

Communication from Public

Name: Kelsey Summer Schwartz

Date Submitted: 04/20/2023 02:48 PM

Council File No: 22-1196-S1

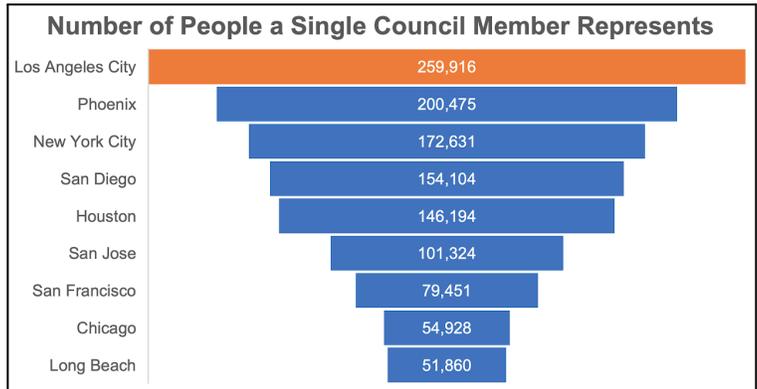
Comments for Public Posting: My name is Kelsey Schwartz and I am an organizer with the Fair Rep LA coalition (www.fairrepla.com). I am writing in support of LA City Council expansion. LA City Council needs to increase in size to be more representative of the many diverse residents of LA city and to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents. LA City Council has not changed in size since 1925. Over the last century, LA city's population has grown by 6 times! Each council member now represents about a quarter of a million people, making the ratio of council members to residents the highest in the nation! Los Angeles city should be a leader in good government, not lagging behind. I recently completed my Master of Public Policy at UCLA and for my thesis, I researched and co-wrote a policy report on the need for LA City Council to expand and for LA city adopting an Independent Redistricting Commission. To read this report, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/UCLAMPPFinalReport>. I also helped write the Fair Rep LA coalition's policy brief on council expansion, found here: <https://tinyurl.com/CouncilSizeExpansionBrief>. In this brief, we outline a possible range of council sizes: "By using the Districtr mapping tool (image to the right), one can see the harbor cities in CD15 that are highlighted in yellow total ~150,000 people. Using a rounded number for LA city's 2020 population of ~3.89 million, a district size of 150,000 constituents would constitute a 25 district council. This is comparable to San Diego's council member ratio to constituents, at 1:~154,000. Another factor is the neighborhood of Koreatown is now in a singular council district and has ~125,000 people. Any smaller of a district size would effectively split this densely populated community of interest. At 125,000 people per district, LA City Council would have about 31 districts." The 2021 LACCRC proposed no less than 22 seats for a larger council, but I think that there is a need to discuss a council size beyond the max number that the committee is proposing now. While the coalition has no specific number for a larger council size, I believe that council should have between 25 and 31 districts. I also think that the way to get to a more definite number for a larger council is to do a massive amount of community outreach and engage communities often left out of traditional policy making processes. This means that the committee needs to ensure that there will be the ability to give

public comment for committee meetings remotely. Having only in-person public commenting reduces community engagement with these vital issues. Including video of the meeting and translation services is also needed to improve public participation. I ask the committee to consider a full range of options, including potentially doubling the size of council, to ensure fair and equitable representation of LA. Thank you.

Council Size Expansion Brief

This brief outlines some concepts surrounding the size of a larger city council, compiled by the Fair Rep LA coalition’s Policy Working Group. Visit www.fairrepla.com for more information on this coalition.

Los Angeles City Council has the highest ratio of constituents to council members in the nation, with each council member representing about 260,000 people. LA is the second most populated city in America, with New York City being first and Chicago being third. In comparison to these other two large cities, NYC has a council size of 51, or a council member to constituent ratio of about 1:173,000. Chicago has a council size of 50, or a ratio of about 1:55,000.



City council sizes do vary across the U.S. with no set rule or standard, ranging from 5-51 council members. While it is hard to pinpoint a new number for LA City Council’s size as compared to other cities, seeing the difference between LA and other cities representation does show that LA residents have less representation.

City	Number of Council Districts	Total Population (2020)	Residents per Council District
Los Angeles	15	3,898,747	259,916
Phoenix	8	1,603,797	200,475
New York	51	8,804,190	172,631
Houston	11	1,608,139	146,194
Chicago	50	2,746,388	54,928

There are many factors to consider when deciphering a larger council size, and it has been long documented that “there is neither an abstract optimal size for a national, state, or city legislature nor an accepted formula for establishing legislative size, because decisions on size involve fundamental matters of representation, governmental effectiveness, political accountability, and the competitiveness of the city’s political system.”¹ Therefore, this brief summarizes some key findings that can guide initial formation of identifying a size for a larger, more effective and more representative LA City Council.

