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From: applications.administrator@capitol.local
Sent: Monday, February 15, 2021 4:07 PM
To: Senate Redistricting
Subject: INETMAIL: Redistricting Public Input
Attachments: Texas Congressional and Municipal Districts.pdf

Date: 2021-02-15
First Name: Byrwec
Last Name: Ellison
Title: NA
Organization: Citizens for Independent Redistricting Fort Worth
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State: TX
Zipcode: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: ALL

Message:

I'm following up remarks that I gave in my public testimony to the Senate Special Committee's February 4 hearing in order to provide maps and photographs in the attached file.

In my testimony, I asked a few concrete things of you. First, that when you draw our new districts, you refrain from combining metropolitan areas with exurban and rural counties. Apart the political cracking, the practice disfranchises and dilutes the interests of voters across the state landscape. Residents of sparsely populated areas have very different concerns from those of us in the DFW metroplex. For instance, we have lots of hospitals here in DFW, but Texas leads the nation in rural hospital closures. In the 1960s, there were 300 rural hospitals and medical centers, thanks to the federal government's Hill-Burton Act. Today we have something closer to 150, and half of those are at risk of shutting down. The residents of those communities deserve representatives who will carry the ball on issues of unique concern to them.

But getting back to urban neighborhoods and communities in DFW, how you break them up has a big impact here at our municipal level. The district boundaries that you draw in Austin – which includes Congressional, State Senate and House and Board of Education – in addition to our Court and County Commissioner precincts, those determine how our voting precincts are drawn. And way downstream in that mapping process, our City Council districts have to use those voting precincts as building blocks. So when you break up a small neighborhood, it not only splits up a community between far-flung Congressional or Legislative districts, it can also separate neighbors between two different City Council members. I'm speaking about small residential neighborhoods where kids might play in the street, or you cross the street to borrow a bowl of sugar. Yet your neighbor has different members of Congress and City Council.

I can point several examples. The attached file notes two: a tiny neighborhood across the street from Eastern Hills High School in east Fort Worth and a jagged border along Brentwood Stair Rd. a few blocks away. Half the residents of these two neighborhoods are notched away into a packed 85% minority Congressional District 33 that stretches from Fort Worth Stockyards to Dallas Love Field; the other half are in a cracked District 6 that combines half a million residents of Southeast Tarrant County with the 200,000 people who live in Ellis and Navarro Counties. And because the Tarrant

County Elections Office had to draw the precinct boundary along that Congressional border, the residents of those small communities are split between two Fort Worth City Council Districts 4 and 5. Our cities are riddled with that kind of residential neighborhood butchery.

I understand that Congressional districts have to be nearly exact in population, but there's no discernable reason to break up our neighborhoods so finely or arbitrarily to achieve that. Nor must you combine urban and rural counties. You can make rural districts that are reasonably compact in shape and scarcely larger than our current ones without having to burrow deep into dense metropolitan counties.

Moreover, you could do our cities a great favor by following existing school district boundaries or even school attendance zones – which are legitimate communities of interest – when you draw boundaries in our neighborhoods. Fort Worth comprises 14 different school districts, and those ISDs often have to deal with two or three different Council members when it would be simpler to deal with just one. If your district lines traced school district boundaries to the extent possible, it would allow Counties to draw voting precincts along those lines and Cities to draw council districts that conform with school district lines and serve our needs better.



To: Texas Senate Special Committee on Redistricting

From: Byrwec Ellison, Fort Worth

I'm writing to ask some concrete things of you. First, I ask that when you draw our new districts, you refrain from combining metropolitan areas with exurban and rural counties. Apart the political cracking, the practice disfranchises and dilutes the interests of voters across the state landscape. Residents of sparsely populated areas have very different concerns from those of us in the metroplex. For instance, we have lots of hospitals here in DFW, but Texas leads the nation in rural hospital closures. In the 1960s, there were 300 rural hospitals and medical centers. Today it's something like 150, and half of those are at risk of shutting down. The residents of those parts deserve representatives who'll carry the ball on issues of unique concern to them.

