

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: May 28, 2026

From: City Manager Department

Subject: Transition to Districts – First Public Hearing

Recommended Action: 1) Adopt a resolution updating the timeline for the City's transition to by-district elections pursuant to California Elections Code Section 10010 and rescinding Resolution No. 4482; 2) Conduct a duly noticed **time-certain public hearing at 6:15 PM** and receive public input regarding the composition of the potential Council election districts; 3) provide direction on Council's preference for five Council districts with a rotating Mayor, or for four Council districts with a Citywide-elected Mayor; and 4) if a Citywide-elected Mayor is preferred, provide guidance on whether the Mayoral term should be two years or four years.

Background: The City Council was elected under an at-large election system, whereby Council Members are elected by voters of the entire City. On April 30, 2026, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 4482 declaring the City's intent to initiate procedures to transition from at-large elections to district-based elections pursuant to California Elections Code Section 10010, and approving the tentative timeline and other related actions. Under the Elections Code, the City has 90 days from the adoption of that resolution to complete the process.

Since April 30, 2026, the City has received a 30-day extension to complete the districting process and staff recommends updating the adopted timeline to reflect new extended timeline and associated meeting dates.

Timeline for District Development: The California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) requires the City to hold at least two public hearings over the next thirty (30) days, at which the public is invited to provide input regarding the composition of the districts. Those dates are established as May 28th and June 11th, and the public hearings will begin at 6:15 PM. No official maps can be drawn before the completion of these two (2) public meetings. Once the initial two meetings are complete, a demographer and the public can begin to draw maps that will be considered in the districting process.

The City will hold at least two additional public hearings over the following forty-five (45) days to receive input on the draft maps and the proposed election sequencing. With the updated schedule, staff recommends setting the hearings for June 25 (unchanged from the previous schedule) and July 23, both with a fixed 6:15 PM hearing start time. If a map is selected and is unchanged from what is presented at the 4th public hearing, then a first reading/introduction of an ordinance transitioning to districts and adopting that same map may be conducted at the 4th public hearing.

Thereafter, if the selected map continues to be unchanged, then a second reading/adoption of the ordinance may be conducted at a 5th public hearing. That date is proposed as August 28th. Anytime a map is changed, a seven (7) day notice must be published and made available, as applicable, and a subsequent public hearing would have to be held before the map can be considered for adoption. As such, depending on the number and timing of the changes, the tentative timeline (e.g., the number of public hearings) included in Attachment 1 may change.

The City will also need to comply with the Fair and Inclusive Redistricting for Municipalities and Political Subdivisions Act (Fair Maps Act), which provides criteria the City must use when establishing election district boundaries or when undertaking the redistricting process (which must occur every ten years after each population census). These criteria include compliance with the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, CVRA, and the federal Voting Rights Act. The Fair Maps Act also prohibits the

adoption of district boundaries for the purpose of favoring or discriminating against an incumbent councilmember, political candidate, or political party.

Staff has prepared an updated timeline that identifies the preliminary schedule for the required public hearings and public outreach and complies with Elections Code 10010 (see Exhibit A to Attachment 1). This tentative timeline may change depending on the level of community involvement and the complexity of the map drawing process, provided that the extended 120-day deadline is met.

Discussion: In addition to the required public hearings outlined above, the City already provided an informational item on the May 14th City Council agenda to discuss the transition to districts, during which the demographer (NDC) and staff provided a presentation, answered questions, and received feedback from the public.

In addition, staff plans to host a second community engagement webinar on Saturday, June 20 at 11 AM. This webinar will be advertised in advance so that members of the public ask questions to be answered by the City's demographer and staff. Staff plans to host this outreach opportunity in a web-based format to allow for maximum participation from the community who may not be able to attend the mid-week in-person evening City Council meetings already scheduled.

Today's hearing partially fulfills the requirement of California Elections Code Section 10010 that states:

“(1) Before drawing a draft map or maps of the proposed boundaries of the districts, the political subdivision shall hold at least two public hearings over a period of no more than thirty days, at which the public is invited to provide input regarding the composition of the districts.

The intention of this hearing is to identify the neighborhoods, other “communities of interest,” and other local factors that should be considered or used as ‘building blocks’ when the drawing of draft maps begins. The public is welcome to propose complete districting maps, but it is not required.

This hearing will also review the City's public mapping tool and interactive map review website, provided by the districting consultant.

Four vs. Five Districts: California Government Code Section 34886 enables cities to change to by-district elections by ordinance:

“Notwithstanding Section 34871 or any other law, the legislative body of a city may adopt an ordinance that requires the members of the legislative body to be elected by district or by district with an elective mayor, as described in subdivisions (a) and (c) of Section 34871, without being required to submit the ordinance to the voters for approval. An ordinance adopted pursuant to this section shall comply with the requirements and criteria of Section 21130 of the Elections Code and include a declaration that the change in the method of electing members of the legislative body is being made in furtherance of the purposes of the California Voting Rights Act of 2001 (Chapter 1.5 (commencing with Section 14025) of Division 14 of the Elections Code).”

As noted, part of this process is the decision to change to four districts with an elective mayor, or to five districts with a Council-selected rotating mayor. In NDC's experience, the process goes smoother the earlier this decision is made, as residents then focus on how to draw and select the best four- or five-district map, rather than on whether to have four or five districts.

The resulting recommendation is for the Council to give (non-binding) direction on whether to develop four-district or five-district scenarios at the end of this public hearing.

If the Council is not yet ready to provide that direction, the decision can wait until the conclusion of the second public hearing.

The Council can reverse this decision at any time prior to second reading or the districting ordinance, however changing this decision may require scheduling additional hearings prior to final adoption, which may affect the City's ability to complete the process in a timely manner.

Public Outreach: The transition to districts requires significant public outreach, and staff has already initiated efforts to make sure that the public is informed throughout the process.

- Staff created a dedicated webpage for district elections. The website is updated with information, documents (like staff reports/presentations from Council meetings), and a section with meeting video footage and a brief summary of action taken: <https://www.cityofcapitola.gov/1001/District-Based-Elections>
 - A subpage is available for access to the public mapping tool provided by NDC, including access to the printable PDF map for public use.
 - A subpage is available for access to map submissions received from the public.
 - The City's entire website is translatable into multiple languages, ensuring accessibility for non-English speaking residents.
 - Based on feedback at the May 14 meeting, staff updated the webpage to better clarify meeting dates and start times.
- Staff developed two frequently asked questions (FAQ) documents: one for general district questions, and one specifically tailored to the discussion about number of districts and the differences between an at-large mayor and rotating mayor.
 - Staff created a dedicated email address where members of the public can submit questions, comments, or send maps: districts@cityofcapitola.gov
 - Staff created a web form where members of the public can submit questions about the transition to districts. A link to the web form is available on the City's webpage, linked above.
 - The questions will be regularly summarized and answered in an updated FAQ document, uploaded to the webpage periodically.
- Staff sent out the first of two mailers to all residences in Capitola. The mailers will include information about upcoming meeting dates and how to participate in both English and Spanish. The second mailer will be sent out to align with the publication of the first round of maps and will include available meeting dates for public input.

Fiscal Impact: The City has already amended the FY 2025-26 Budget to allocate funds for the transition to districts. There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action. Additional costs will be incurred for legal fees and plaintiff costs. Those will be presented to Council at a future meeting, once determined.

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Public Mapping Kits – English and Spanish

Alignment with 2025-2029 Strategic Plan Priority: Accountable Government

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