In 2022, Portland voters passed a charter amendment to triple their city council size from 4 to 12 members.² The Portland Charter Review Commission spent 18 months researching and hearing from the community in order to create their recommendations for council expansion. Starting in 2024, the city will have 4 districts, each with 3 council members elected by-district. Options for multi-member districts or election methods could be explored for LA. Electing council members by-district increases the ability of all groups, especially those concentrated in a district, to have a better chance of electing a candidate of their choice, which is especially true for providing greater access to the political process and power for communities of color.³ Moreover, “district council members are more attuned to the unique problems of their constituents.”⁴ In contrast, at-large elected council members could be more impartial and prioritize the whole city over a single district. At-large elections are typically used in smaller cities, while by-district elections are used in larger cities.⁵

In the late 1980s, New York City’s Charter Reform Commission recommended and put to voters a council expansion measure. Their guiding principles that led to a consensus on a 51-seat council were:

1. “To enhance minority opportunities to elect candidates of their own choice;
2. To increase minority membership (and minority-party membership);

¹ Douglas Muzzio and Tim Tompkins, “On the Size of the City Council: Finding the Mean,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 37, no. 3 (1989): pp. 83-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1173754>, 83.

² “Charter Commission,” [Portland.gov](https://www.portland.gov/omf/charter-review-commission), 2020, <https://www.portland.gov/omf/charter-review-commission>.

³ National League of Cities, “Cities 101 -- at-Large and District Elections,” City of Winston-Salem, <https://www.cityofws.org/DocumentCenter/View/13991/Cities-101---District-v-At-Large-Elections---National-League-of-Cities-pdf>.

⁴ National League of Cities, “Cities 101 -- at-Large and District Elections.”

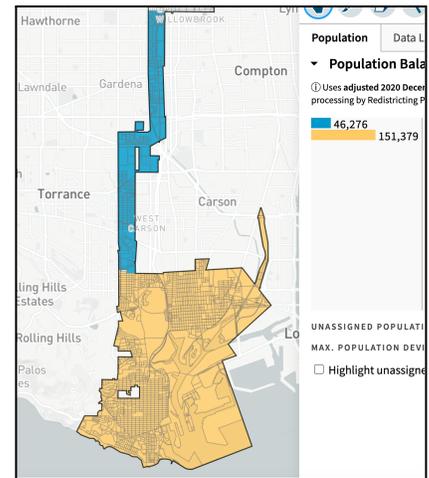
⁵ National League of Cities, “Cities 101 -- at-Large and District Elections.”

3. To maintain as Council of manageable size in which all members could meaningfully participate;
4. To increase constituent responsiveness by decreasing the size of each district.”⁶

In NYC’s deliberation, they found that by making districts smaller, racial and ethnic minorities had an increased opportunity to elect their candidates of choice. This resulted in greater minority representation: “minority numbers on the new Council in fact went from nine to twenty, or almost 40%.”⁷

Another point to consider is that evidence has shown that “size influences the effectiveness of legislator efforts to build trust and support,” where the larger the governing body, the less trust the public has in the body.⁸ There is a point of diminishing returns when it comes to council expansion. Raphael Sonenshein was the Executive Director of the 1999 Appointed Charter Reform Commission, which was the last time council expansion was attempted, and he explained in an interview for a [2022 UCLA’s Master of Public Policy report](#) on council expansion that, “From the checks and balances side, there is a limit to how big you can make the council before it becomes ineffective, fractionated and chaotic. The mayor doesn’t have the administrative size to fill in some of the stuff the council does at the field level.”⁹

By using the Districtr mapping tool (right), one can see the harbor cities in CD15 that are highlighted in yellow total ~150,000 people. Using a rounded number for LA city’s 2020 population of ~3.89 million, a district size of 150,000 constituents would constitute a **25 district** council. This is comparable to San Diego’s council member ratio to constituents, at 1:~154,000. Another factor is the neighborhood of Koreatown is now in a singular council district and has ~125,000 people. Any smaller of a district size would effectively split this densely populated community of interest. At 125,000 people per district, LA City Council would have about **31 districts**.



In terms of the cost of expansion, preliminary research points to minimal infrastructure costs at city hall with a council of **31 seats** or less. The total cost of council expansion was estimated for a 21 and 25 seat council for the 1999 ballot. Estimates have been calculated in 2022 dollars for a range of numbers. As you can see, even on the high end, the cost of expansion does not even reach 1/2% of the city’s total budget. This evaluation can focus on the bigger picture and how we are prioritizing city funds. Furthermore, a larger council would have a greater capacity to tackle costly issues affecting the city, such as homelessness, incidents of corruption, or the ineffective use of finite city resources.

Type of Cost	In 1999 Dollars	In 2022 Dollars	2022 Dollars Estimate as a % of \$11.2 Billion City Budget
One-Time Cost of Special Election	\$2.8 mil	\$4.8 mil	0.04%
Annual Cost of a 21-District Council	\$800,000 - \$7.8 mil	\$1.4 mil - \$13.3 mil	0.01% - 0.1%
Annual Cost of a 25-District Council	\$1.3 mil - \$13 mil	\$2.2 mil - \$22.1 mil	0.02% - 0.2%
Annual Cost of a 30-District Council*	-	\$2.64 mil - \$26.52	0.02% - 0.2%
Annual Cost of a 50-District Council*	-	\$4.4 mil - \$44.2 mil	0.03% - 0.4%

*estimates using the costs from the annual cost of a 25-district council.

