

Letter from PDG Harry Lippincott/Response by SPC
October 31, 2021. Dear MD19 Strategic Planning Committee for Redistricting

Hello, PDG Harry. This is a lot to unpack, but we will give it our best. The comments on behalf of the Strategic Planning Committee are in blue below yours. For clarity, I will precede below comments with initials “HL” and “SPC.”

**For the SPC,
John**

SPC. As preface, the issues you raise have all come before the Strategic Planning Committee several times over the past 15 months since it began working on redistricting. That does not mean they are not issues worth raising or discussing. But the Committee is doing the job the Council of Governors directed it to do, which is to implement a redistricting plan that consolidates the nine current districts into five districts. The Committee can not change that direction. If you think there is a better plan, or that a plan should be deferred, that is a matter that the Council needs to decide, not the Committee.

In general, let me state that we wish that you had been with our committee since the beginning, since you had some experience in the mid-2000's with your Realignment. What is significantly different now, of course, is the steady – even precipitous – loss of membership that has occurred in MD19 in just the last five years. We are hovering at around 9600 Lions now. Five years ago, we had more than 14,000 Lions and twenty-five years before that we had peaked at nearly 20,000 Lions. We have lost the same number of members in the last 5 years that we lost in the preceding 25 years. While some may wish to sit back and watch more members depart, our COG has seen the urgency and directed the Strategic Planning Committee to move forward with plans to redistrict.

HL. I guess it's time for me to put my opinion forward regarding redistricting. I did not see instructions for how to forward individual comments so am sending to all SPC members.

First, I do not like the characterization of west side / east side as shown on the districts and membership numbers page. I think it may be indicating a divide that should not be. Just delete those entries for the future.

SPC. Easy enough. We can fix that in the master.

HL. Second, I do not see the need for the rush period. We have been losing members for years, The redistricting will not stop the drops.

SPC. This is not a “rush period” by any standard. The Strategic Planning committee has been working on redistricting steadily for over 15 months at the direction of the Council of Governors. If the plan is approved by vote of our MD six months from now, and approval is granted by LCI a year from now, the earliest date we could implement redistricting is July 1, 2023.

And keep this in mind as well: The coordination between adjacent district merger partners is all about creating a PLAN between districts that can be included in the final proposal to Lions Clubs International. The MD19 Redistricting pages contain a key document entitled “The Role of the District Merger Committee.” For the most part, only the section concerning the selection of the District Governor is something that has a hard deadline. (Target: before January 2023) All other merger components may be handled by a simple Letter of Agreement or Merger Agreement between districts that can be made effective before or after the July 1, 2023, effective date of consolidation.

Our report to the Council of Governors in June 2021, states “The Strategic Planning Committee has concluded that MD19 is rapidly approaching a critical point in its history that, absent a significant reversal of membership and leadership trends, redistricting will be the only option remaining for MD19 to effectively continue serving its Lions. As result, the committee feels it would be remiss to simply kick the problems, and the viable solutions to those problems, down the road. “

At that June 2021 meeting the Council approved the plan, directed this Committee to implement a full redistricting plan for consideration to the clubs and districts of MD19, and to place it on the ballot at a special MD19 Virtual Meeting sometime in May or June of 2022.

We can continue to say, “What’s the rush?” but given our history we do so at great peril.

HL. Third, I do not see why we do not embrace the Global Membership Approach. It appears to be working and there is a district in MD19 that is having success. Again, a year or two of really immersing ourselves in the GMA could help but maybe not totally solve the situation.

SPC. Harry, as you are probably aware, the GMA is not new. It is a globalization of NAMI, which has been with us for virtually the entire previous 5 years during which MD19 went from 14,000 plus members to 9,600. Although we would all love to see GMA/NAMI/whatever be a roaring success, there is little clear evidence that it has changed the membership vector in MD19. We have all heard, repeatedly and anecdotally, over the last several years how that NAMI/GMA “appear to be working” in some unnamed district, but the reality is our overall numbers continue in steep decline.

It is abundantly clear that we can no longer continue “business as usual.” As LCI states in its “Guide for Consolidating Districts” booklet. “**While membership growth**

should always be a part of the plan, redistricting can infuse the district with a mix of new leaders who can look at district activities in a new way, and combine resources to more effectively meet the needs of the clubs...”

HL. The other comments I would like to make are:

I think now is a terrible time to put forward this redistricting goal. Firstly, because clubs continue to struggle with the COVID-19 being able to even meet and to do projects. While I do know there are many ways to do projects most is through a face-to-face type of event.

SPC. If not now, when? Yes, Covid has had a huge impact on our ability to meet and do in-person fundraising and service projects. We all wish it weren't so. But Lions have shown a keen ability to adapt. All of us can imagine a future where our larger, newly consolidated districts with their new mix of leaders work together to find innovative and enthusiastic solutions.

HL. Additionally, I wonder why redistrict now since we have the new Global Membership Approach plan just getting off the ground. It appears to me that the MD is not even giving consideration.

SPC. As my previous comments have indicated, the GMA is not “just getting off the ground”. It has been with us for years. Also, this is not an “either/or” proposition.” We must continue to promote membership while we reorganize and redistrict. Simple as that. As a friend of mine wryly quipped “If you can't ride two horses at once you shouldn't have joined the circus.”

