

Advantages

Over the last 1.5 years, advocates of Districting the Village of Winfield have vigorously discussed a number of advantages. However, Districting could have profound implications for the Village, so it is essential to examine both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, one or more counter arguments have been presented for each of the claimed advantages for Districting. The full text of the advantages of Districting were presenting by Trustee Allen.

- **Greater Accountability**

- Counterpoint

- Less Accountability - Simply put, the voters will have ONE verses SIX representatives to promote their interests. Districting will mean the other 5 Trustees provide no representation for the resident's concerns, even though they will vote on issues that will affect all of Winfield.
- Divide and Conquer - The other 5 Trustees can safely vote against the concerns of a 6th Trustee, effectively isolating those in a given area. **This is a major disadvantage for an individual voter**
- Same Access - Communication is easy. With the current At-Large system, residents can contact any of the 6 trustees. Their contact information is available on the Village web site or with a quick phone call to Village Hall.
- No Representation - Residents will only have 1 representative on the Board, but they will have no representation if the Trustee holds a grudge or views the resident as having 'wrong politics'.

- **Distributed Power**

- Counterpoint

- Say what? Advocates for Districting claim that the "only proper way to run a democracy is to have all areas represented by their own trustee". This is obviously incorrect since 69% of DuPage municipalities have At-Large elections (see Table 1). So Districting is clearly not the "only proper way to run a democracy" (which is a wild assertion). Plus, it seems rather extreme to talk about needing distributed power in a Village of ~9,000 people.

- **Less influence by big money donors and special interests in our town's elections**

- Counterpoint

- Increased PAC Influence - A political action committee (PAC) or independently wealthy candidate can still dominate any individual District financially. In fact, Districting may INCREASE the influence of PACs since their financial strength can be focused on a smaller area to support or defeat a candidate in a District. *Be careful what you wish for...*
- Rancor - Considering the rancor of past Winfield elections and the profusion of PACs, it is highly unlikely that PACs will not be present in Winfield politics if Districting is successful. They will simply adapt.

- Concentration - PACs in the Village (which has been true in since at least 2001) could just as well push their own candidates in small districts that are part of a team or slate of candidates. Safe Districts can be ignored, and all resources poured into the few contested Districts.
 - **Lower Barriers to Run for Office**
 - Counterpoint
 - More Shoe Leather - Almost all candidates are part of a slate or team. Team mates can expect help in their districts, so even with Districts a candidate will still be expected to campaign across the Village. This would negate much of the supposed advantage (less work and cost) for the candidate.
 - Ample Candidates Now - There has been no lack of candidates for Winfield Trustee in the last few cycles. So is making it easier to run and thereby prompting more candidates to run really an advantage for the voter?
 - Better For Candidate or for Voters? - Is the point to make it easier for the candidate, or provide better service and representation for Winfield voters?
 - **More Continuity in Winfield Politics**
 - Counterpoint
 - Permanent Incumbents - 'continuity in politics' is the same as incumbents that cannot be removed since they are in safe districts. Is it really a good idea to give a Trustee a job-for-life - where they know they are unaccountable to 5/6 of the Village and **only have to answer to ~182 Winfield voters?**
 - Can't We All Just Get Along - So, Districting will suddenly make the opposing factions in the Village suddenly love (or at least like) each other? Really? Considering the rhetoric in recent elections it hardly seems likely that those with strongly held opinions will sit down and sing happy songs - especially if they know their opponents now are in a safe district...with a (Trustee) job-for-life.

Disadvantages

Advocates for Districting have not addressed a number of possible disadvantages of Districting. Disadvantages must be discussed to fully explore the Districting issue.

- **Power to the Politicians** - Districting is a way for politicians to give themselves an advantage, or put their opponents at a disadvantage. In effect, politicians can decide an election before it even happens. Are we ready to give the Winfield Board this power?
- **Boring Elections and Less Choice**
 - With the current system voters get to vote for 3 Board members every 2 years.
 - Under the Districting plan voters get to vote for 1 Board member every 4 years. **THIS IS LESS CHOICE for the voters in Winfield, and a MAJOR DISADVANTAGE**

- With fewer choices, Districting could decrease interest and turnout. Winfield has one of the highest voter rates in DuPage County, and with Districting we may see this participation decrease due to boredom and apathy – especially if we are afflicted with safe Districts and Trustees-For-Life.
- **Unaccountable Politicians** – With Districting the Board will make decisions for the 5/6 of the Village that did not have the chance to vote for them. **These Trustees can safely ignore the wishes of 83% of the Village** (e.g. those outside their District).
- **Limited Selection and Talent of Candidates for Voters** – Dividing Winfield into rather small districts will, by definition, limit choices of the voters. Voters will be stuck with whoever falls in their (small) district.
 - With the current system we can vote for the best candidates from the entire Village. With districts the talent will be restricted to rather small geographic boundaries. And it is entirely possible that two excellent candidates might be in the same neighborhood, but with districts only one could be elected.
 - **Winfield will be ill served if we exclude the best candidates based on an accident of geography.**
- **Pocket Districts** - small political districts raise the unpleasant specter of ‘pocket districts’ where one person or a special interest locks an area. This serves the interests of political factions, but for voters this is distinctly unappealing. To secure a District **all a Trustee needs is ~182 voters and they have a Job-For-Life.**
- **Narrow Interests** - political districts imply the district board member will represent the interests of that geographic area. This sounds good, but it also means that those interests may be rather narrow – and that the candidate will not be accountable to the Village as a whole.
 - **KEY POINT** - Is it better for the Village as a whole to think of all interests, or just those of a particular geography?
- **Size** - Winfield is a rather small community in terms of size and population. We have roughly 9,000 residents. Wheaton’s Districts are ~13,000 each – more than the entire Village of Winfield. Simply put, we are so small we don’t need districting. Winfield is small enough without carving it into ever-smaller pieces.
- **Sharp Knives** – Drawing District will strongly affect the political future of the Village. The Village Board will have this power, and it will almost certainly be a very contentious fight. Do we really want to give this board MORE reasons to fight with each other?