

February 17, 2012

Chairman Regnier and District and Apportionment Commissioners
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620

Chairman Regnier and Commissioners,

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to offer local suggestions in the redistricting process. As we have said in previous testimony, it is our hope that the commission will work to create legislative districts that are based on common-sense boundaries, such as neighborhoods, school districts and trade areas. To that extent, we would ask that you disregard current legislative lines when creating the 2014 maps and simply start with a clean slate.

The Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce has been working with other interested parties to create a suggested map for Cascade County and the city of Great Falls. We have worked to follow the guidelines adopted by the Commission.

We began drawing our districts based on neighborhoods and communities of interest in the county. For almost two decades, Great Falls has had organized Neighborhood Councils where neighbors come together to work on common issues. These maps were the basis for our proposal.

In order to keep communities of interest intact and observe existing geographic and political lines, our proposed districts do deviate from the preferred 9,894. However, we believe that we have kept each district within the 3% allowable deviation and can offer justification for each district.

We propose five House Districts that would be almost entirely contained in city limits and two that would contain some portions of the city and then venture out into the county into fairly dense rural population. A seventh district would be entirely rural.

As you know, Cascade County population (81,327) does not justify an eighth House seat. However, in order to not exceed the allowable deviation, some of the county needs to be apportioned with a neighboring area. We suggest that the northeast corner be added to the district that will encompass Chouteau County. This would follow the guidelines of creating districts following communities of interest (primarily agricultural area) and assist with making the Chouteau County district more compact and contiguous than if it needed to extend even further to the north and east.

Please accept the following explanation for the population deviations proposed in Cascade County. Our comments reflect the proposal on the attached maps.

Beginning in the center of town, in the area that is east of the Missouri River and north of 10th Avenue South: This is the Original Townsite and includes our historical downtown business district, a large number of rental properties and many of the historic homes in our community. As you can see from the attached map we ask that this district cross the Missouri River at the 15th Street Bridge and include the community of Black Eagle. This area is also one of the oldest parts of our community. It also includes their small business district and a large number of rental properties. Three elementary schools are included in this area. This district is fully developed and has very limited opportunity for additional housing units. For this reason, we ask that the commission allow this district to be approximately 230 over the ideal population in order to maintain the locally accepted boundary of the one way streets that divide Great Falls.

The proposed District in the center of Great Falls: This section of town is also fully developed and there is little room for infill or growth. It contains four elementary schools, Great Falls High School and the Alternative High School. It is primarily single family homes on standard city lots. There is very little multi-family housing or commercial property in this neighborhood. The northern portion includes industrial properties between 8th Avenue North and the Missouri River. This proposed District population is approximately 180 over the ideal. However, to move this small number into another District it would require the boundary line to shift east for only a few blocks and not make a clear and reasonable dividing line.

East end of Great Falls: The proposed District is very near the top range of the deviation. This portion of town includes three elementary schools, a junior high and the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. A large number of military families live in this neighborhood due to its proximity to Malmstrom Air Force Base. The homes in this area were primarily built in the late 1960's thru the early 1990's and the area is nearly fully developed. We ask that you allow for this deviation in order to keep the eastside community intact.

South of 10th Avenue South: We propose that this district primarily follow the city limit lines. In order to maintain ideal population, we also included high density residential areas that border the city limits. These areas are built at much the same density as the adjacent area in city limits. These are also the areas that are currently being built out and annexed into the city in small sections. This area includes two elementary schools, the MSU College of Technology, and the University of Great Falls. The hospital and nearly the entire medical complex in our community are spread from the west end to nearly 32nd street on the east. We believe that the population deviation in this District is very close to ideal.

Riverview area north of the Missouri River: This area of town was first developed with the missile complex in the 1960's. The northern portion of this area is one of the newest areas of development in Great Falls and is growing rapidly. This area includes three elementary schools, a junior high and CMR High School, as well as the Headstart Program. The refinery and a portion of the Westside business district are included in

this area. Riverview is a close-knit and well defined neighborhood in Great Falls. Although this District is nearly 150 under in population, it is likely the fastest growing area of our community.

Westside/Rural: *The “Westside” is probably the most definable community in Great Falls and very proud of their heritage and status. The area near the river is made up of older homes that originally housed many railroad employees. This area includes the Fairgrounds, Burlington Northern railroad yards and the Westside business district. As you move west in this district you will find non-homogenous lots and housing. These lots will vary in size from standard city lots to up to ten acres. As you get further west, limited stock animals are also allowed. These two to twenty acre lots make up the majority of the area north of the Sun River, thru the area known as Sun Prairie and on out west of the community of Vaughn. Vaughn, Sun River, Fort Shaw and Simms all share a high school located in Simms. Some of the children in Sun Prairie also attend Simms High School. We chose to use Highway 200 as a boundary in order to follow existing political and geographic boundaries. However, Cascade County has identified and zoned areas around the communities of Sun River, Fort Shaw and Simms that are considered potential growth areas for those communities. We propose that this district “sweep” south of Highway 200 in these areas to include the entire community in one House District. This area would include three elementary schools (one in Great Falls, Vaughn and Fort Shaw) and Simms High School, which also houses their Junior High. We believe that this population deviation is very close to ideal.*

Fox Farm/Rural: *This proposed District lies south of the Sun River and west of the Missouri River. This area is often referred to as the “Country Club addition” and includes higher end homes on lots that are a bit larger than other lots within the city of Great Falls. We extended this District south along the Missouri River to Ulm, in order to include all the new development south of town. This area south of town includes large numbers of five to twenty acre lots and no longer contains large amounts of agriculture production. We again followed the county zoning around the community of Ulm to keep the community intact in one legislative district. The choice of the Ulm Pishkun road as a dividing line was very intentional. West of this road is still primarily production agriculture. Although there are still a number of acres of agriculture production east of the road, it is quickly filling with five to twenty acre developments. This area includes two elementary schools, one in Great Falls and one in Ulm. It also includes the airport, the county jail, the National Guard headquarters and the industrial development around the airport. We believe that the population of this District is very close to ideal.*

Rural District: *This is likely the most diverse in our proposal and actually contains many different communities of interest. However, in order to keep the District compact, follow county lines and meet the ideal population numbers, it needs to be a large district that includes most of the rural communities in our county. Cascade, Belt, Centerville, Stockett, Sand Coulee and Neihart are all included in this District. It includes three elementary schools and three high schools. The District is primarily production agriculture with forest in the southeast section. This district will also include Malmstrom Air Force Base. The Great Falls community is committed to keep the community of MAFB intact in one legislative house district. It seems reasonable to combine this*

smaller community with the other six small communities in this district. We believe this District population is also very close to ideal.

The Great Falls Chamber appreciates the Commission's consideration of our proposal when redistricting Cascade County for legislative purposes. We have worked with a number of interested organizations and government officials in order to create a map that truly represented the neighborhoods and communities in our county.

Please feel free to contact our lobbyist, Ronda Wiggers at 406-899-5659, if you have questions or need more information concerning this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Malicott', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Steve Malicott
President
Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce