

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS
CHARTER COMMISSION AND
REDISTRICTING GROUP

Job Description: Volunteer Student Observers

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2010, Minneapolis voters approved an amendment to the Minneapolis Charter to govern redistricting of city wards and boundaries after the 2010 census and beyond. The Charter change assigned to the Minneapolis Charter Commission the responsibility of and authority for redistricting. The Charter amendment also provided that the Charter Commission would appoint an Advisory Group to participate in the redistricting process, with the goal in part of increasing the diversity of the redistricting body. Other values underlying the process are openness, community engagement and involvement, and nonpartisanship.

The Charter Commission has determined that the redistricting process would be greatly enhanced by the participation of one or more volunteer observers, preferably graduate or law students.

OVERVIEW OF FUNCTION

The volunteer observers, **subject to the discretion of their professor**, are asked to attend all the meetings and hearings, or as many as possible, for the following general purposes:

- To observe the process and take notes of their impressions as they deem appropriate;
- To offer an analysis of what worked and what did not work well; and
- To make a record of observations and recommendations for the use and benefit of future redistricting bodies.

It is not intended and not necessary for the observers to take detailed notes or minutes, as this task is the responsibility of city staff. Rather, the notes would be more in the nature of reflections by the author(s) about the process. Some potential questions, by way of example and not obligation, that might be considered are listed below.

Finally, the work must be carried on in compliance with the Minnesota Data Practices Act, but it is anticipated that volunteers will receive the same guidance as is available to members of the Redistricting Group.

TIME COMMITMENT

Unfortunately, the time commitment cannot be well defined at this time because the final map for the city cannot be approved until after the state legislature (or the court) has completed its own redistricting of state legislative and congressional districts. The Job Description for members of the Advisory Group contains the best information that can be offered at this time. According to that Job Description:

“The time commitment expected of participants is somewhat unpredictable. The work of the Redistricting Group will begin in May of 2011 and may extend through March 2012 depending on actions by the Minnesota Legislature. Once the Legislature completes its work, the Redistricting Group will have about two months to finish redistricting in Minneapolis. Redistricting work requires numerous committee meetings, public hearings and community meetings, some of which may be held in the evening.”

QUALIFICATIONS

An interest in learning from and contributing to the Redistricting Process, a willingness to make the time commitment needed, at least a rudimentary knowledge of the purposes and principles of redistricting, and an ability to observe and analyze the process. In addition, familiarity with and use of the Minneapolis Charter Commission website and its links to redistricting news and resources will be necessary.

EXAMPLES OF ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

The following list reflects some of the questions that might be considered as part of the analysis:

1. Was the Redistricting Group able to work in a nonpartisan manner?
2. Was the Redistricting Group able to work in an evenhanded manner?
3. Was the redistricting process successful in reflecting the diversity of the city's population, and how did the diversity goal eventually play out?
4. Did the Redistricting Group receive in a timely manner the information and resources it needed to do a good job? Would it have been helpful to have additional information and resources, and, if so, what additional information or resources?

5. Were the paid (City and other) staff functions useful and appropriate, and were the requests to the staff appropriate?
6. What are your impressions of the meeting dynamics? Were the meetings formal enough, or too formal? Were the Advisory Group members equal partners? Were members of the public attending the meeting or posing questions given adequate or appropriate time and attention?
7. How did the process work in terms of public engagement and participation? How could it be improved?
8. Did the Redistricting Group appear to be overburdened or the job unduly difficult? Is there a way future processes might be improved, if necessary, to address these problems, if they turned out to be problems?
9. Did the redistricting software available to the Redistricting Group make the job easier?
10. Were there any controversies that had to be resolved, and how were they resolved? What sort of process, if any, was needed to help resolve them, or what sort of process could have been helpful?
11. Should the Charter provisions related to redistricting remain the same for next time, or should another new amendment be considered?