

Commissioner Holtzman's Observations from Two Meetings of
the
County of San Diego Independent Redistricting Commission

Their agendas are officially posted at the South Entrance of the County Administration Center. Their agendas are translated from English into their required languages, and available, with supporting documents (and for past meetings, minutes) via <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/redistricting/IRCmeetings.html>

Thursday, January 28, 2021, 5:30 p.m.

Meeting is run by Chair, but initial roll call, votes, public commenting, and minutes are administered and recorded by Clerk (The Clerk of the Commission, who appears to be the same person as the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors.^{1,2})

Beginning at this meeting, the Clerk started using a randomizer to change the roll call order for each roll call vote.

Training for Commissioners came up in public comment. Commenter urged them to move fast because they'll have to make hiring & purchasing decisions soon.

They are considering public interviews for line drawer candidates, possibly with opportunities for the public to ask questions.

The local League of Women Voters asked that contractors not be called the "line drawers."

Training at this meeting was focused on transparency about use of government funds, esp. county funds. County has extensive internal controls.

Their county has given them a budget for the calendar year of \$750,000. They will not incur costs for their county staffing. They have extensive county staff support, several "COSD" (County of San Diego) staffers were in Zoom windows and helped with presentations and answering questions.

They were urged to ask in the next couple of months for budget increase (particularly for the training line item?) because the county's budgeting is for its fiscal year, not the calendar year.

They are getting laptops distributed to them.

It appears they do not have an Executive Director.

Their Chair is awarding cookies from his son for particularly good work.

¹ This is similar to the arrangement at the South Coast Air Quality Management District where the Governing Board and the independent Hearing Board share the services of the office of the Clerk of the Boards. I was on the Hearing Board.

² Per state law, in their county, the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors administered the selection of commission members, just like our county's elections official and Auditor-Controller did for us..

They have counsel with an arrangement like ours. Someone questioned the high cost so far of legal services. Someone answered that the number of lawyers and amount of their time needed had probably been underestimated.

They follow the same sequence we try to follow within agenda items: 1. Presentation. 2. Clarifying questions. 3. Opportunity for public comment. 4. Discussion (within a motion, if applicable).

They're looking forward to having a Community of Interest(?)/COI app. (Coming from USC?)

They tabled discussion/appointment of ad hoc committees (working groups).

They are considering having the members who live in a Supervisorial District take the lead in planning the required hearing in that (current) district.

They adjourned at 8:19 p.m. (Just before 3 hours in.)

Thursday, February 11, 2021, 2 p.m.

This meeting included "Redistricting 101" presented by their counsel [Marguerite Mary Leoni](#) (of Nielsen Merksamer Parrinello Gross & Leoni, LLP, in Marin County) and Kathay Feng of Common Cause.

Public comment included a request to engage refugee communities in the process, a request for clear instructions, included in the foreign-language agendas, on how to request live translation.

They took up the ad hoc groups subject they had tabled last time. (They were calling them "ad hoc committees," to distinguish them from "standing committees.") They can have a maximum of 6 members on an ad hoc group.³

The Vice Chair noted that the list of suggested subgroups represented significant commitment of time for commissioners and the public.

The Chair said he doesn't want to be the sole voice of the commission, and might like to let ad hoc groups do media calls.

Someone suggested that all commissioners should be involved in RFP (request for proposals [bids]) processes. Especially for demographic and outreach/engagement services. But for certain specialized subjects/tasks, they appointed interested commissioners to ad hoc groups using a random selection tool — the same one they were using for the order of vote roll calls. (They had specified the size of each group in advance, and apparently guarded against having commissioners serve on more than one ad hoc group.)

The Vice Chair said that "making ourselves truly independent" is important to her.

³ Traditionally, the Chair of a body may sit in on any meeting of a subgroup. With a maximum subgroup membership of 6, the Chair's attendance would put commissioner attendance at 7, not quite a majority of the body. Having 2 Co-Chairs, as we do, affects the math. Particularly regarding the Brown Act.

“Redistricting 101” suggests “flipping the script” to start with listening rather than by adopting any firm ideas of what a redistricting commission wants.

Note: Universities, including Princeton, have projects that offer collaboration opportunities, and apps. Organizations have been putting together outreach materials and guides that commissions can use. (Perhaps reducing costs.)

In the Redistricting 101 Q&A, one commissioner asked if the vast majority of their work would have nothing to do with the Census. And was told that’s pretty much true.

Another commissioner asked what to do about communities like motorcycle owners, veterans, and LGBTQ people, which are geographically spread out, not concentrated. It’s important to hear from them “because they want to tell you that they’re here.” With general comments, it’s a good idea to follow up with questions about locations or institutions that are meaningful to the commenter’s community. Commissioners should prompt commenters for mapping, streets, etc.

Also in the Q&A, a commissioner asked what to do about the pandemic-induced shifts in where people were living when the Census was taken. Could they make any accommodations for that, to reflect a more normal distribution of population? Commissions have to use the data they receive, but might consider pre-existing communities of interest (pun intended).

Kathay Feng had mentioned that having rotating chairs was a good innovation by the state CRC. A commissioner soon raised the issue for later consideration. There appeared to be significant support for the idea. (The terms of their current Chair and Vice Chair are due to expire under the terms of a previous motion.)

The other good state CRC innovation Kathay Feng mentioned was post-meeting socializing. Without discussing anything related to commission business, of course.⁴

(This meeting, too, lasted about 3 hours.)

⁴ The independent hearing board I was on frequently had lunch together in the agency’s cafeteria, without talking about cases at all. Although I found the conversation generally awkward, It was nice to have the chance to talk about other things in life.

Screenshot of “Redistricting 101” slide showing other “independent” commissions in California:



California cities and counties have also moved to independent commissions:

- Berkeley
- Chula Vista
- Escondido
- Oakland
- Long Beach
- Los Angeles County
- Roseville
- Sacramento
- San Diego City
- San Diego County
- Santa Barbara County