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San Diegans voiced their opinions about the redistricting process at the first and only citywide weekend public hearing Saturday at the Balboa Park Club.

More than two dozen community members from the current eight city council districts shared their thoughts with the seven-member Redistricting Commission about the map that will soon divide San Diego into nine districts.

“We are very committed to hearing what you have to say about redistricting,” said Chairwoman Anisha Dalal at the start of the public hearing. “We want to make sure that we hear your voice and capture all ideas.”

**Commissioners Arthur Nishioka, Theresa Quiroz and David Potter listen to community input during a citywide public hearing Saturday.**

While redistricting occurs every 10 years, this is the first time a new district will be added since the 1960s. Voters approved the creation of a ninth district last year.

George Mitrovich, a member of the city’s Human Relations Commission, read a letter that was adopted by his commission and directed to the Redistricting Commission.

“With all due respect, we remind you of the importance of being responsive to the great diversity that marks San Diego,” Mitrovich said. “We have serious concerns regarding those communities of interest that in the past have been marginalized in the process. We urge you to maximize representation of all of our communities.”

Most of the speakers sought a continued or strengthened representation of minority communities.

“It’s important to me as a Hispanic that there are districts that represent the diversity of people in San Diego,” said a speaker from Clairemont. “It is important for the Asian communities, African communities and the Hispanic communities to be fairly represented in the council.”

Several Latino speakers addressed the commission in support of a second Latino district. They requested, however, that the commission not divide District 8. A few of the speakers spoke in Spanish and an interpreter translated their comments.

“We do not want to see District 8 divided,” said the interpreter on behalf of one speaker. “I do support the idea of another Latino district, but I want to maintain District 8 as it is.”

Through the interpreter, another speaker agreed: “This community has been where we Latinos have felt good. We feel that we belong here, where we have our friends and our relatives.”

Franco Garcia, a representative from the Environmental Health Coalition, which works with underrepresented communities on environmental justice and environmental health issues, urged the commission to use the creation of a ninth district as “an opportunity to further empower other minority groups.”

“We have the opportunity to give proper representation because we have nine city council districts,” Garcia said. “With that in mind, we do support, as much as possible, maintainment of the communities that work together in our part of District 8. Because we are going to nine districts, we understand that each district will change and probably be getting smaller.”

Several other community members argued for a united Kearny Mesa, Mira Mesa, Miramar Marine Corps Air Station and Rancho Peñasquitos district.

Mira Mesa resident James Cunningham said it's "a mistake" to divide the communities as they are now.

"Mira Mesa and Peñasquitos have many of the same concerns, such as traffic issues, public safety and the preservation of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, which backs up to my home," said Cunningham. "Both communities share the canyon as a recreational space, and wildfires can be devastating to both communities, so I feel it's in the best interest that these communities are in the same district."

He asked that the commission use the surrounding freeways as natural district borders.

"I feel like that would be a perfect district for me to live in," he said.

Another speaker from Rancho Peñasquitos disagreed: "Whatever you do, just don't do that! That will split Rancho Peñasquitos right in half," he said. "That would not be a boundary that we would like no matter what map you come up with. ... This whole issue is very complicated."

Representatives from the Asian & Pacific American Coalition of San Diego also asked that the same communities form one district in hopes of increasing the chances of electing an Asian to the council.

"The Latino and LGBT communities have shown that local representation is the gateway to state government or to state matters," said one coalition representative. "These groups have shown that our system works."

Another representative from the coalition reminded the commission that Asian and Pacific Americans are the second largest minority group in San Diego, after Latinos.

"Please listen to the voice of the people and help us preserve the communities of interest in the new proposed District 9 as one district so that we can all make this great city a better place to live," he said.

Hillcrest resident Ann Garwood said she believed many people from her neighborhoods wanted to come to the meeting, but were unable to make it.

Garwood said that it "is not fair" that the older neighborhoods surrounding Balboa Park are currently divided.

"I think that these older, rich communities have a need to be represented at City Hall, and we really aren't being because we're splintered," she said.

"I support the older neighborhoods of character being represented by one council member and to have that represented voice speak for our community. I think we are tied with the neighborhood as 'our community,' and even though I'm a lesbian, that's not why I chose this as my home."

Residents from the beach communities also addressed the commission.

One De Anza Cove resident said his community should be a part of District 2 like the rest of Mission Bay, because they share the same beach and bay issues.

An Ocean Beach resident pointed out that Point Loma has two distinct communities. Eastern Point Loma is connected to downtown and has "deep military roots," she said. Western Point Loma is similar to Ocean Beach and other beach communities, she said. Thus, they should not be "lumped" as one, she said.

Chief of Staff Midori Wong presented a 2010 redistricting and U.S. Census data overview. The San Diego Deputy City Attorney gave an overview of redistricting criteria.

The Redistricting Commission will hold public hearings in every district through mid-May. The next meeting will take place this evening at the Regional Transportation Center Showroom in District 3.

In May and June, the commission will develop a preliminary plan and hold additional public hearings in July before the commission adopts the final plan in August.

For those unable to attend the meetings, minutes of the meetings can be found on the commission's website. The meetings are also [broadcast and archived on CityTV](#).

To view learn more about the redistricting process, visit <http://www.sandiego.gov/redistricting/index.shtml>.



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