While it's understood that Congressional districts must be nearly exact in dividing the state population, it's possible to construct rural districts that are reasonably compact in shape and scarcely larger than our current ones without burrowing deep into dense metropolitan counties. Fig. 1 is an idealized map of 16 North Texas Congressional districts using the 2010 Census data and 2012 precincts. Each of the districts has roughly 700,000 residents; the target population in the last redistricting cycle was 698,488. Yet none of the 12 rural districts cross county borders or siphon residents from the DFW metroplex. It would require only minor adjustments of borders and precincts to achieve the target Congressional district population with a minimum of cross-county sharing.

Contrast that with the current Congressional districts shown in Fig. 2, which are drawn with extensive cracking of metropolitan counties that siphon off large numbers of urban residents into exurban and rural districts. The rural districts in Fig. 1 are still reasonably compact in shape as compared with ones in Fig. 2 and not appreciably greater in extent for sparsely populated regions. It is possible, therefore, to draw districts that respect the differing needs of urban and rural residents.

Fig. 1 – North Texas Congressional Districts (Idealized Model)

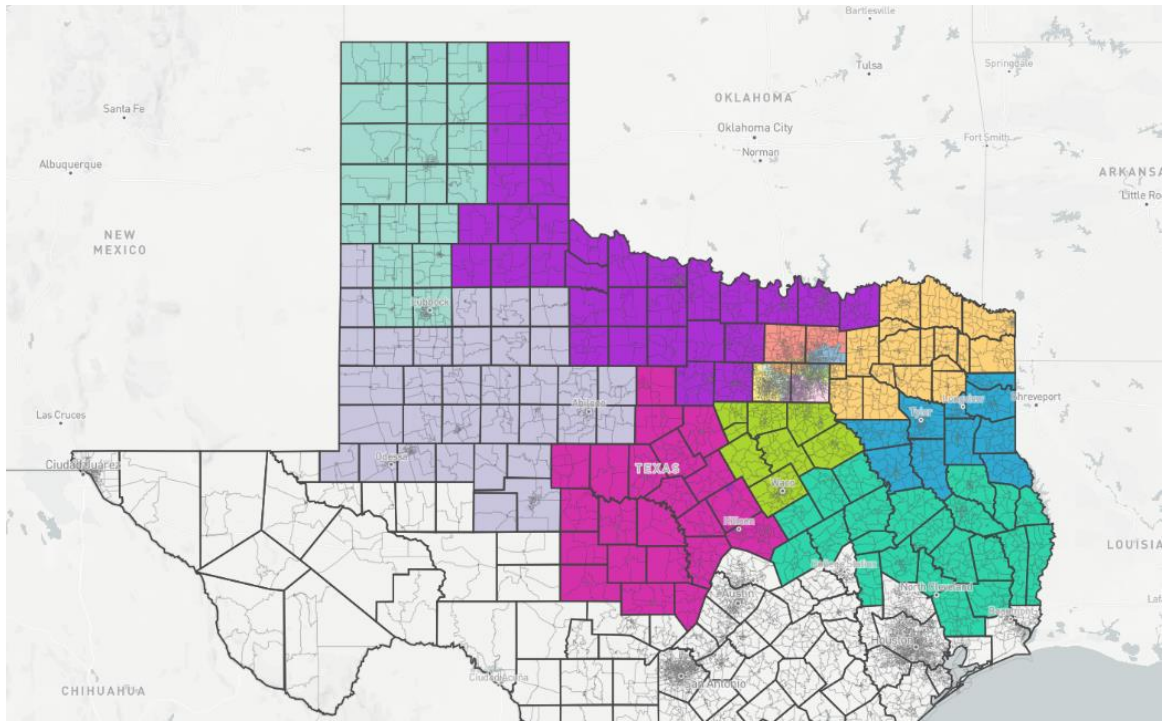


Fig. 2 – Current Texas Congressional Districts

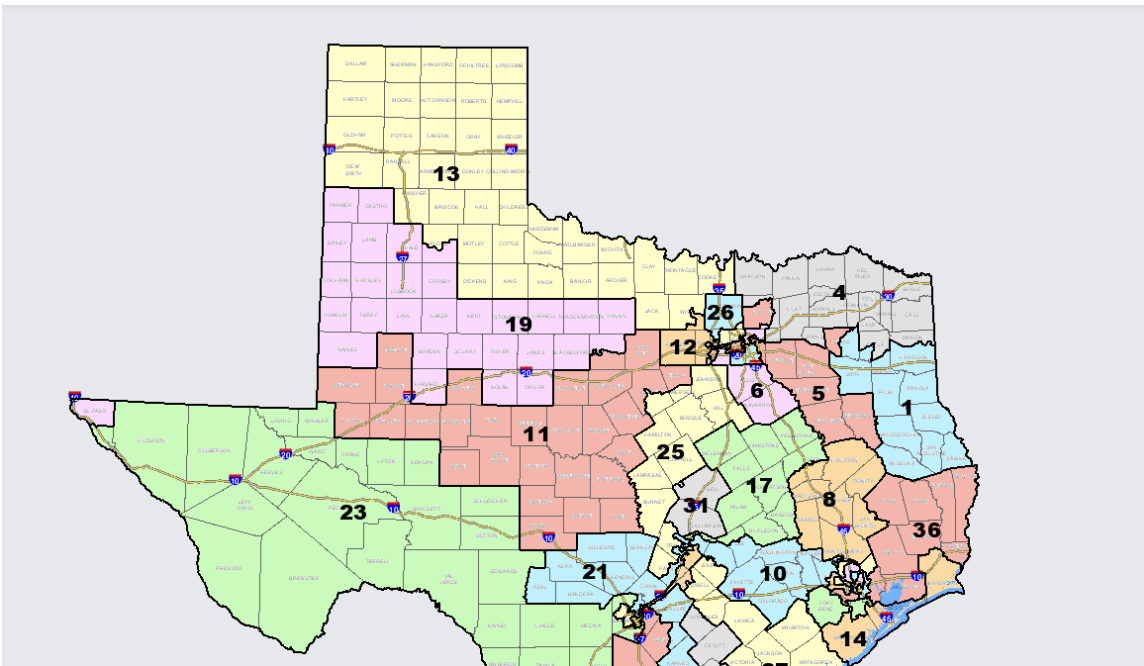


Fig. 3 is a close-up of the idealized district map shown in Fig. 1, zoomed in to the four counties that make up the DFW metroplex. They are broken up into eight Congressional districts of roughly the same population. While those districts do cross borders within the four metropolitan counties, they do not extend beyond those four, and it would require but small adjustments to reach the required target population number for each district.

Fig. 3 – DFW Metroplex Congressional Districts (Idealized Model)

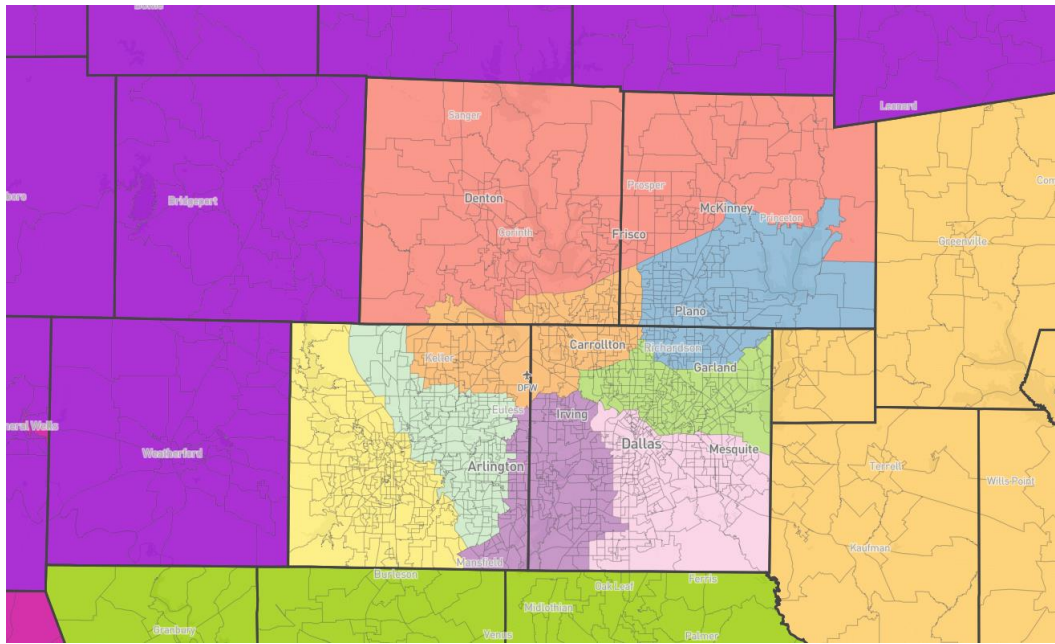
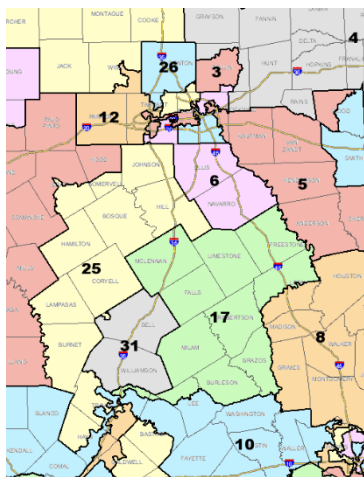


