



WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2011

Residents to Council: Show us what's going on with redistricting

By Jan Ransom

The throngs of local leaders, activists and residents who flocked to Hunting Park tonight for a public hearing on how to redraw Philadelphia's City Council districts had a key question for members: Where's the map?

"We still haven't seen a draft plan and you guys have one week?" said 42nd Ward committeeman Michael McCrea. "What are we looking at? We don't know what you're looking at."

McCrea was among the 60 people who filled the auditorium inside of Esperanza Academy Charter School on Hunting Park Avenue near 3rd Street to give their input on Council's redistricting process, which the body must complete every 10 years using Census data.

Council members Marian Tasco, Maria Quinones-Sanchez, Wilson Goode Jr., Darrell Clarke and Council President Anna Verna listened to roughly two hours of public comment on how to best draw the city's 10 Council districts.

Check out today's Daily News story for [behind the scenes details](#) of Council's redistricting negotiations.

In what may be one of the toughest redistricting efforts in recent history, Council has to deal with a massive population shift from west to east, in addition to correcting two badly gerrymandered districts in the middle -- the 5th and the 7th.

If members do not agree on a map by Sept. 9 they lose their pay, which has happened in the last two redistricting efforts.

In addition to greater transparency, many speakers tonight asked that Council create districts with similar community interests, with Latino groups asking for a district that encompasses more of the city's rapidly growing Latino population.

"You have the opportunity now to reward that population with a district that is solid enough no matter what happens next time," said Juan Cartagena, of Latino Lines.

Former Councilman Angel Ortiz urged Council to give Latino voters their due. The 7th Council District is currently about 46 percent Latino and is represented by Quinones-Sanchez, but advocates think that percentage could be increased if the district didn't stretch out so far, weaving through Fishtown, Kensington, Frankford, Hunting Park and the lower Northeast.

"The city has grown and we have grown. Everybody else has lost population," Ortiz said. "When they added that ungodly tail that was to dilute the Puertorican and Latino vote at that time. We can no longer accept the circumstances that were put forward."

Councilwoman Marian Tasco said she understood the concerns of the Latino community and the current problems with the 7th Councilmanic District.

"They want a district that is Latino influenced (that doesn't) look like that gerrymandered mess," said Tasco. "We want to get rid of that thing too. We're tired of being called the worst gerrymandered city in the country."

Other concerns raised were whether entire wards should go into one district, rather than being split several ways.

"That disenfranchises us," said Stephanie Singer, 8th Ward leader and Democratic candidate for City Commissioner. "I can look across the street and wave at people in a different district."

Wilfredo Rojas, with the Delaware Valley Voter Education Project agreed and called for the wards to be redrawn.

"Philadelphia is about ward politics. We have to restructure the wards," Rojas said. "Politics starts from the bottom. All politics is ward driven."