

**COMMUNITY NEWS**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
June 23, 2021



## **San Mateo to Overhaul City Council Elections**

### **City Intends to Move to District Elections Following Receipt of Letter Asserting Violation of California Voting Rights Act**

**San Mateo, CA** — This week, the San Mateo City Council affirmed its commitment to transition to district elections and will begin a robust community-engagement initiative to seek feedback on this momentous change.

Currently, voters across the entire City elect all five City Council members through an at-large elections system. A district-based election is one in which the City is divided into separate districts, each with one City council member who resides in the district and is chosen by the voters in that particular district.

The decision to move to district elections comes after careful evaluation of the legal and financial risks associated with a potential lawsuit over the City's current at-large electoral system. In late May, the City received a certified letter from attorney Scott Rafferty asserting San Mateo should voluntarily change to a district-based election system in order to adhere to the California Voting Rights Act (the "CVRA".)

During a public meeting Monday, June 21, 2021, the Council took the first step to move toward district elections by adopting a resolution of intent, while committing to a transparent and inclusive community engagement process.

"This is perhaps the most important shift in local City Council elections in San Mateo's more than 125-year history," said Mayor Eric Rodriguez. "Listening to and learning from our community is key to this process, and I encourage everyone in San Mateo to get involved in guiding the future of our democracy."

Residents can learn more and sign up to get involved on the City's new District Elections web page: [www.cityofsanmateo.org/districtelections](http://www.cityofsanmateo.org/districtelections).

The City has also hired a professional demographer to assist in the process. Under the CVRA, the City is required to identify the number of districts, adopt a map, determine the election sequencing and hold a minimum of five public hearings. In addition, the City plans to host a variety of in-person and virtual workshops to engage community members in identifying communities of interest and ensuring democratic representation. The process and strict timeline for establishing districts is controlled by federal and state laws.

After a city adopts a resolution of intent to move to district elections it has 90 days to finalize the district map. However, the City will request an extension to allow for more robust public outreach and to incorporate the Census 2020 demographic data that is expected to be released later this year.

The transition to district elections has become increasingly common in the state and San Mateo County, as attorneys have sued local cities and school districts alleging there is evidence of racially polarized voting in at-large electoral systems. While the City does not believe there is local evidence of racially-polarized voting, under the CVRA, minimal evidence of racially polarized voting can result in a court ordering a change from at-large voting to district-based voting.

###