

February 3, 2022

To: The Vermont Apportionment Board
From: Town of Bethel Board of Civil Authority

The Bethel Board of Civil Authority opposes the proposed changes to our current district (Windsor-Rutland). We do so for three reasons:

- 1) the proposed changes violate the districting criteria in several ways.
- 2) the changes would have a negative impact on the district's right to effective representation
- 3) the changes would have a negative impact on the district's community and historic relations

Criterion One requires districts be as close as possible to an ideal of one representative for a population of 4287 with an acceptable deviation of up to 10%. Windsor-Rutland, as it currently stands, has 4263 voter for a deviation of -0.6%. The proposed change has a deviation of -1.91%.

The proposed districts represent a wider disparity from the ideal population than the current district. The current district is a mere -0.6% off from the ideal.

Current:	Proposed:
<u>WDR-RUT</u>	<u>NEW WR-AD-RU</u>
-0.6%	-1.91%

Criterion Two dictates that districts be geographically compact and contiguous. Further, "This criterion aims to foster effective representation by ensuring that representatives are accessible to the people they represent." The current Windsor-Rutland district is comprised of four towns all accessible through major state highways (Routes 107 and 100) without any major mountains in the way. It is compact and contiguous. Proposed district NEW WR-AD-RU is comprised of 5 towns and is not compact nor easily accessible throughout. The addition of Hancock and Granville and removal of Stockbridge isn't as conducive of a plan for population status. Granville has more in common with the NEW-ORA-WAS district, in location and could help the population deviation. Accessing Granville from Bethel would mean driving either through Rochester and Hancock to the western area of Granville. In order to reach the eastern area of Granville one would need to travel through Randolph and Braintree to gain access.

The proposed districts are less contiguous than the current district, with each of the proposed districts containing a greater number of towns or portions of towns than is currently the case.

Current:	Proposed:
<u>WDR-RUT</u>	<u>NEW-WR-AD-RU</u>
Bethel	Bethel Hancock
Stockbridge	Pittsfield
Pittsfield	Rochester
Rochester	Granville

Further, the proposed district is less accessible geographically than the current district. Granville is set apart from several of the communities in the proposed district, including Bethel, by a mountain range. In contrast, the current district shares a common river valley and does not require crossing a mountain range. Additionally, the proposed districts are less accessible using Class 1 State Highways.

Current:	Proposed:
WDR-RUT	NEW-WR-AD-RU
VT Rte 107	VT Rte 107
VT Rte 100	VT Rte 100
	VT Rte 12

Other routes require travel on Class 2 or 3 roads and are more difficult to navigate, especially during the winter months.

Criterion Three “dictates that districts should follow the existing boundaries of counties, towns and other political subdivisions”. The current district maintains the political integrity of the political subdivisions. The towns in the current WDR-RUT district are populated to achieve the necessary district population.

Criterion Four requires “recognition and maintenance of patterns of geography, social interaction, trade, political ties and common interests”. The towns of Bethel, Stockbridge and Pittsfield have multiple generations of interaction. Until recently, they shared the same school district (Whitcomb High). The towns of Rochester and Bethel merged their high school sports teams, until a few years ago. Numerous groups and organizations serve these same towns including the food shelf, and the Rotary Club. Bethel residents are regular participants in Rochester’s arts community. Rochester and Stockbridge share a school district. Stockbridge and Pittsfield residents work and play in Bethel. And all four towns share the White River and common recreation areas, activities, and groups. Because of the river, the four towns share a number of common challenges and opportunities. In the Flood of 1927, the community of Stockbridge lost 37 businesses and homes and were never rebuilt. They do not have a town center or services that are typically found in a small town. The towns of Bethel, Rochester and Pittsfield have become the towns of service to Stockbridge. Even after Tropical Storm Irene, the four towns were greatly impacted but they relied on each other for local services. The historic and community ties between the four towns are deep. Also, the geographic location of the towns is important. To access either Rochester or Pittsfield, from Bethel, you would need to drive through Stockbridge (Route 100).

Currently, the community of Bethel is working with bordering communities to get grants together to help strengthen community assistance and impact. The neighboring communities who would benefit from this assistance would be those such as Stockbridge, Rochester and Pittsfield.

Dividing the current Windsor-Rutland district would go against these patterns. Adding in towns that are difficult to get to exacerbates this disconnect.

Criterion Five requires proposals to consider “incumbencies”. The current representative lives in Bethel with deep connections to Stockbridge, Pittsfield, and Rochester. A representative from Granville or Hancock would have no connection to Bethel nor easy access, thus negatively impacting Bethel’s representation. Given the size, shape, and geography of the proposed districts, it would be nearly impossible for one representative to be known by citizens of the district.

Dividing Windsor-Rutland district would go against established patterns and interests and would contribute to a lack of cohesion within the upper White River Valley. This would negatively impact these towns' ability to continue cooperation on current initiatives.

For these reasons, the Bethel Board of Civil Authority is opposed to the reapportionment proposal and recommends retaining Windsor-Rutland, as it currently exists.