

## INSTRUCTIONS TO DISTRICTING COMMITTEE 2011

As the San Juan County Districting Committee, your job, as described in RCW and in the County's Charter, is to draw a legislative re-districting plan for the County in accordance with population data gathered in the 2010 census.

History. A little history on San Juan County districts: The current districts were set by the Freeholders when they drew up the Charter, which increased the number of districts from 3 to 6. One of the intents of the Freeholders was to move away from the uneven (in population) districts previously used in San Juan County to districts that better represented the Federal guideline of "one person, one vote." As a matter of convenience, they used existing precinct lines to create districts as close to equal—in numbers of registered voters—as they could. Precincts were the smallest identifiable block of voters available to them, and they did not have the time to pursue other methods of dividing the population.

The current task. Your task is different. First, you want your districts to be equal in population, not equal in registered voters. Second, you do not have to abide by existing precinct lines. Although Elections staff is already working on draft changes to precincts, our final precinct plan will not be drawn and adopted until after your districting plan is adopted. Rather than precincts, your smallest identifiable block of population is census blocks, which are shown, with population counts, on the map included in your packet. You can use these blocks to define districts more precisely than precinct lines would allow.

According to RCW 29A.76.010, which is included in your packet, your district plan should be consistent with the following criteria:

1. Districts are as nearly equal in population as possible.
2. Districts are as compact as possible.
3. Districts are geographically contiguous. (With islands, we can group any islands together, because they are all joined by a common body of water.)
4. Districts may not be drawn in such a way as to favor any political or racial group.
5. To the extent feasible, district boundaries should coincide with natural borders and preserve communities of "related and mutual interest."

I have been asked about the relative importance of population equality versus the other criteria. This is how Jim Pharris, Assistant Attorney General, answered that question:

"I would say that federal equal protection means that districts must meet population equality standards no matter what other factors are considered. The case law is a little fuzzy as to just how "equal" districts must be, and there is a certain amount of leeway if disparities can be justified, such as by following established political boundaries or natural features. As among the state law factors listed, there is no way to say that any of them "trumps" the others. All of them should be considered in developing a plan. The key element is to have a

rationale for any variances from the standards set forth, especially population disparity but also as to the other factors.”

Procedures. As a volunteer committee appointed by the County Council, you are bound to conduct yourselves according to the Uniform Business Rules for Boards, Commissions, and Committees. A copy of these rules is included in your packet. Some of the requirements to be noted are that you must appoint a chair and vice-chair, that your meetings are public and must be duly noticed, and that you must publish ahead of time a meeting agenda for each meeting.