Clock Ticking Down On New Council District Map

Posted on Mar 01, Posted by Administrator Category City

City Council members only have a few hours left before the newly drawn district maps are sent to the clerk's office.

While the Council's agenda on Wednesday may have been dominated by news of its immigration reform and street vendor bills, the Council also filed the Districting Commission's revised maps. Members must file any objections to the commission by 5 p.m. Friday, otherwise the map will move on to the city clerk's office — effectively meaning the Council has approved the lines without a vote.

The lines wil then be submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice for review.

Andrew Berman, director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, said he was disappointed there wasn't more of an announcement from City Hall.

"The fact that there have been no public statements," Berman said, "is somewhat distressing."

He emphasized the far-reaching consequences that the new maps will have on the city's communities, including his own. Berman said that while the city can't change district lines based on speculation, the commision should have reflected on how the lines will affect Council Disctrict 3, represented by Speaker Christine Quinn, which was the most populous district in Manhattan and yet was shrunk.

James Hong of the Asian American Community Coalition on Redistricting and Democracy said that Wednesday's actions are what the group expected. He described the redistricting process as one where Council members can discreetly influence maps without having to publicly acknowledge their part in the system.

“It’s created an opaqueness to the process,” Hong said.

The coalition, which includes 14 advocacy groups, came out strongly to criticize the redistricting process, specifically in the map’s treatment of the Asian-American community in Bayside, Queens.

The commission, made up of 15 political appointees, approved the maps on Feb. 6 with a 14-1 split. The city charter gives the Council three weeks to adopt, reject or take no action, which becomes the equivalent of adoption. If anyone objects before the weekend, more hearings would need to be scheduled.

In a statement after its vote, the Districting Commission said that the new maps create 35 minority districts, compared to 30 in the 2003 maps.

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