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### Public Input Critical to Redistricting

Redistricting is a word seldom used, except once every ten years. On Wednesday, July 6, 2011, at 6:30 p.m., the public is encouraged to attend a public hearing on redistricting in the Commissioners' Courtroom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Historic Ellis County Courthouse on the square in downtown Waxahachie.

Driven by the numbers from the 2010 Census, redistricting is the process used to redraw precinct lines to maintain equal representation, based on population. Since the last Census was taken in 2000, 36,250 people have moved into Ellis County and now call it home. Because the population growth was not spread evenly throughout the County, the Commissioners' Court must go through the redistricting process to balance the population in their precincts.

With growth, comes change.

Governed by Equal Protection Clause in the United States Constitution and the Civil Rights Voting Act of 1965, redistricting is an important process to ensure that certain legal standards are maintained. "One man, one vote" is the touchstone.

"Redistricting is more of a Constitutional issue," said County Judge Carol Bush. "It is not about evening up road miles or making adjustments to the budget. It is strictly about drawing our precinct lines to ensure that the minority voting strength in our County is preserved."

The Ellis County Commissioners' Court hired David Guinn and Michael Morrison, two Baylor University School of Law Professors, to act as the County's consultants through this process. Guinn and Morrison have been actively involved in voting rights matters and federal litigation since 1978 and have represented over 70 political subdivisions, as well as the State of Texas, in voting rights and redistricting matters.

“You can’t make it harder than it was before for a minority group to select the candidate of their choice,” explained Professor Morrison. “Community input is critical to this process.”

On March 14, 2011, the Commissioners’ Court formed the 12-member Citizen’s Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Committee was to seek public input on the various Model Plans that were being considered by the Court and to provide feedback to the Commissioners about the impact of those Plans on the community.

“As County Judge, I appreciate the time commitment made by the members of the Citizen’s Advisory Committee,” Bush stated. “They have taken their responsibilities seriously and have provided valuable commentary from the community to the Commissioners’ Court.”

The Citizen’s Advisory Committee composed of Rudy Amor, Sandy Anderson, Bob Beakley, Linda Dunn, Jane Hamilton, Tony Medina, Paul Perry, Richard Reno, Brenda L. Sexton, John Tabor, and Diane Threadgill, have met several times and actively discussed the various Model Plans. Because of their involvement, the Commissioners narrowed the choices down to two Model Plans during their regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, June 27, 2011. Model Plans 3 & 7 were selected by the Court for further consideration and discussion by the Advisory Committee and the public.

“Public input and feedback is critical in this process,” Bush explained. “That is why the Advisory Committee is meeting for a third time and a public hearing is being held to discuss the two Model Plans chosen by the Court for consideration.”

On Wednesday, July 6, 2011 from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., the Advisory Committee will meet on the second floor of the historic Courthouse in downtown Waxahachie. Immediately after, a public hearing will be held to discuss Model Plans 3 & 7. The public is invited and encouraged to attend. Each of these plans may be viewed on the Ellis County website ([www.co.ellis.tx.us](http://www.co.ellis.tx.us)).

“While superficially, it may seem like a very dry process, its significance cannot be ignored,” Bush noted.

After the public input is received and considered, the Commissioners’ Court will meet to choose one Model Plan to submit to the United State Department of Justice for pre-clearance.

“Under the Voting Rights Act, the proposed plan cannot provide racial or ethnic minorities less access to the political process than the one it replaces,” Morrison explained.

The Court will more than likely make a final decision on the proposed Plan during their regularly scheduled meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, July 11, 2011.

“I have full confidence that after the Citizen’s Advisory Committee meeting and the public hearing, the Court will achieve its objectives and will choose and submit a plan that will be approved by the Department of Justice and serve the best interests of Ellis County,” Bush said.

The County has the burden of proving that its submitted Plan is lawful and meets the constitutional and statutory requirements. After the Department of Justice approves the Plan, voting precincts will have to be adjusted to comply with the new Commissioner Precinct lines. All of this must be completed before the 2012 primary elections.

“Each of the Commissioners has carefully scrutinized each of the Model Plans before they were submitted to the Advisory Committee,” Bush noted. “I want to recognize the Commissioners for understanding the purpose of redistricting. They were fully engaged in the process, dedicating significant amounts of time to ensure that the County fulfills its legal obligations.”

Redistricting is a process that takes place only once every ten years – consequently, the choices made at this time will affect all residents of Ellis County for the next decade. Public input is vital.