



Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2022 — 6:00-7:30 PM

Westminster Hall, 178 W Center St.

Cache Valley League of Women Voters: Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy

- **CVLWV welcome**

- This meeting was recorded on zoom. The meeting in its entirety can be viewed [here](#).

- **Keegan Garrity || All about district-based voting**

- Garrity explained he first learned about district voting when he ran for the Logan Municipal Council in 2019. He didn't know there were alternate ways to the current at-large system but there are! In an at-large voting system, everyone who is on the council can be elected by everyone in the city.
 - In a district-based system voting is based on geographical location. Only the people in that specific district can vote for one person on the council.
 - Examples: school board, water district
- Garrity stated that he has studied this issue for a while and proposed the question: What was the intent of the Logan council when they changed the system in 2009? What was the impact? What should the city do moving forward?
- Prior to 2009, the Logan council seats had to be declared to run for that seat.
 - The committee sought to:
 - improve logan's system
 - allow options for citizens who couldn't afford to run city-wide
 - Assume some amount of geographic distribution for council members
- **Logan demographics**
 - Population: 52,778
 - Area median income: 41,000
 - Owner occupied housing: 39%
 - Median age: 24
 - Hispanic or Latino pop: 15.3%
- **Neighborhoods**
 - Six neighborhoods, defined by elementary school boundaries

- Three on the east side of Main Street and three on the west.
 - 51% of the population is on the west side.
 - 49% is on the east.
 - Note: as of Jan. 2022, there are now five elementary school precincts. Neighborhood councils are the same.
- In 2020 a committee was formed with 1 representative from each neighborhood to examine the impact of the change from declared seats to at-large.
 - The purpose of the committee formed by the Logan Municipal council was to determine if it was something worth looking into, to ask questions, and to look at expenses of campaigns.
 - **Findings:**
 - Garrity made it clear that his presentation is specific to Logan. Different areas have different demographics, but this is what he thought would be best for Logan.
 - Garrity pointed out it is not often that a clean before and after can be examined. The biggest benefit was that the committee could see some of the impact. They were looking for consistencies in correlation.
- Under a declared seat system the number of candidates from the east and west side of main street were similar. Under an at-large system, no more than one person from the west served on the council at a time. (Currently this would be Ernesto Lopez.)
 - Garrity clarified that although it appears the west lacks representation, it is two specific neighborhoods that produce candidates in comparison to the four others.
 - Most of the candidates that both ran and were successful were from the Hillcrest and Wilson neighborhoods. Most candidates from the west side were elected via appointment after a previous member had to leave mid-term.
 - All but two council members earned their initial seat from an election from those two neighborhoods.
 - Even though the west side has much of the population, they've never had more than one representative at a time.
- What's different about those neighborhoods?
 - Demographics
 - Hillcrest and Wilson have a higher income
 - Woodruff has the highest Latino population
 - Homeownership: majority is in hillcrest and Wilson

- Have to be selective of where you want to go. Precinct boundaries have since been changed and updated.
- Garrity stated that 8 of 40 precincts have determined election outcomes with 100% certainty. If you win these 8, you basically win the election. Some areas have higher turnout than others. The voter turnout was higher in 2021 than it had been previously – 32%.
 - 6 of 8 precincts are on east.
 - These 8 precincts represent <30% of the city population.
 - If you were to divide precincts into 5 districts, what would happen?
 - Gender was unchanged before and after
 - From Purdue, in-district based voting, women could be disadvantaged by .05. It was unclear whether this was for all women or just white women.
- Garrity gave praise to the league for equal voice and proportionality.
 - He additionally shared some concerns about district voting.
 - A potential smaller pool of candidates could result in unopposed race or head-to-head negative campaigning.
 - Candidates could get elected with less votes in an already poor voter turnout cycle.
 - Council members could prioritize their own districts over city wide concerns.
- Garrity noted that in the current system someone could alienate 75% of the city and still get elected if they focused on Hillcrest and Wilson only.
 - Voters no longer get to vote for each candidate.
 - However, Garrity made a third suggestion: A mixed system. Three seats could be district based and two could be at-large, giving a voter population the choice.
- There is no magic answer to getting people to run.
- The outcome of the committee was a 5-1 vote for district-based voting system. Results were delivered to the council in January of 2021.
 - The council had concerns and planned to wait for the results of the census and precinct changes.
 - In their first meeting, they approved voter participation areas; a city must establish equal participation areas based on population.
 - The council also approved school board boundaries for 5 precincts instead of the previous six in January 2022.
- **What's next?**

