



# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS County of Dane

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**TO:** Members of the Executive Committee

**FROM:** Karin Peterson Thurlow  
Chief of Staff

**SUBJECT:** Summary of Dane County Redistricting Process: 1991, 2001, and 2011

Redistricting is the process of redrawing the lines of districts from which public officials are elected to reflect population shifts in accordance with the results of the census. The boundaries for County Board districts are adjusted based on population changes that have occurred over the previous decade. Through the redistricting process, the population within each supervisory district is equalized so that residents across the County have equal representation on the Board of Supervisors. The approved final map is then used for the next decade.

There has been interest in the redistricting process in anticipation of the 2021 effort. Two items regarding redistricting are pending before the County Board: 2014 RES-085 Independent, Non-Partisan Redistricting Process for Dane County and 2014 OA-012 Amending Chapter 15 of the Dane County Code of Ordinances, Creating an Independent Redistricting Committee.

This memo will outline the timeline for redrawing the County Board district lines, describe the attributes desired in redrawing boundaries, and provide a description of the process used in 1991, 2001, and 2011 with a focus on oversight of the process and responsibility for drawing the maps.

## REDISTRICTING TIMELINE

The following is the timeline for the county redistricting process. Redistricting occurs in three 60 day periods of activity.

**2020:** Decennial census occurs.

**March 2021:** Census data is delivered to the state.

**April 2021:** Last municipal elections are held in old districts.

**Mid-April 2021:** County receives census population block data and the reapportionment 60 day time clock begins.

**April and May:** Redistricting issues are considered and resolved by county body responsible; alternative supervisory districts maps are prepared; meetings occur with local municipalities which may be split by districts.

**May-June:** A public hearing is held on the tentative supervisory district plan and the county body responsible recommends a tentative plan to the County Board.

**June 2021:** The County Board approves a tentative supervisory plan (required 60 days after receipt of the Census data, but no later than July 1, 2021).

**June-July:** Municipalities adjust ward boundaries and submit ward plans to the county (no later than August 1 and within 60 days after receipt of the tentative supervisory plan).

**October 2021:** The County adopts final supervisory district plan and cities adopt aldermanic districts within 60 days of receipt of the municipal ward plans.

**December 2021:** Candidates may begin circulating nomination papers for county and municipal offices based on the new districts.

**February and April 2022:** First county elections in new districts (primary and general elections)

## **BACKGROUND**

The number of county supervisory districts is set by the county board within statutory ranges. Chapter 59, Wis. Stats. has established maximum sizes for county boards. Counties between 100,000 and 500,000 can have no more than 47 members; between 50,000 and 100,000 can have no more than 39; 25,000 to 50,000 can have no more than 31; and those smaller than 25,000 can have no more than 21. Menominee County may have only seven supervisors and Milwaukee County may establish its own size, currently at 18. In Wisconsin, the number of supervisors varies, with a low of 7 and a high of 38 (Marathon County). A list of Wisconsin counties and the number of supervisors is attached.

Some of the considerations when choosing the number of districts include population, geography, board organization and functioning (including committee structure), electoral issues, and cost of campaigns. Statutes require that districts have a single member, be composed of whole contiguous municipalities or parts of municipalities consisting of whole wards, be substantially equal in population, compact, and recognize minorities.

A ward is the building block used to form election districts. They are designed to be permanent and do not need to be equal in population. The size of a ward is dependent on the size of the city, village, or town. For example, a city with a population over 150,000 may have wards with 1,000 to 4,000 individuals. A community with a population of 1,000 to 9,999 may have wards of 300 to 1,000 individuals. Wards are constructed on whole census blocks, must be wholly within a county, and composed of contiguous territory.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The County Board approves a resolution in advance of the redistricting process that sets out the guiding principles for the process. Key principles include:

**Representation:** Wisconsin has a tradition of large county boards, with some of the largest in the country. Currently, a Dane County supervisory district has 13,191 citizens. In the past, there has been discussion regarding the size of a district a Board member can represent while: 1) maintaining a close tie to the community, 2) being able to campaign in an area at a reasonable cost to allow entry to the local government without having to raise a large amount of money, and 3) maintaining a citizen legislature. Additionally, the large number of districts allows development of majority minority districts.

