

Report of the MD19 Strategic Planning Committee
MD19 Council of Governors, Winter Council Meeting 2022
PCC John Kirry, Chair

“Non Progredi Est Regredi.”

The latin translation means “To Not Move Forward is to Move Backward.” The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) is united in its desire to see MD19 continue to be a strong and vibrant organization that will continue to serve Lions Clubs and their communities in the years ahead. Our committee was tasked in 2020 with the responsibility of analyzing the concept of redistricting and making recommendations to the council. Now, some 20 months in, we are making great strides forward.

Background

Over the course of many months of detailed and highly technical work beginning in July, 2020, the committee created a concept proposal to the Council of Governors in February, 2021, and a final plan in June, 2021. This plan consolidated our nine current districts into five larger districts. The complete plan can be seen in the minutes of the 2021 Spring Council Meeting. The Council of Governors unanimously approved a motion to move forward with the SPC plan.

The SPC placed the entire plan and all working documents on the MD19 Website redistricting page for all to examine and Districts were given the planning tools to begin the process of merger talks with their counterpart districts. All proposed districts were formulated to abide by Lions Clubs International redistricting requirements to have a minimum of 1250 members and 35 clubs.

Because redistricting is a complicated and lengthy process, the SPC then ramped up operations and began a series of weekly Zoom meetings in order to answer questions and assist districts with their merger efforts. These weekly Zoom meetings have been held since October, 2021 with many of the District Merger Committee members in attendance.

Alternate Plan Proposals

While districts D-E-F, B-H and C-D have reached basic merger agreements and begun in earnest to discuss the ways and means of redistricting with their merger partners, districts A-I have lagged behind in the process. While Districts A and I each had a representative on the MD Strategic Planning Committee from the very beginning, communication and coordination between the full District Merger Committees of Districts A and I had not developed as hoped.

As a result it was not until late January, 2022 that the full written plans of the District A and I Merger Committees become available to the SPC.

Accordingly, the February 8, 2022 weekly Zoom meeting was held for the purpose of discussing the written plans of Districts A and I. The SPC opened the meeting to the merger chairs of Districts A and I to describe their plans and to take questions from the attendees at that meeting. Both districts' written plans can be found in the MD19 website redistricting section. Of note, both proposals included a desire to seek an extension of the current three-year timeline to that of a four-year timeline.

Alternate Plan Analysis

After seeing and analyzing these two proposals, the majority of the SPC feels that these alternate plans have serious shortcomings. In addition, numerous representatives from the other seven districts have legitimate concerns that these alternative plans are ultimately "too little, too late" in nature and could have significant impact on the plans and progress of the other districts.

The SPC plan stresses merging between current contiguous districts, while the A and I alternate proposals seek to extract clubs and zones from non-adjacent or non-contiguous districts who, in some cases, already have tentative agreements with their planned merger partners. In addition to the disruptive jigsaw puzzle approach to creating new districts out of several other districts, the extension of the current three-year timeline to four years has significant drawbacks.

The Case for NOT Delaying Redistricting

Both Districts A and I have stated repeatedly that more time is needed to develop the plan. On this point the committee strongly disagrees. Having worked diligently on this plan for the past 20 months the SPC has produced a clear and detailed plan of action. As it is now, the redistricting process as defined by LCI is a three year process and we are exactly on track to meet that timeline. The SPC is NOT rushing this process as claimed in the alternate plan documents.

In the simplest terms, to delay for another year could put the entire redistricting plan in jeopardy. The momentum we have made will be stalled and perhaps never recovered and REAL CHANGE will not be realized. The reality is we have been watching MD19 membership precipitously fall while talking about "doing something" for decades. We have now assembled a large coalition of MD and District leaders and are taking strong and decisive action toward expanding leadership opportunities and re-imagining the district borders of MD19. Adding another year to the time line is an unnecessary hinderance to the process.

In fact, the SPC has made changes and accommodations with each of the participating districts and can continue to do so until the very time of implementation in July of 2023. For example, at the beginning of SPC deliberations in 2020, a possible scenario was considered where a redistricting line was drawn straight across the USA-Canada border, effectively splitting all international districts. In subsequent

discussions, however, each current cross-border district opposed that plan in favor of remaining with their current international partners. Adjustments were made to accommodate the impacted districts. More can follow in the months ahead.

And finally with regard to delay: As required by Lions International Board Policy, a vote must be held within the Multiple District to allow delegates from all Clubs in the MD to approve/disapprove the redistricting plan. On the current plan timeline, that vote is only four months away, and the delegates of the clubs of MD19 will have the final say. With such little time before that vote, it is imperative that we not make a drastic and disruptive course change now.

A Realistic Solution: Region Chairpersons

In order to keep the process moving forward, the SPC made contact with the Merger Chairs of Districts A and I in early February to attempt mediation and approach the two districts with an innovative solution to the impasse.

That proposed solution is for districts to implement the Region Chairperson concept as outlined in the LCI Standard District Constitution and Bylaws. Implementing the long-established and proven Region Chairperson model allows Districts A and I to merge under one District Governor per the SPC plan, while authorizing each district broad regional administrative autonomy. The Region Chairperson concept would expand and enhance leadership in the district and eliminate what may be some of the most contentious point of the merger argument: the difficulties of geography, travel time and cost of ferry travel between those districts. This is a solid solution.

In fact, the Region Chair concept is a potentially good fit for all of the five newly merged districts of MD19. Under the proposed plan, many districts will nearly double in size. The Region Chairperson concept, fully endorsed and currently used in many large districts around LCI, can alleviate many of the administrative challenges created by the new larger districts. The Region Chairperson program is created and administered by each district and can be customized not only to account for geography and travel, but to suit each district and its unique leadership, membership and service challenges.

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To Not Move Forward is to Move Backward. The Council of Governors voted unanimously at the June 2021 meeting to move forward with this redistricting plan. Working with all the districts in the months ahead the SPC will pledge to make adjustments and improvements right up to the July 1, 2023, implementation date. It is our hope that the significant momentum created by the current SPC plan will enable the districts of MD19 to move forward with new and innovative ways to serve our Lions Clubs and their communities.