Fig. 4 – Current DFW Metroplex Congressional Districts



Again, contrast that with the current district map (Fig. 4), which breaks the metroplex up into 10 or 11 districts, some of which extend well into rural areas, and District 25 encompasses parts of distant metropolitan Tarrant County and metropolitan Travis County.

Beyond the diluting effect of combining urban and rural residents, the district boundaries drawn by the Legislature have an outsized impact at our municipal level. The districts drawn in Austin – Congressional, State Senate and House and Board of Education – together with locally drawn Court and County Commissioner precincts determine the layout of county voting precincts. The voting precincts must conform to those governmental units. And far downstream in the mapping process, our City Council districts use those voting precincts as building blocks. Thus, when small neighborhoods are broken up by the Legislature’s redistricting scheme, it not only splits those communities between far-flung Congressional or Legislative districts, it also puts neighbors into different City Council districts.

Take the area in east Fort Worth split up between Congressional Districts 6 and 33 shown in close up in Fig. 5. District 33 is a minority opportunity district that stretches from the Fort Worth Stockyards to Cedar Hill to Dallas Love Field. District 6 encompasses the southeast quadrant of Tarrant County with half a million residents plus all of neighboring Ellis and Navarro Counties. Yet the irregular notches and zig-zagging borders between them carve up intimate neighborhoods because they force those changes on local voting precincts as displayed in Figs. 6 and 7, which show the voting precinct boundaries in that part of town in 2010 and the revised boundaries in 2012, respectively. Prior to the last redistricting cycle in 2012, the voting precincts were smooth, regular rectangles.

