

Editorial: Why settle for status quo?

New district plan in the works: With a better alternative available, the County Commission advances a proposal that lacks improvement.

Staff Reports

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The Shelby County Commission is moving toward the adoption of a redistricting plan that essentially mirrors the current setup.

The commission could go in a different direction with a plan that encourages closer ties between commissioners and their constituents, creates more accountability and eases the way for newcomers to break into local politics.

The proposed new district map, which got preliminary approval in a first-reading vote Monday, follows the same pattern as the current map: six two-member districts and one with a single member.

Prompted by the release of 2010 Census data reflecting the county's population shifts, it essentially maintains the status quo.

Its adoption would make it easier for incumbents to avoid being unseated, Commissioner Sidney Chism pointed out -- not the rationale that many Shelby County voters would endorse and almost irrelevant anyway, with commissioners now limited to two consecutive terms.

But it apparently was relevant enough for commissioners to reject an alternate map suggested by Commissioner Steve Mulroy that would divide the county into 13 single-member districts.

Why not give that map a try? It would give commissioners a smaller territory to cover and more opportunities to get to know their constituents.

Newcomers attempting to establish a political base would also have a smaller district to cover and fewer voters with whom it would be necessary to establish credibility, reducing the obvious advantage now enjoyed by candidates with more money to spend.

It would reduce the number of constituent inquiries and complaints that would land on each commissioner's desk.

It would make each commissioner more accountable for the problems that do or don't get solved within their districts and the improvements that are made.

Two more readings are required before the status quo redistricting plan, which would go into effect for the 2014 county election, is adopted.

That's plenty of time to take another look at the alternatives and answer this question: Why would maintaining multiple-commissioner districts be in the best interests of the citizens of Shelby County?



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