



Providing Economic, Community, and Workforce Development Services

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March 13, 2012

Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620-1706

**RE: Kalispell Public Hearing - March 14, 2012  
Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission**

Dear Members of the Commission:

On behalf of our 650 members, I would like to offer our comments on the Draft Maps of the Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission.

**General Comments:**

We appreciate the efforts of the Commission and its staff to bring public hearings on the Draft Maps around the state and particularly to Kalispell. The decisions you will make are of special interest to the business and civic leadership of Kalispell and Flathead County because of the rapid growth we have experienced recently. During the period from 2000-2010, Kalispell grew at a rate of 40.1 percent (US Census) and Flathead County grew at a rate of 22.1 percent. During the last redistricting process, the county was overpopulated by five percent at the beginning of the decade and that differential increased throughout the rest of the decade. As a result, we have a vital interest in ensuring that we receive the proper representation in our state legislature.

We further appreciate the Discretionary Criteria you have adopted to help guide your decisions, including 1) following the lines of political units, 2) following geographic boundaries, and 3) keeping communities of interest intact. These criteria improve the overall process and will result in better outcomes for the citizens of Montana.

Nevertheless, none of the plans shown provide an ideal fit for the City of Kalispell or Flathead County. We will direct our specific comments to the four questions for which you are seeking input and make suggestions we think will result in better representation of the communities of interest for our area.

**Specific Comments:**

*1. What do the maps do right?*

The maps do a good job of offering five diverse planning models for the state.

*2. How do the various draft maps affect your community of interest?*

Kalispell serves as the regional trade center for a market of approximately 150,000 and millions of annual visitors. The trade center component of our economy has grown steadily as a percentage of our economy (University of MT, Bureau of Business and Economic Research). This role comes with a unique set of challenges and needs related to state government including: growth and development issues, transportation and infrastructure improvements, economic development and tourism promotion, and education and workforce capacity. While an argument can be made that our urban interests are better satisfied with several representatives having a piece of Kalispell's constituency, on balance we believe a smaller group of legislators whose focus is primarily on a single jurisdiction is more beneficial to our citizens. At the end of the day, it still takes a majority of the House and Senate to pass a bill.

*3. Which map do you feel the commission should use when it adopts a final plan?*

Kalispell – The Urban Rural Plan is the closest fit for representation of Kalispell's community of interest. The Urban Rural Plan could be improved by including more of Kalispell city limits into fewer House districts by looking at Kalispell city census tracts to the north, west, and east.

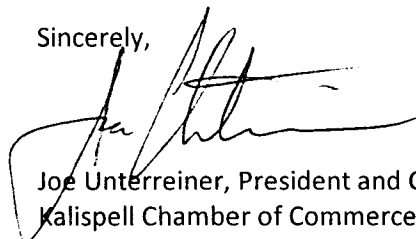
Flathead County – The Subdivision Plan is the closest fit for representation of the County's community of interest. It best aligns geography and communities at the county level. It is important to pay attention to the city limits of Flathead County's three incorporated communities and to equalize the population as much as possible. We may have additional comments at a later date as newer versions of the map(s) are released.

*4. What should or could be changed or adjusted in the maps?*

As noted, more consolidation on Kalispell city districts would improve its disposition on each of the maps.

The Kalispell Chamber appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Redistricting and Apportionment Commission's hearing. Because of the importance of this work, we look forward being involved throughout your decision-making process. Please add us to your distribution list of new information as it becomes available.

Sincerely,



Joe Unterreiner, President and CEO  
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce