



Supervisor Debra Lucero, in her downtown Chico office, says it's important for the city to be represented proportionately and holistically under Butte County's redistricting.
PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

county's top industry merits more representation than from one supervisor with an expansive area.

"We don't represent industries or land, we represent people," Lucero told the CN&R in response. "The city of Chico has 110,000 people [including Chico State students], and we need two solid districts in Chico, not four quadrants of four supervisors representing Chico. I don't think that's in the spirit of the Voting Rights Act at all."

The Voting Rights Act prohibits a jurisdiction from making a change that affects voting, including redistricting, unless it demonstrates neither a discriminatory effect nor purpose. The Fair Maps Act, passed in 2019, prohibits gerrymandering of city and county districts.

Paul Mitchell of Redistricting Partners explained to the supervisors that "the architecture that might have made sense under the prior structure simply doesn't work. There's too much gravitational force coming into Chico, and that makes it harder to draw the rest of the county when we're forced to draw districts with equal population....

"Even among all the agencies we're working with," he added, "this is going to be one of the most disruptive redistrictings because of all the realities on the ground."

Board President Bill Connelly, whose District 1 covers the Oroville area, told Mitchell after the supervisors and public commented, "So, I guess you have your direction: Start over."

The consultant will review additional map submissions—some two-dozen more—and attempt to reconcile all the feedback. Ring said the public may continue to submit maps and comments ahead of Tuesday's meeting (see info box).

Connelly advocated for Lake Oroville and for east county mountain communities to remain in his district (the latter also pushed by District 5 Supervisor Doug Teeter) while supporting Kimmelshue's proposition—asserting apolitical intentions.

"I could easily run in Oroville and Thermalito [without having other communities in the district] and get reelected," Connelly said. "I want to be more logical."

Lucero, up for election in 2022 along with fellow Chico Supervisor Tami Ritter, expressed skepticism about her colleagues' motivation: "I believe there are politics at play in this."

School districting

Chico Unified's effort stems from a pre-pandemic lawsuit, part of a statewide effort aimed at ensuring cities and school districts represent communities of color. Under the threat of litigation from law firms in Sacramento and Malibu, the city of Chico authorized district elections, which proponents say improve diversity of candidates and access for constituents. CUSD resisted until a costly court battle loomed.

In the settlement, which hasn't been finalized, Chico Unified

agreed to establish districts within its enrollment area, which extends beyond city limits. School board members get elected in November, as do city council members, but added layers of county and state approvals mean CUSD must finalize its map no later than January. The city, in an earlier phase of redistricting for council seats, just received consultant applications.

"Now is when we hope people will engage," CUSD Board President Eileen Robinson said by phone. "We have not made a selection [among the draft maps], but we have all of the interest points identified from the board's perspective. We have limited information from the public, so that's what we're trying to generate."

Establishing districts is "not something that we would have done on our own," added Robinson, a school board member since 2010. "But when we were faced with what the firm that sued us felt was noncompliance with the Voting Rights Act, we felt ... we might as well save [school] district dollars and just comply."

CUSD turned to Chico-based King Consulting, its longstanding consultant for demographics analysis, to manage districting. As in the county's process, Chico Unified and the public got three maps, scheduled for consideration at the board meeting on Nov. 3. Two emphasize high schools—either separating Chico High and Pleasant Valley or including each of them in every district—while the third stresses elementary schools, among other criteria. The board will hold another map session Nov. 17 before deciding district lines Dec. 15.

Three members have terms ending next year: Robinson; Board Vice President Kathleen Kaiser, first elected in 2006; and Tom Lando, in his first term.

"There's no consideration for incumbency," Robinson said. "Our concern is setting the districts up appropriately. Where people [on the board] live, we haven't even looked at it." □

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The researcher was born and raised in California and studies in the Department of Sociology at New York University.

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