



## **GARLAND COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION**

**Election Commission Building**

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### **Redistricting Plan 2021**

October 2021

#### **Redistricting Process**

After each decennial census (every 10 years), voting districts must be altered to reflect the population shifts in order to ensure equal representation for all voters. This is required by the U.S. constitution. Basically, the population of an area divided by the number of districts equals a target population for each district. The requirement is for each district to be plus or minus 5% from the target.

Four (4) Congressional Districts in Arkansas are drawn by the State Legislature. One hundred (100) State Representative Districts and thirty-five (35) State Senate Districts are drawn by the Board of Apportionment which consists of the Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General.

This cycle, the City of Hot Springs must draw their director district boundaries, but next cycle that duty will revert to the CBEC (County Board of Election Commissioners). The Election Commission must draw the Justice of the Peace (JP) district boundaries to meet the target within the allowed variance.

Legal challenges may occur, but as long as the process is conducted fairly, and in compliance with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US constitution, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and a court order concerning minority districts, the process is fairly simple.

The goal is to divide the county into the fewest number of precincts, reducing the number of possible ballot styles, and less confusion for voters. Typically, drawing JP districts would be the last part of the process, following, if possible, district lines drawn by the above entities.

Delays in completing their portion of the process by the legislature or board of apportionment delays the CBEC drawing JP district lines.

#### **Challenges for this cycle**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused several problems with the 2020 census, delaying local jurisdictions from receiving population data. In a normal cycle, the redistricting process would have been completed by this point, but due to the delay in receiving population data, the process is behind the normal schedule.

Ethnic data from the 2020 census will also require six (6) of the seven (7) school districts in Garland County to divide into single member districts instead of at-large board of directors. Any school district with a larger than 10% minority must elect board members from single member districts. Each of the affected school districts must be divided into 5 single member districts, increasing the number of precincts in Garland County. Fountain Lake is the only school district in Garland County not required to be divided into single member districts.

A special election scheduled on February 8, 2022 increases the urgency to complete the redistricting process quickly. Without this special election, the May 2022 Primary Election would be the first election that redistricting would apply to. Notifying voters of district changes is a priority, and required by law at least 30 days prior to an election.

### **Garland County Justice of the Peace Districts**

The 2020 census lists the population of Garland County, AR at 100,180. Garland County elects Justices from 13 districts, making the target population for each district at 7,706. The variant of 5% plus or minus, would allow a population of 7,320 to 8,091 per district.

Determining Justice of the Peace (JP) districts directly affects the number of precincts and possible ballot styles for the next ten (10) years. The goal is to have minimal variants from other districts that are not determined by the Election Commission.

### **Districts not determined by the CBEC**

- US Congressional Districts - Determined by the state legislature
- AR State Senate Districts - Determined by the AR Board of Apportionment (Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General)
- AR State Representative Districts - Determined by the AR Board of Apportionment (Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General)
- City Districts - Determined by the City of Hot Springs  
All other municipalities are at-large districts
- School Districts - Preset boundaries
- Water Districts - Preset boundaries
- Fire Districts - Preset boundaries

Consideration of the above district boundaries when determining Justice of the Peace district boundaries reduce the number of precincts and possible ballot styles. Currently Garland County is divided into 56 precincts for reporting purposes, and 168 precinct parts or possible ballot styles.

### **Drawing Boundaries**

Considering existing boundaries that are fixed by other entities, and existing Justice of the Peace districts, and the time constraints, the goal is to limit changes as long as we comply with applicable laws.

Districts should be geographically contiguous, and compact. Irregular shaped districts are not desirable, and lead to voter confusion. Although maintaining current JP districts to include incumbents is desirable, it is not required. JP districts must be determined prior to the filing period for the 2022 Primary Election, in March 2022. Incumbent JPs were elected by voters of their district, but all terms are two (2) years and must stand for election in 2022.

Gerrymandering is not the desirable method of drawing district lines, but consideration should be given to local communities. Preferably, a JP district that is predominantly within a city, should be

drawn along city boundaries, and a JP district that is predominantly in the county should be drawn to encompass areas outside the city. If it is determined that the most efficient district boundaries adversely affect incumbents, it might still be the right thing to do.

If we are forced by time constraints, to draw JP district lines prior to changes made by the other entities involved, it could result in an increase of the number of voting precincts in Garland County, and add to voter confusion.

### **Vendor Support**

Garland County will utilize a current vendor to suggest changes to current mapped districts. DataScout LLC is the current vendor for mapping, including voting districts and voter addresses. They currently produce exception reports showing voter addresses outside their voting precinct. This is an invaluable tool we use to ensure a voter gets the correct ballot.