One of the most essential functions of the federal government is the conduct of a national census every ten years as required by the Constitution. That census plays a key role in determining how many seats each state will have in the United States House of Representatives, and this data is a key factor in the distribution of public and private funds throughout the United States.

Since the 1960s, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that the apportionment of legislative seats in the Congress, state legislatures and local governments must be made in conformity with equal population as determined by the Census. In New York State, the criteria to be followed in local government redistricting are set forth in the Municipal Home Rule Law, and the provisions of that statute have governed the process in the City of Ithaca following the 2020 Census.

Appointment of the Redistricting Working Group

To initiate the process in the City of Ithaca, in December 2021 Mayor Svante Myrick appointed five City residents as members of the City of Ithaca Redistricting Working Group. He requested that they undertake an examination of the population changes that have occurred within the City over the last decade, develop a proposed redistricting plan in compliance with the relevant federal and state statutes and submit such plan to the Common Council for consideration. Common Council makes the final decision on redistricting.

The members of the Redistricting Working Group reside in each of the five current wards of the City:

Ward 1 – Henrik Dullea, chair
Ward 2 – Joseph Murtagh
Ward 3 – Jared Pittman
Ward 4 – Katie Sims
Ward 5 – Christopher Proulx
The Working Group has been primarily assisted in its work by Ruth Aslanis, the City’s Geographic Information Systems Administrator, and as required by Faith Vavra, Chief of Staff to the Mayor, Victor Kessler, Assistant City Attorney, Julie Holcomb, City Clerk, and Melody Faraday, Public Information Specialist. Greg Potter, Director of Information Technologies for Tompkins County, and Svetla Borovska provided coordination assistance with the Tompkins County Independent Redistricting Commission.

Working Group Meetings

The Working Group held its first meeting via Zoom on December 20, 2021. The City Attorney, Ari Lavine, represented the mayor and laid out essential information concerning formation, charge, timetable, and staff support. The working group members agreed that they would work closely with the County Redistricting Commission, through sharing data and holding joint meetings to solicit public input and reactions. They further agreed that the first meeting of the joint group would be on Tuesday, January 25, at which the public would be invited to provide input regarding legislative districts for the county and ward boundaries for the city.

The Working Group has since met on a biweekly basis, starting on January 18 and continuing through the date of this report. The minutes and recordings of its recent meetings have been made available on the city website.

Statutory Guidelines for Redistricting

Chapter 516 of the Laws of 2021, passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor, sets forth the key factors that are to be considered by local governments in the process of redistricting. They are listed below in order of priority:

1. **Equality in Population** – Districts shall be as nearly equal in population as is practicable. The difference in population between the most and least populous district shall not exceed five percent of the mean population of all districts. Census blocks determined by the Census Bureau must be used and cannot be divided. The City of Ithaca population in the 2020 Census was reported as 32,108; the average population for five wards is 6,421, and five percent of that average is 321. Prior to this redistricting process, the difference in population between the most and least populous district could be up to ten percent of the mean population of all districts.

2. **Protection of Minority Voting Rights** – Districts shall not be drawn with the intent or result of denying or abridging the equal opportunity of racial or language minority groups to participate in the political process or to diminish their ability to elect representatives of their choice.
3. **Contiguous Territory** – Districts must be completely contiguous with no intervening districts.

4. **Compact** – Districts shall be as compact as possible. Significant differences in the density of individual wards in the City of Ithaca create districts that vary substantially in geographic size while representing equal populations.

5. **Fairness in the Political Arena** – Districts shall not be drawn to discourage competition or for the purpose of favoring or disfavoring incumbents or other particular candidates or political parties.

6. **Communities of Interest** – Existing neighborhoods and population groups and subdivisions shall be considered.

7. **Election Administration** – Districts shall be formed so as to promote the orderly and efficient administration of elections. For our purposes, this refers to being aware of issues associated with overlapping boundaries for city wards and county legislative districts.

**Issues Identified at Public Input Sessions**

The Working Group appreciates the comments and recommendations submitted by incumbent members of Common Council, the County Legislature and the public at the joint meeting with the County Independent Redistricting Commission on January 25 that focused on both ward boundaries and legislative districts within the City and at the March 29 meeting at which the public was invited to respond to the Working Groups initial proposed redistricting plan. Additional comments have been submitted to the Working Group via email.

As indicated in the standards listed above, equal population wards must be our first priority. There are several factors that make this obligation more difficult this year than in the past. We must, for example, use the census blocks as provided by the U. S. Census Bureau in determining the size of proposed districts. The very large number of persons residing in individual census blocks associated with Cornell University is one such factor. As an example, two such blocks on North Campus are approximately the size of one-half of an entire ward, and there are similar challenges on West Campus and in Collegetown.

Low voter turnout in certain areas of the City is an issue that has been raised by several members of the public, but it is not a legally acceptable factor in redistricting. Student populations are clearly recognized in law as a community of interest, but for redistricting purposes they must be considered as individuals regardless of their voting status. Voter turnout is, however, a legitimate factor for local boards of elections in making decisions as to polling places.
Communities of interest most certainly do include traditional neighborhoods, and the Working Group has had extensive discussions concerning the recognition of such areas as Fall Creek, North Side – South Side, Washington Park, Collegetown, Cornell Heights, Belle Sherman and South Hill, as well as issues presented by low density in the West Side and population growth in Downtown. We prioritized keeping neighborhoods intact and together within a ward, even where that required a neighborhood to be re-aligned into a different ward.

The Working Group also sought to create districts that could serve as appropriate districts for the County Legislature. For this reason, as well as challenges posed by varying population density across the City, the Working Group is proposing to retain five wards.

Welcome Public Reaction to the Proposed Plan

The Redistricting Working Group has tried to find the best possible balance among the factors that must be considered in developing a new redistricting proposal for the City of Ithaca. We released our draft proposed plan, Map Alt 4C, to the public via the media and the City website, and we invited the public to register for the purpose of making comments at our next scheduled meeting on March 29 at 5:30 p.m. Several members of the public, four members of Common Council including the Acting Mayor, a member of the County Legislature and a Commissioner of the Board of Elections either spoke at this hearing or submitted comments to the Working Group via email.

Final Recommendation

Based on the comments received at the public meeting on March 29, the Working Group met again on April 5 to determine whatever modifications to the initial draft redistricting plan would be necessary and/or desirable and to decide on a final plan to be submitted to the Acting Mayor and Common Council not later than April 26.

The details of the revisions to the initial draft plan that was submitted to the public for comment are contained in the Minutes of our meeting on April 5, and those minutes have been made available on the city website. A total of 23 alternative maps were considered by the Working Group throughout this process.

The Redistricting Working Group has unanimously endorsed the attached 2022 Proposed Redistricting Plan for the City of Ithaca and hereby recommends its adoption by the Common Council for implementation in the 2023 election cycle.
Final 2022 Proposed Redistricting Plan (Scenario ALT 4C V3)
City of Ithaca Redistricting Working Group, April 2022

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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Total Deviation: 3.66%</td>
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Total 2020 City of Ithaca population is 32,108. Ideal size of ward, as 1/5 of population, is 6421.6 which is rounded to 6422. Total deviation between proposed wards is 3.66%.
Population by block shown in each Census block.

NY State Plane, Central GRS 83 Datum
Map Source: Tompkins County Digital Planning Map 1997-2021
Data Source: US Census 2020 Redistricting Release (PL 94-171)
Map Prepared by: GIS Program, City of Ithaca, NY, April 2022