Fig. 5 – Congressional Districts 6 & 33, East Fort Worth

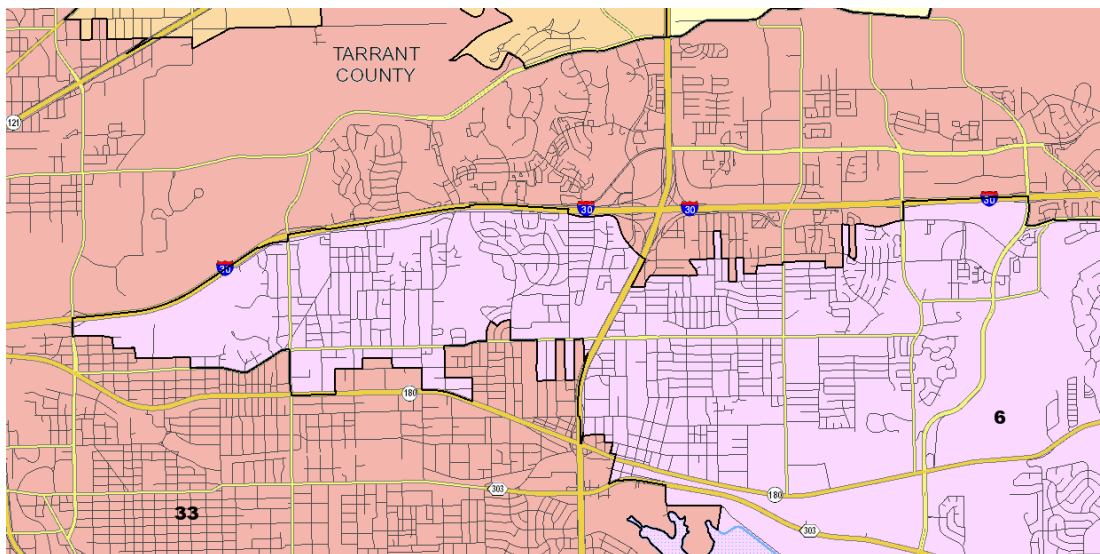


Fig. 6 – East Fort Worth Voting Precincts (2010)

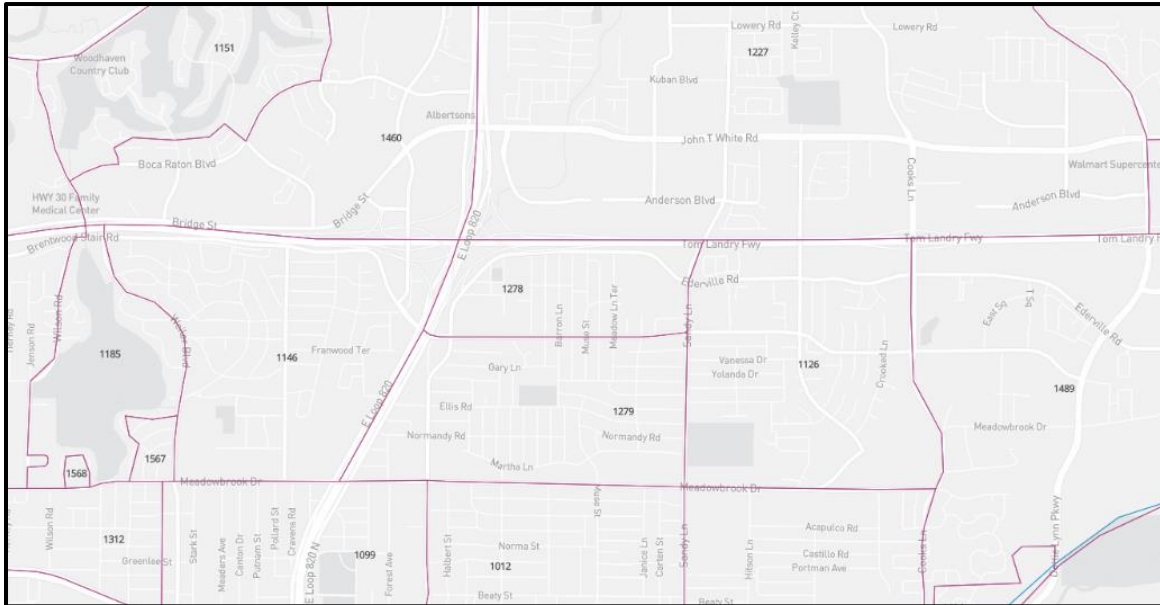
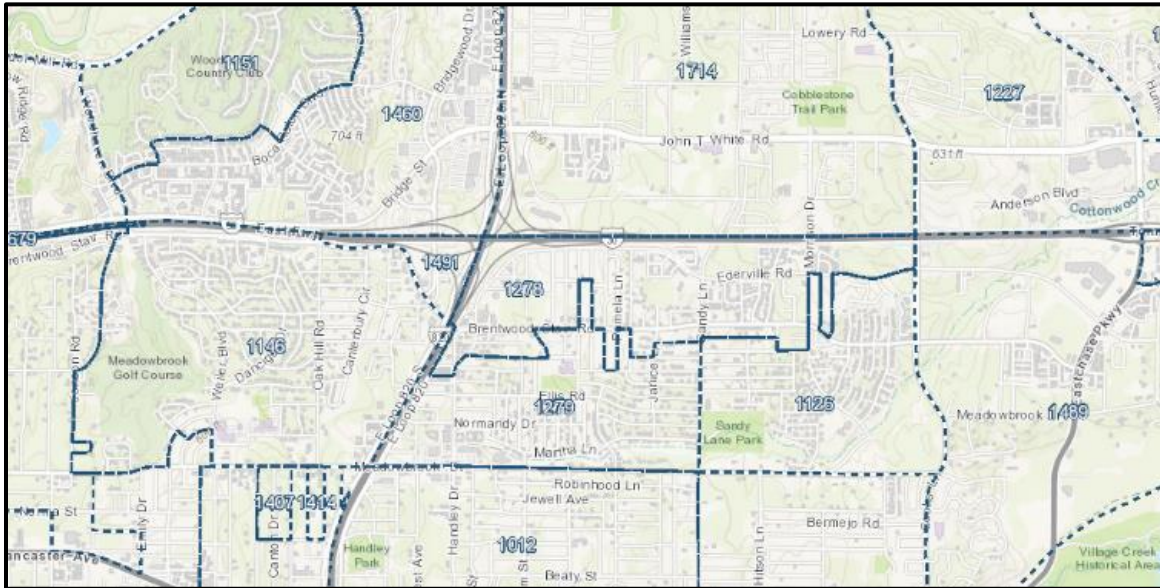


