



February 13, 2023

Sent via email

Mayor and Pleasant Hill City Council
100 Gregory Lane
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523
CityCouncil@PleasantHillCa.org

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus is the nation's first legal and civil rights organization serving low-income, immigrant, and underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander ("AAPI") communities. As an organization dedicated to empowering AAPI communities, including through fair districting, voting rights advocacy, and improved democratic representation, we have been proponents of the California Voting Rights Act ("CVRA") and have supported the establishment of by-district elections in many communities throughout the state.

We have been informed by community members, including AAPIs, that Pleasant Hill is under scrutiny by parties who urge the City to comply with the CVRA by establishing City Council districts and that councilmembers be elected by-district in upcoming elections. We are writing to provide input as you consider whether to voluntarily change Pleasant Hill's election system from at-large to by-district elections, as well as to share a few perspectives on behalf of AAPI communities.

We are aware that Pleasant Hill's City Council has not historically been diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, and socio-economic status. Community members have also shared with us concerns that a lack of diverse representation on the elected body may result in a failure to address the important needs and issues of certain unrepresented communities. The composition and representation on the City Council may unevenly skew policy-making such that underrepresented communities do not receive adequate resources or attention to address their concerns.

Community members, including AAPIs, have expressed a desire for election reform to enhance representative democracy in Pleasant Hill, and a conversion to by-district elections has emerged as a potentially appealing option. While establishing districts does not automatically improve fairness and representation, the conversion from at-large to by-district elections can be an opportunity to ensure greater fairness in the election system. We have found that fair districts result when certain best practices or principles are adopted. Among these:

1. Establish a fair and inclusive process for determining the election districts and district boundaries. (While we understand the deadline the City may be considering, in general, we have been a proponent of independent, nonpartisan redistricting commissions, as a vehicle for

fair line-drawing and robust community participation. To that end, we support the City stipulating to an extension of the legal deadlines for the purpose of created such a commission)

2. Implement a robust plan for community outreach and engagement, especially seeking the participation of historically marginalized communities and ensuring language access.
3. Observe communities of shared interests, such as renters, students, economic concerns, etc.

The Asian community is approximately 14% of the population, and the Latine population is around 12%. These communities of color have increased in size in recent years and seek full representation. We urge you to consider how best these communities can be fully included in the civic life of Pleasant Hill. We are available to answer any questions and provide support for improved AAPI engagement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deanna Kitamura".

Deanna Kitamura