

HARTFORD BOARD OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

2022 REVIEW-LEGISLATIVE APPORTIONMENT PROPOSAL REVIEW

NOVEMBER 4, 2021 (Town Hall; Rm 2 @5:15pm)

MEETING MINUTES (draft)

Members Present: Nancy Howe, Vice-Chair; Kevin Christie; Mike Morris; Lannie Collins; Dennis Brown; Sue Buckholz, Chair; Gayle Ottmann; Lisa O'Neil, Clerk; Dan Fraser; Joe Major (5:30); Pat Cook (5:30); Kim Souza (5:30).

Sue Buckholz called the meeting to order at 5:17pm. The Clerk presented information regarding the ability for the Board of Civil Authority (BCA) to elect to have a Secure Ballot Drop Box installed for elections per ACT 60 as passed in the 2021 Legislative Session. Nancy Howe made a motion for the Town to obtain and install a secure ballot drop box through the Secretary of State's Office in accordance with the statutory criteria. Gayle Ottmann seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (Joe Major; Kim Souza & Pat Cook were absent from the discussion and vote).

The Chair introduced the discussion regarding the Legislative Apportionment Board (LAB) re-districting proposal. Each member of the BCA had been forwarded the LAB proposal and associated documents as received by the Clerk on October 18, 2021 for their review. The Clerk provided a summary as follows:

1. The Clerk contacted Pomfret & Barnard-their BCAs are not meeting because nothing changed for them.
2. Legislative Apportionment Board (LAB) proposal creates single-member districts across the State; Hartford gets divided into three sections rather than two. The LAB vote for the single-member district statewide was 4-3; so, not unanimous.
3. Based upon the State population, the calculation for 150 single-member house seats = ~4287 voters per single district (~8574 for a two-member district).
4. All three Towns realized modest population increases as follows:
 - Hartford (+734 to 10, 686)
 - Barnard (+45 to 992)
 - Pomfret (+12 to 916)
5. An Alternate Plan proposed a hybrid model of single- and two-member districts (drafted by Jeanne Albert). The Alternate LAB District was included in the information provided to Clerks/BCA's by the LAB as well. Based upon the analysis for the alternate plan, Hartford would remain unchanged: i.e., TWO DISTRICTS: one a single-member district containing Pomfret, Barnard and a portion of Hartford; and, one two-member District for the balance of Hartford (See LAB District Plan titled "Jeanne's Plan").
6. The Clerk reviewed the file from the 2012 reapportionment meeting. At that time, BCA faced a similar proposal to change to single-member districts. At that time the BCA recommended retaining the district configuration at that time for numerous reasons.

The Chair asked State Representative, Kevin Christie, to share his thoughts. Kevin indicated he supported the Alternate Plan (leaving the Hartford Districts unchanged); he stated he thought three single-member districts would lead to confusion by the voters. Kim Souza stated she had consulted State Representative Becca White who was unable to attend the meeting her thoughts. Kim indicated Becca was in support of keeping the Hartford the Districts as they are now. Lannie Collins asked for clarification regarding the number of registered voters in each district. The Clerk clarified re-districting is based upon the Census data, not the number of registered voters. Based upon the 2020 Census for Vermont, the ideal single-member district would be comprised of 4287 people; a two-member district ideally would have 8574 people.

Nancy Howe stated we must include reasons with the recommendation to the Legislative Apportionment Board. The reasons discussed included:

- Demographically and geographically, Hartford residents see themselves as one community with similar interests, regardless of their location in Town. The Eastern portion of Hartford is the most densely populated and the most closely connected. Dividing our current two-member district into two separate one member districts divides our community in an unnatural way. The Seven Member Select Board members are elected at-large and serve the entire community rather than by ward or neighborhood; The Town of Hartford is a single School District rather than a unified district with other communities. The five-member School Board is also elected at large to serve the entire community.
- Increasing the number of districts would cause voter confusion. The current District configuration has been in place for three decades and has worked well (although many Hartford residents are still unsure of which district to vote in when they come to the central polling location). Increasing the number of single member districts could necessitate an additional polling place exacerbating voter confusion and frustration. At a time when the State and local communities are trying to inspire voter participation further splitting the Hartford community as proposed by LAB could lead to voters feeling separated from town matters and disenfranchised, resulting in voter apathy.
- Adding a third legislative district makes administering elections challenging. It could require an additional polling location, increased costs, additional tabulators & programming, and increased time and staffing to manage and tabulate election results.
- Leaving Hartford as two districts, UNCHANGED, does NOT affect any other districts therefore it would not create a ripple effect across the State.
- The modest population growth within our two districts leaves the total numbers within the acceptable deviation range for a two-member district.

Lannie Collins added, "If it ain't broke don't fix it"; Kim Souza agreed, stating the existing model is working and serves our townspeople well.

Concerns were voiced over logistical challenges if an additional polling place was needed. Our current central polling place accommodates two districts but adding a third district could require an additional polling location. After a brief discussion, the Board members could not readily identify an available facility location to conduct a secure, safe election in the western portion of Hartford.

Gayle asked how the LAB and the legislature might view the Hartford BCA recommendation. Kevin said the conversation can get most involved when it reaches the Government Operations legislative committee. The BCA and Hartford legislators will need to follow the discussion and be prepared to respond as needed.

Mike Morris made a motion to recommend to the LAB to leave Hartford 's current voting districts unchanged (as outlined in the Alternate LAB Plan by Jeanne Albert). Dennis Brown Seconded the motion. The motion carried by unanimous vote (Nancy Howe; Kevin Christie; Mike Morris; Lannie Collins; Dennis Brown; Sue Buckholz; Gayle Ottmann; Lisa O'Neil; Dan Fraser; Joe Major; Pat Cook; Kim Souza).

Kim Souza moved to adjourn. Joe Major seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:04pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa M. O'Neil, Town Clerk