Fig. 7 – East Fort Worth Voting Precincts (2012)



Consider two neighborhoods in east Fort Worth that are broken up by that Congressional district split. One is a sawtooth pattern along Brentwood Stair Rd. The other is a small enclave west of Eastern Hills High School that is cut in half by the two Congressional districts. In both instances, they are also split into separate City Council Districts 4 and 5 as shown in Figs. 9 and 10.

Fig. 8 – Two Neighborhoods in East Fort Worth, Brentwood Stair Rd. & Meadowbrook Blvd.

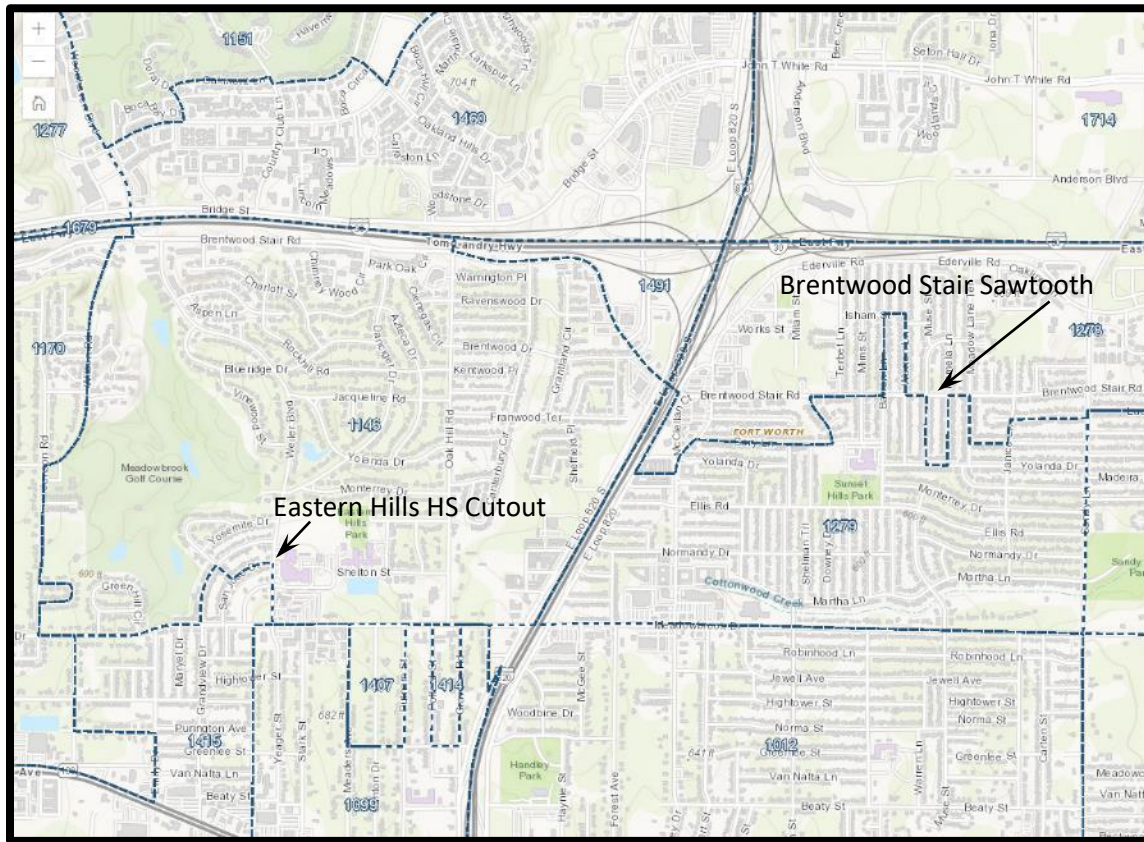


Fig. 9 – Brentwood Stair Rd. Sawtooth



Fig. 10 – Eastern Hills High School Notch



The figures that follow show those two neighborhoods on the ground. As anyone can see, there is nothing that distinguishes one block from another that is just across the street. These are integral neighborhoods that ought to share the same City Councilmember, not to mention the same Member of Congress. The City Council split is a particularly acute hardship because of the local impact it has on the common interests of residents in these communities. Our cities are riddled with this butchery of residential neighborhoods that serve no one's interest who lives in these communities. These inexplicable irregularities have the look of redistricting software mappers run amok. We who live in these communities can only plead with the legislative redistricting committees to refrain from breaking up our neighborhoods in this inconsiderate and capricious manner in the coming redistricting cycle.