HL. The redistricting proposal, I think is just a matter of shuffling around the districts to make the membership appear to be good numbers in the eyes of LCI (i.e., shows the districts then exceed LCI requirements for districts) and for whose benefit?

SPC. We STRONGLY disagree with this, Harry. First, LCI does not initiate redistricting. MD19 initiates redistricting. So, we have no one to impress but ourselves. Second, please know this: all but one of the nine Districts in MD19 is in “transitional” status (fewer than 1250 members). If current membership trends continue for another five years, we will be nearing 8000 members, in ten years at that same rate we will be at 6000 members. A consequence of membership losses is a developing, acute leadership vacuum in the districts which exacerbates a vicious circle as the districts struggle to find effective leaders who are equipped to address their district's membership and leadership issues. We must take action to mitigate this looming crisis.

Again, to quote from the LCI “Guide for Consolidating Districts:” **“While the ideal size for a district has been debated, there is little doubt that a district should be large enough to have a sufficient pool of trained, qualified district leaders, a well-**

attended and meaningful district convention and ample resources to support club development.

This IS NOT shuffling for appearances.

HL. I believe it's an exercise in futility, as in 5 years of so I believe the membership problem will again raise its ugly head.

SPC. Again, we **STRONGLY** disagree that we should sit back in futility. And even if we didn't disagree, the Council of Governors has given the Strategic Planning Committee a job to do, and this Committee is not empowered to ignore what the Council has directed it to do. As leaders, we can take strong, positive steps to meet membership and leadership problems head-on. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose by taking no action.

HL. My belief is that our situation is not totally a membership problem. It lies more in Leadership both at the district and club level. While likely not true in all districts, I am pained to say it exists in my home district. I have followed operations of districts in my 24 years in the MD (my meaning here is I have had the opportunity to hold positions both at the MD level and the district level and have watched the leadership throughout the MD in all my years.

SPC. Already, some districts have made great progress toward redistricting. Merger Committees have been established in all our nine districts and we have opened lines of communication to assist them by Zoom on a weekly basis. Discussions between merger partners is underway across the MD.

HL. I do believe with full adherence to the Global Membership Approach and concentrating on Leadership issues at both the district and club levels would be a more reasonable approach to use, or until we get out of this pandemic situation. Now is not the time to cause more upheaval in clubs.

SPC. Redistricting should not cause upheaval in our clubs. With just a couple of exceptions (and only following MD19 C&BL guidance) we have taken great pains to keep clubs in their current Zones and Zones in their current Districts. Maintaining that stability is vitally important to clubs and Zones. In effect, the only change a club might see is that they would be in a renamed Zone. Membership, leadership, and service programs in the individual clubs will not be affected.

HL. When I remember the goals set in mid 2000's by the Realignment Committee, it now appears some of those goals (like trying to have shorter distances for DG's to travel, and not having one DG travel through another DG's district to reach clubs, etc.) are being ignored. I do not think making travel distances larger is an answer even

though your committee is suggesting a large pool of candidates may be a sort of answer to the issue of membership.

SPC. True enough, travel distances will be larger with larger Districts. But the entire travel paradigm needs to be reconsidered. **For example, did you know that there is no requirement for a DG to visit every club in his /her district every year?** LCI simply requires that there be CONTACT between the District Governor and the clubs. Historically our DG's have made every effort to visit each club in their District, but while it may be desired, it is simply not required. In my estimation, there is ample room for us to reconsider new and established ways for the DG to keep in contact. For example, A DG can send their VDG's to visit in their stead. That would effectively spread the load out so that each DG/VDG would take a third of the clubs per year. Another way is for the DG to contact clubs via Zoom. And still another way is to have the DG attend Zone Meetings where more than one club is present.

HL. I really am concerned over current District 19E losing their international connections. The current district has been in existence since the MD was formed with five districts.

SPC. Some clubs in 19E have made it clear that they like their international connection. It is up to the D-E-F Merger Committees to sort out the boundaries of their new districts. LCI's only requirement is that each of the proposed new districts have a minimum of 1250 members and 35 clubs.

HL. I suggest maintaining both Districts D and E and filling with clubs and members from District F. District F came about due to Districts D and E becoming too large.

SPC. You are quibbling over terminology here. The new district I is almost identical to the original District E before District E got so big that it was split into two districts. Changing the name from E to I, or whatever it turns out to be, doesn't change that. As already stated, the D-E-F merger committees will need to work together to sort these differences.

HL. While taking about redistricting, there are other options that possibly could be reviewed.

One, of course is the separation of Montana (37) and Alberta (MC with District 1&2). While likely working well for Montana but maybe not so much for Alberta. For them it resulted in two extremely large districts with large numbers of clubs and long distances for DG's.

Another could be to separate the MD into two MD's. The west? side and the east? side to include current districts D, E and F possible set up as a MD with two districts. I know this may be unpopular at a first glance. I suggest there are both advantages and disadvantages.

SPC. These are interesting observations. They are outside the scope of MD19 redistricting, especially concerning Montana and Alberta. Keep in mind they are not what the Council of Governors has instructed us to do. If you want to float a different plan, you need to take it up with the COG.

All said with the best interests of LCI and the MD in mind. No axe to grind.

Respectfully,

Lion PDG Harry Lippincot