This memo aims to give a brief overview of some issues that can help inspire deeper thought on identifying a number for a larger council size for LA. As LA nears a century with 15 council seats, we must also look forward to future changes to our city and create safeguards to ensure the size of city council can adapt more easily to population changes. One potential solution could be to create a formula for growth for city council as the city population changes. Furthermore, the need for substantial community engagement cannot be understated in identifying a larger council size. Input from a broad and diverse public is essential to evolving the discussion around the number for an expanded LA City Council.

⁶ Frederick A.O. Schwarz Jr. and Eric Lane, The policy and politics of Charter making: the story of New York City’s 1989 Charter, 42 N.Y.L. Sch. L. Rev. 723 (1998), 786.
⁷ Schwarz Jr. and Lane, The policy and politics of Charter making, 787.
⁸ Daniel Bowen, “Constituency Size and Evaluations of Government,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (September 13, 2021): pp. 459-499, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12358>, 459.
⁹ Raphael J. Sonenshein, interview by Kelsey Schwartz, Zoom meeting, December 31, 2021.

Communication from Public

Name: Russia Chavis Cardenas

Date Submitted: 04/20/2023 06:05 PM

Council File No: 22-1196-S1

Comments for Public Posting: Good evening, Council President and Members; I am Russia Chavis Cardenas with California Common Cause standing on the principle that ultimate democratic authority is based directly on the will of the people, not the incumbent. We support an increase to the number of City Council districts in Los Angeles, to ensure a City Council that is representative of all communities across LA and local political leaders that are close to and responsive to regular folks in our city. We recommend that the number of council districts be adjusted every decade based on the decennial U.S. Census population results to achieve one district per 150,000 people rounded to the nearest odd whole number. This will ensure that Council seats represent roughly the average of what Council seats represent in other large US cities and ensures the size of the Council will change automatically as the City changes. Further, we recommend that revised districts are effective in 2032 and elections thereafter and that a new City Data Bureau certifies Census data. Thank you for your consideration.

Communication from Public

Name: South LA Constituent

Date Submitted: 04/20/2023 03:02 PM

Council File No: 22-1196-S1

Comments for Public Posting: Topic of Discussion: Size of Council Districts Before a discussion of the proposed size of redrawn Council Districts can take place, wouldn't it be prudent to determine if redrawn boundaries are considered necessary or warranted by the impacted constituency? There are several issues that need to be addressed prior to making any determination on size, for example: Will redistricting address the following: • Improve representation: How will the process lead to better representation of the city's diverse communities and interests, and how will it ensure that each council district has a fair and equitable share of resources and services? • Provide greater fairness: Will redistricting help ensure that all residents have equal access to political power and representation, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status? • Increased voter participation: Will the process encourage greater voter participation by creating more competitive districts, where candidates are forced to engage with voters and address their concerns or will it just further divide communities on political and ethnic lines? • Guarantee Greater Transparency: The redistricting process must provide an opportunity for increased transparency and public engagement in the political process, by not only allowing communities have the chance to weigh in on the redrawing of district boundaries but to also give their input greater weight. Additionally, how will redistricting prevent: • Political and/or Racial bias: As noted from past redistricting efforts, there remains the risk that process can be used to benefit one political party, coalition or racial ethnicity over another, or that it could protect incumbents from competition, rather than create fair and equitable districts. • Disruption to Constituents: Redistricting can cause upheaval for residents who may be moved from one district to another and may have to adjust to new elected officials and community groups. • Increased Costs: Redistricting can be expensive, requiring resources for mapping, data analysis, and public outreach, which may divert funding from other priorities. Also the cost of up to 15 additional elected Councilmembers must be considered. • Delayed representation: Redistricting can lead to a delay in representation, as elected officials may not be able to begin serving their constituents until new districts are finalized, elections held and new representatives sworn in. Additionally, how will the elected officials residency requirement be addressed

if the current elected is redrawn out of their district? In short, increasing the number of Council Districts, even by half, only makes a small problem larger. It would further divide communities and fail to negate the possibility for continued “weaponization” of future redistricting efforts based on political or racial bias. It would also do nothing to address the wildly unequitable distribution of taxable infrastructure, resources, and services, There are just as many issues redistricting would create than it would fix so why spend the money on a zero-sum game? The problem was never with the number of districts, but where the lines are drawn.

Communication from Public

Name: Ellen Evans

Date Submitted: 04/20/2023 12:25 PM

Council File No: 22-1196-S1

Comments for Public Posting: Please allow remote participation in any public meetings related to this council file. At a minimum, please provide for remote viewing and/or listening. These topics are so important.