Fig. 11 – Brentwood Stair Rd. Sawtooth



Fig. 12 – Brentwood Stair Rd. Sawtooth



Fig. 13 – Brentwood Stair Rd. Sawtooth



Fig. 14 – Brentwood Stair Rd. Sawtooth

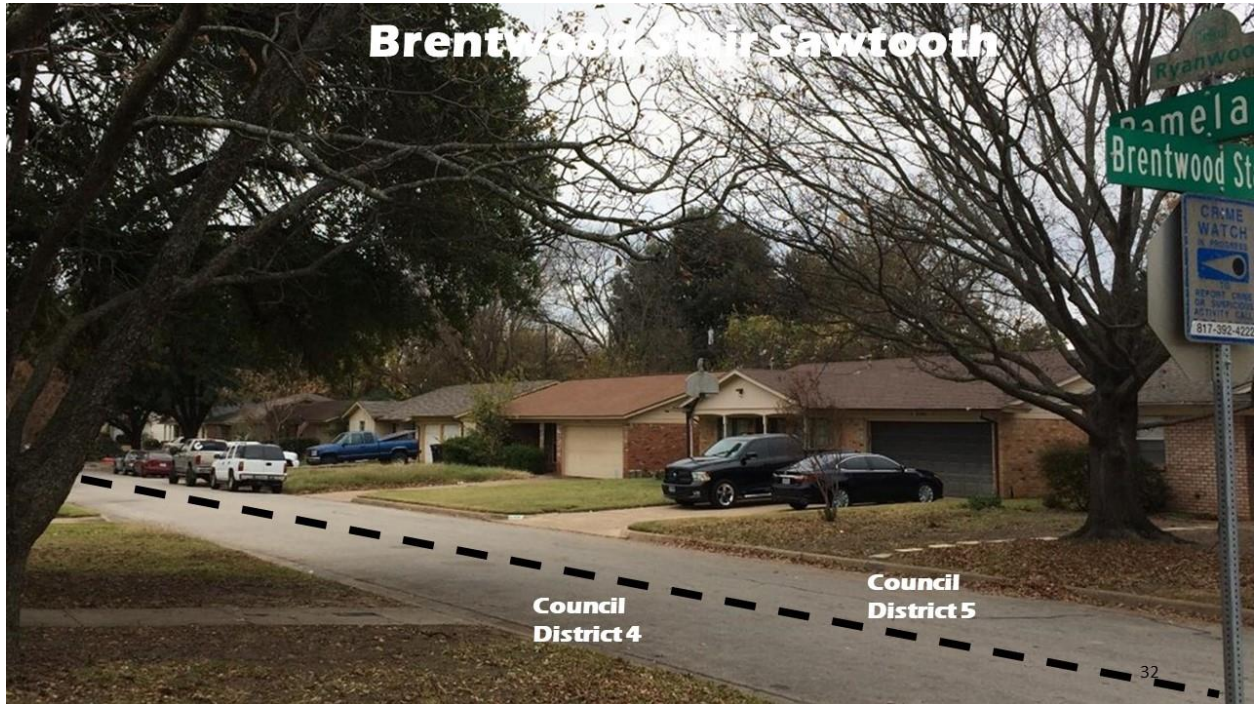


Fig. 15 – Eastern Hills High School Notch

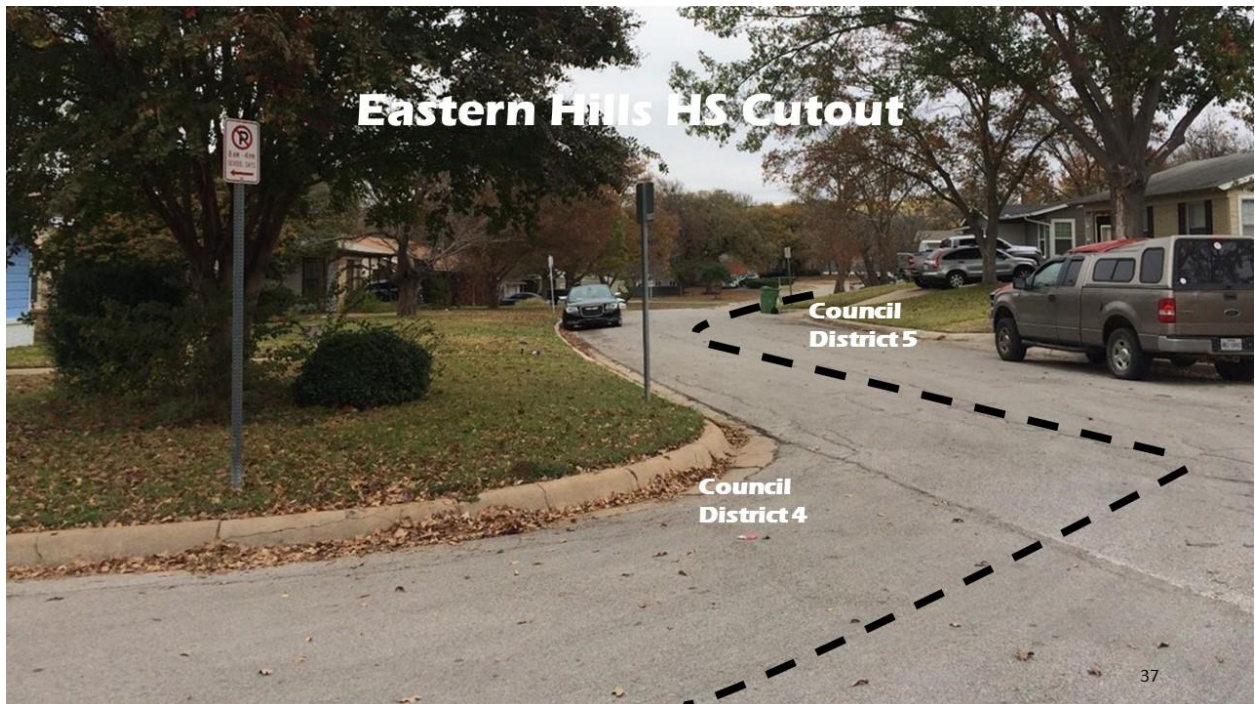


Fig. 16 – Eastern Hills High School Notch



One way that our legislative redistricting committees could do our cities a favor would be by drawing district boundaries along existing school district boundaries or even school attendance zones – which are legitimate communities of interest – to the extent possible. For instance, the city of Fort Worth comprises 14 different school districts, and those ISDs typically deal with two or three different Council members. It would be simpler for those school districts to work with just one member. Many issues that come before our City Councils – including policing, zoning, traffic control, public works projects and more – are driven by the needs of our schools. If Congressional and Legislative district lines traced the school boundaries, it would allow the County Elections Offices to draw voting precincts along those lines and let Cities draw council districts that conform to our school zones. That action would improve our Cities’ responsiveness to schools and serve the needs of our urban communities far better than the current maps do.