

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Building and Planning Committee

Issue Briefing

Topic: Redistricting Ordinance

Prepared By: Robert Duncan, Assistant Township Manager

Date: November 2, 2017

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

The Board is being asked to consider two options to address the populations variations in the 14 voting ward districts in the Township.

1. Authorize a public hearing in December and consider adoption of the redistricting ordinance to modify the voting ward boundary lines.
2. Consider amending the staff established policy to increase from 3% to 6% the variation in the target population in each voting ward.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

The Board of Commissioners must determine whether the variation in population in each of the 14 voting districts is acceptable or whether an ordinance should be considered to modify voting ward boundary lines to provide 14 similarly populated districts.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

The Board is required to make a determination whether the variation in population in the 14 voting wards is acceptable. If the variation is too large, the Board of Commissioners must adopt an ordinance amending the voting ward boundaries to adjust the population in certain districts to equally populate within an acceptable range. Township staff has a long-standing policy established many years ago allowing a population discrepancy between voting wards up to 3%. This 3% range was never adopted by the Board but has been used in at least the last three redistricting determinations. Rather than continuing with this 3% policy because this is what was historically used in the past, staff is seeking Board direction whether to modify this policy and increase it to 6%.

The Township Manager has provided us with information indicating that a population variation range as high as 10% has been accepted in other communities in Pennsylvania. Staff will be recommending the Board amend the policy to 6% due to the difficulty in modifying reasonable ward boundaries as a result of the limitations placed by the state legislative and district court boundary lines.

Changes to population in any of the 14 wards exceeding the acceptable population range requires the adoption of an ordinance to adjust the ward boundary lines bringing the population in each ward to acceptable standards in compliance with the policy.

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

In 2014, the Board adopted a redistricting ordinance to modify the voting ward boundaries based on the population data provided from the 2010 census. Most of the boundary adjustments were routine adjustments to provide as close to equal populations in all 14 wards as possible. Staff met with the Montgomery County Voter Services representatives to review our redistricting plan and they informed us of two potential conflicts with our amended voting boundaries. While we were in the process of completing our redistricting, there was also a Court settlement establishing revised District Justice boundaries that affects Montgomery County, including the Lower Merion Township District Justice boundaries.

The 2014 ordinance adoption was rescinded to address the County and State Voter Services offices concerns. Staff has made the additional adjustments to the redistricting maps to address the concerns raised by the county and state.

The revised redistricting ordinance maps showing the changes to the ward boundaries are attached and will be presented at the November Building & Planning Committee meeting. We have also attached a chart showing the number of residents that must move from one ward to an adjoining ward to meet the population 3% variation criteria. There remain a few districts where we are unable to meet the 3% policy standards due to state and/or federal established boundaries.

The other option available to the Board of Commissioners is to modify the 3% policy referenced above and increase the population variation in voting wards to 6%. This adjustment would allow the voting ward boundaries to remain the same and avoid residents being moved to a different ward.

V. Impact On Township Finances:

This ordinance will have no impact on Township finances.

VI. Staff Recommendation:

Staff is recommending the Board amend the past policy and increase the population variation between wards to 6% to avoid moving residents to new voting wards. This policy change will remain in effect until the 2020 census data is available. The 2020 population census data will likely result in changes to ward boundaries due to population changes in the Township between 2010 and 2020.