



Costa Mesa Voting District Formation

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ

1. Why is the voting process changing?

The City of Costa Mesa is proposing to change from the City's current at-large elections to geographically defined district elections. The objective of the Voting District Formation process is to ensure compliance with the California Voting Rights Act and ensure minority votes are not diluted. The City will place a ballot measure before the voters in November 2016 to consider a district-based election system map. Depending on the district map selected for the ballot, voters may also determine whether they will directly elect a mayor or if one will be selected by way of rotation amongst the current councilmembers, as is currently the case.

2. What is the Voting Rights Act and why is it important?

The Voting Rights Act is federal legislation adopted in the 1960s protecting the rights of all citizens to participate in the voting process. This legislation has provisions ensuring underrepresented groups have equal opportunities for voting and representation. The California Voting Rights Act has additional provisions with the purpose of ensuring equal access to voting and representation. All City activities used to create these newly formed voting districts will follow and comply with both the spirit and letter of the law, including those laid out by both the federal and state Voting Rights Acts.

3. What are district-based elections?

In a district-based election, voters elect a single representative from within their district to represent them on the City Council. The intent of district-based elections is to provide opportunity for geographic and demographic representation based on each district's constituents with similar goals and concerns as others in their respective geographic area. District elections allow City Council representation across defined geographic sections of the City, providing opportunities for representation in communities that may not have previously had a Council Member serve from their neighborhood.

4. What will be the process for creating voting districts?

The process will have both a technical and community input component completed in tandem to define and create the best recommendation for creating the district boundaries to place on the November 2016 ballot. The technical process requires the formation of nearly equal districts based on population (ideally within 5 percent from smallest to largest). However, secondary factors also play a major role including: topography, geography, cohesiveness, contiguity, compactness, integrity of territory, communities of interest and significant and sensitive land uses.

Community participation is vital to ensure proper formation of the districts. An assortment of materials, meetings and other social media communication tools will be utilized to inform and engage the public throughout the technical process. This will include a minimum of two rounds of public workshops, opportunities for interested individuals to meet directly with Compass Demographics (the demographer hired to assist the City with this process) to provide direct input on boundary lines and two public hearings at City Council meetings.

5. What is a community of interest?

A community of interest is any distinctive area within the City that has a definable group of people, unique geography or some other distinguishable feature or characteristic that it would be undesirable to divide in the creation of voting districts. Some of these may already be clearly established and others may be defined as a result of this process. This distinction requires strong community input to ensure communities of interest are maintained in this process. For example, the Orange Coast College campus is a definable area that the community may believe should not be split by a district boundary.



For additional information please contact:

Brenda Green, City Clerk | (714) 754-5225 | districtelections@costamesaca.gov



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6. Who will approve the final districts?

The consultant team hired to complete the technical study, Compass Demographics, will provide a written report that City staff will use to provide the City Council with a recommendation, following community meetings, public input and public hearings. Ultimately, the City Council will vote to approve the best recommended voting district map and only that map will be placed on the November 2016 ballot for the Costa Mesa voters to consider. The City Council will also determine whether the measure should include a directly elected mayor or continue with the current rotational system.

7. When will these new districts take effect?

If City voters adopt the November 2016 ballot measure, the new voting districts will immediately take effect. However, the first election to be held using these newly formed districts would occur in November 2018. Councilmembers will serve out their current terms.

8. What will happen to existing council members if the districts go into effect?

Current Council Members may serve the remainder of the term to which they were elected and will continue to serve at-large regardless of where they live. Once a current Councilmember's seat is up for re-election, that seat would be subject to by-district election depending on the order in which districts are selected to vote.

9. How will creating voting districts affect me?

If the ballot measure passes, beginning in 2018, residents in the City of Costa Mesa will have the opportunity to vote for candidates who run in the district in which they live. Once elected, these City Council Members will provide direct representation of the unique population, issues and challenges found within each of the districts. City Council elections are staggered. Depending on what map, if any, passes, two or three district seats will be on the November 2018 ballot and the remaining district seats will appear on the 2020 ballot.

10. Why is my participation important?

This process, and the resulting decisions, are critical to the leadership and future of Costa Mesa. It is important that these voting district boundaries clearly and accurately represent the varying geographic areas and unique demographic groups found within our community. Your participation will help bring clarity to the process and help better understand the issues important to you as we look at volumes of data to help create balanced and representative districts.

11. What if the district-based elections and corresponding map measure is not approved?

If the measure is defeated, it is possible that litigation will ensue. If that happens, while the court considers the potential proceedings, the current at-large election system will remain in place. The November 2016 ballot will contain only one measure to establish district elections which includes only one correlating district map. If voters defeat the measure, then both the question regarding district-based elections as well as the recommended map are defeated.

12. How will my input be used?

Your input will help inform the technical process which will be based on a collection of data and analytics. We will ask you to share with us what is important to you, where you think the boundaries should go to protect communities of interest and other clarifying questions that will help us in the development of voting district recommendations.

13. Where can I learn more about the process and get additional information including scheduled public meetings?

For this process, the City has set up a host of communication tools and ways for the public to receive information and provide input. The City has established a project webpage at www.costamesaca.gov under Voting District Formation. All meeting information and project materials will be posted on the website for your review. You can also email your comments or questions to districtelections@costamesaca.gov or via direct mail to: City of Costa Mesa, Attn: Brenda Green, City Clerk, 77 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, CA 92626. For additional information, please call (714) 754-5225.