In recent years, there has been a trend in reducing the size of county boards. A list of Wisconsin counties and the number of supervisors on each County Board is attached.

**Small deviation in district size:** In each of the past three redistricting efforts, minimizing the deviations in district size has been a goal. For example, in 2001 the goal was to keep the deviations at 2%, but the final map had

greater deviations to serve another goal – keeping municipalities and neighborhoods intact. The greater the deviation, the easier it is to build a map. However, to stay true to the goal of one person/one vote, the maps should have as little deviation as possible so that each supervisor represents the same number of people. If there is deviation, there should be justification for it.

**Communities of Interest:** In the past three redistricting cycles, the County Board has worked to keep communities of interest together in the same district. “Communities of interest” may include the area within neighborhood association boundaries, school boundaries, zip codes and phone exchanges, among other groupings. Indicators of communities of interest outside the City of Madison could be housing developments. Communities of interest could also be an ethnic group or a municipality.

### **THREE EXAMPLES OF PROCESS**

The county has pursued different approaches to redistricting in 1991, 2001, and 2011. However, in each case, an advisory body recommended a map to either the Executive Committee or to the full County Board.

#### **1991**

In 1991 the Dane County Regional Planning Commission developed the redistricting plan for the County Board. The RPC had a RPC Reapportionment Committee which recommended a map to the RPC, which – in turn – recommended the county supervisory district plan to the County Board. According to Res. 273, 1990-91, Regarding Reapportionment of County Board Supervisory Districts, “It would facilitate the formation of county supervisory districts if county reapportionment work be done in a coordinated manner with all municipalities.” To that end, the County Board requested the Dane County RPC to prepare a plan.

In 1991, the number of districts decreased from 41 to 39, with 20 districts inside the City of Madison – coterminous with the city aldermanic districts – and 19 outside the City of Madison. The average district size was 9,412.

#### **2001**

The County Board created a Redistricting Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board Chair, to consult with the Executive Committee and provide public input on the reapportionment of supervisory districts. The advisory committee was comprised of 7 non-supervisor members and 2 ex-officio supervisors. Res 244, 2000-2001 Regarding Reapportionment and Redistricting of County Board Supervisory Districts provided guidance to the Advisory Committee, including that the design of districts consider compactness, continuity of area, communities of interest, and have districts coterminous with municipal boundaries. While the committee considered multiple options for a much smaller County Board, the final map decreased the Board by 2 seats – to 37 members. At this time, the Madison aldermanic districts and County Board districts were de-coupled. The average district had 11,528 citizens.

The committee began meeting by the end of March 2001, and held a joint meeting with the Executive Committee on a recommended plan. The Executive Committee forwarded a plan to the County Board with a motion of “no recommendation” and the County Board moved a different map and made amendments to that on the Board floor. The plan approved by the County Board on a 22 to 17 vote was then vetoed by the County Executive because she questioned whether the goals of fairness and legal

standards were met, based on splits of towns and villages, population deviations, the need for compactness, the need to enhance minority participation, and substandard ward size. A motion to override the veto failed. A second tentative plan was prepared and approved by the County Board and County Executive, sent to municipalities, and finalized in the fall.

Staff support for the 2001 process was provided by the County Board Office with assistance of the Regional Planning Commission.

### **2011**

In 2011, the Executive Committee created a Redistricting Subcommittee and the County Board Chair appointed 5 Board members and 2 citizen members, as well as two non-voting Board members and 2 non-voting citizen members. Staff support for meetings was provided by the County Board Office, while the Land and Water Resources Department and the Land Information Office provided assistance with drawing alternative maps. The subcommittee advised the Executive Committee, which approved the tentative plan and forwarded it to the County Board for consideration. The number of supervisory districts remained 37, while the average number of citizens per district rose to 13,191.

### **CHALLENGES FOR 2021**

As with previous redistricting cycles, the key questions for 2021 will be how to structure oversight of the process regarding, and who most appropriately should be charged with producing the maps. As with previous efforts, the issue of the right number of supervisors to represent county districts and handle the workload will be debated. Other issues include how to address the planned annexation of urban towns over the next several years, including the towns of Madison, Blooming Grove, and Burke.