- Garrity said it was extremely rare that a council would change the system by which they were voted. The way to change is a lawsuit or a threat of a lawsuit that proves discrimination.
- **Paths to district-based voting**
 - Council can change the voting system to district or ranked choice voting if the total number of seats remain the same.
 - Residents can get a referendum on the ballot (10% of registered voters within those voter participation precincts).
 - State legislature could require all cities with a minimum to implement districts.
 - Litigation
- Garrity proposed options for how to draw districts if the system changed.
 - Based on school board boundaries for Logan school district
 - Garrity stated his worry about drawing districts without a guide, stating “If we draw them, we should use drawn boundaries to avoid a bias” or suggested appointing an independent redistricting committee.
 - Hybrids, based on city council boundaries
 - Five seats on the council but split into district and at-large. Three district-based, two at-large.
- In conclusion, Garrity wrapped up by stating he served on this committee and the council has not done anything with the information yet. He is a believer in districts because he feels it is the best way to get the four neighborhoods without current influence, a voice on council.
 - Amy Anderson, a member of the LWV and a current councilwoman on the Logan Municipal board, updated the attendees with a reminder that now that they had census information, they could start to look more into the situation.
- Questions:
 - Could we add a seat?
 - Difficult, would need state approval
 - Do councils want an odd number?
 - Yes, for tie breakers
 - No population amount triggers additional seats
 - Neighborhood councils are not elected
 - Most people in the neighborhood don’t hear about them and not all the councils are active. What to do about that?
 - Wilson and Woodruff neighborhoods are the most active and are just volunteers
 - Representation?

- Black men had a 10% increase in a district-based system.
- Pleasant Grove, AL has a 54% black population, but a black man had never been elected. Threat of lawsuit changed the system to district-based for this reason.
- Could districts increase voter turnout?
 - Not a strong correlation
 - People who vote are educated, religious, white, and older. This reflected. When a candidate runs, the precincts around that candidate increase in voter turnout.
- How can we get the council to consider this issue?
 - Amy Anderson explained it will probably be brought up at the council over the next few months and examine that census data.
 - Districts must be within 10% of the same size.
- **Damon Cann || The Pros and Cons of District-based Voting**
 - Cann thanked the LWV for the opportunity to present and called it an “amazing organization.” He mentioned that it was the League that brought back televised debates in the seventies after the failure of Nixon and are currently working to make the country more stable.
 - **What can you change in an election?**
 - Can't change...
 - Date of election
 - Term lengths
 - Anything set in state law
 - Can change...
 - Partisan/nonpartisan format
 - Primary approach
 - Mail vs. in person voting
 - District voting vs. At Large
 - **Legal districting approaches**
 - Single member district
 - Each district selects one representative on the council, i.e., Salt Lake City
 - At large
 - Entire city compresses a single district; city with the most votes win i.e., Logan

- At large is the most common form. 248 municipalities; 80% are less than 40k population
 - Mixed system
 - Most members are selected from single districts and then 1-3 are elected at large. I.E. West Valley City
 - At large is appropriate for Logan based on geographics and population
 - 20 largest cities, 8 use at large, 7 use single members, 5 use a mixed system.
- Concerns and issues will not be fixed with a district-based voting system.
- **District elections**
 - Pros
 - Better geographical representation.
 - Better representation of racial minorities if concentrated in specific neighborhoods.
 - Council members are aware of unique geographic needs.
 - Citizens know exactly who to go to with their issues.
 - Should care about geographic location.
 - Cann said that people want people who look like them to represent them. He also stated that there will be issues that can be addressed in one system that might not be able to be addressed in the other and that's what causes issues.
 - Cons
 - Lower levels of candidate recruitment.
 - Council members tend to prioritize their district over city wide concerns.
 - Political particularism
 - Negative campaigning is easier.
- **At large**
 - Pros
 - Don't have to create districts (no gerrymandering!)
 - Remember, how much does geographical location matter in your specific situation?
 - All members take a city-wide view.
 - Easier to recruit candidates.

- Makes negative campaigning more difficult.
- School studies suggest a better gender balance.
- **Specific issues**
 - Turnout
 - Diversity
 - Redistricting requirements
 - Districts must be the same size
 - Districts should be
 - Contiguous
 - Compact
 - Preserve communities of interest
 - Nesting/political boundaries
- With district voting, Cann explained that districts now have to be redrawn every ten years, which can be a struggle.

Important Contacts:

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LWVU Website: www.lwvutah.org

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