



Local Re-Precincting

Municipalities have the initial responsibility of establishing ward and precinct boundaries, which become the building blocks in determining legislative and local government districts.

A **precinct** is the smallest geographically bounded unit used for state election purposes. A precinct is where one polling place in a municipality is located. A **ward** is a geographically bounded unit for election purposes, which consists of one or more precincts.

Towns with representative town meetings elect their members by precinct and cities choose political party committees and

sometimes city council members or other officials by ward. In some municipalities, the council members are elected by districts, which are created using precincts.

After obtaining the necessary local approval, each city and town must submit their plans, including maps, population information and a legal description of the boundaries of each ward and precinct, to the Secretary of the Commonwealth who thereafter makes this information and material available to an independent commission known as the **Local Election Districts Review Commission (LEDRC)**.

ESTABLISHMENT OF WARDS AND PRECINCTS

Each city and town, unless otherwise exempt, is required to establish ward and precinct lines every ten years, following the federal census if:

- the wards of a city do not contain approximately equal numbers of residents so that each ward's population is within 5 percent of the average;
- a ward not divided into precincts contains more than 4,000 residents;
- a town contains more than 6,200 residents; or
- a precinct contains more than 4,000 residents.

Even if a city or town does not need to re-draw their precinct lines because their existing plan remains in conformity with the law, they must still file all the necessary information based on the latest federal census figures and have the plan reapproved by the LEDRC.

STANDARDS

The law requires that voting precincts established by a city or town must meet the following requirements:

- Each new precinct must be "composed of compact and contiguous territory" without protruding fingers or long tails.
- Precincts must be bounded by the center-line of streets or other well defined boundaries such as streams or other bodies of water, railroad tracks, power lines or other clearly visible geographic figures. These features must be recognized as block boundaries by the United States Bureau of the Census and appear on their official block boundary maps. Rear lot lines or other imaginary lines are not acceptable. The use of census boundaries provides redistricting authorities with not only a definitive number of inhabitants in a fixed area, but with demographic information obtained from the federal census, which is essential to any redistricting plan.
- No precinct may contain more than 4,000 residents.
- Every precinct's population must be within five percent (5%) of the average precinct population for that ward or town. Ward populations must be within five percent (5%) of the average ward population for the city.
- Redrawn precinct and ward boundaries must not result in the dilution of minority group members' votes.

For state election purposes, precincts established during the re-precincting process may not be changed in a ward or town which is in more than one senatorial, representative or governor's council district. They may be changed for local elections only and in this case two sets of precinct lines must be maintained.

For the purposes of dividing a city or town into precincts and of apportioning representation in any elected municipal body, the figures reported by the federal census are the only numbers used.