

PUBLIC HEARING
“ACRC Final Districts”
Albany County Redistricting Commission
August 4, 2022

Statement of Richard Conti

My name is Richard Conti. I currently reside at 151 Chestnut Street in the City of Albany which is in the current 5th Albany County Legislative District. I am also a previous member of the Albany Common Council representing the 6th Ward. My comments on the “ACRC Final Districts” map are specifically related to the impact on the current 5th Legislative District and impacted neighborhoods. I previously submitted comments for the June 30 public hearing, the maps for tonight's hearing show no improvements over the previous draft.

As a 24-year member of the Common Council prior to retiring at the end of 2021, I experienced two Common Council reapportionment processes after the 2000 and 2010 US Census findings. In each case, the Commission overseeing reapportionment of the Common Council in accordance with those respective Census reports took into consideration then existing Ward lines and neighborhood boundaries in adopting a final plan in accordance with required population and demographic requirements. This process provided a level of continuity in representation rather than upending ward lines in a way that disrupted established relationships. As a result of the current lines, the Common Council that was elected in 2021 is the most diverse in the history of the City of Albany.

Once again, the revised map that's the subject of this hearing, shatters the current 5th County Legislative District, splitting the Center Square, Hudson/Park, Park South and Washington Park neighborhoods into four new legislative districts that extend into the Pine Hills, West Hill, Arbor Hill, Mansion and South End neighborhoods and the Downtown Business District. In one case, the Hudson/Park neighborhood is cut off from the other areas of its newly proposed district by the Empire State Plaza which creates a concrete barrier ... it makes no sense! These four neighborhoods, on both the County and City levels, have traditionally shared the same unit of representation, represent similar communities of interest, are bound together by Lark Street as a uniting mixed-use commercial corridor and have a strong working relationship with each other. Under the current proposal, the Lark Street corridor that forms the Lark Street Business Improvement District (BID) is split into three separate districts. The Lark Street BID is the only one of the three City of Albany BIDs that is wholly contained within one City Ward or County Legislative District, this has provided a level of cohesion in representation with city and county government that benefits it's membership. The proposed plan under discussion tonight shatters that cohesion and will be harmful to the small, locally owned business that form the corridor.

Overall, the fact that the County and City lines are fairly coterminous has enhanced the working relationships between neighborhood and legislative representations. The proposed County Legislative District map creates an unnecessary division that undercuts this working relationship and will cause confusion among residents as far as representation is concerned and possibly further erode civic engagement.

As an added observation, from someone who's been pretty involved in city politics since 1986, our four neighborhoods have been the heart of progressive politics in the City of Albany that challenged existing political orders and opened new opportunities for civic involvement and responsive government. We have also, and continue to be, the home of a large LGBTQ+ voting population that made those past victories possible and has been able to amplify the voice of LGBTQ+ people in our local political system.

This plan dilutes the political voice of the LGBTQ+ community. I don't know if that is intentional, but that is the impact of the proposal in how it divides the existing 5th LD. This comes at a time when the LGBTQ+ community is facing new challenges nationally, and even locally, and needs to have a strong political voice. This plan sends the wrong message. Frankly, I'm astonished that a plan to dilute the LGBTQ+ political voice is even being put forward. Afterall, this isn't Florida or Texas!

A prior map contained in an earlier redistricting draft essentially maintained the 5th LD as currently constituted with adjustments for population shifts. There's no reason that map of the 5th LD cannot be adopted, and I would urge the Commission to do so.

In considering your final map, I'd urge you to keep in mind the value of continuity in terms of representation, maintaining communities of interest and the impact on the political voice of the LGBTQ community which this plan would seriously dilute.

Please reject the proposal to dismantle the 5th LD as currently constituted and adopt a plan which essentially maintains the existing boundaries of the 5th LD with adjustments necessary to reflect population shifts, and which does not dilute the political voice of the LGBTQ+ community.