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Contra Costa supervisors looking at big changes in their districts

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The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors next week will take its first gander at how it might redraw its district boundaries.

Four concept maps lay out alternatives from which the board will start discussions Tuesday over how to bring its district populations into line with 2010 census population counts.

Significant population growth in the eastern half of the county is triggering major shifts in the boundaries.

"There is a little to like and dislike about all four of the concepts," said Supervisor Karen Mitchoff of Pleasant Hill, whose district could look very different when the board adopts new maps in late summer. "We'll have to think about how we might place the boundaries so that we can all be happy, although I don't know if that can happen."

In the selection of the map lines, supervisors will strike a balance between their political careers and what they view as a fair and logical five-way division of the county's 1 million residents.

The chief consideration is the supervisors' home addresses. Supervisors must live in the district from which they stand for election, and they are unlikely to draw a colleague out of office.

The supervisors will also look at the number and nature of the voters in the newly proposed districts. The district size is based on total population but not everyone votes. And although county supervisors are nonpartisan officeholders, party politics undeniably play a role during elections.

Three

supervisors will seek re-election in 2012 under the new lines -- Mary Nejedly Piepho of Discovery Bay; Federal Glover of Pittsburg; and Gayle Uilkema of Lafayette.

The supervisors have also expressed other goals for the next generation of district boundaries, such as the end of the three-district division of Walnut Creek.

No cities want to split, arguing they will suffer unless they have the assigned supervisor's full attention. But it will be difficult, if not impossible, to keep every city whole and also attain population parity.

"The challenge is to come up with a plan that I think has integrity and one that the public feels is less political," said Supervisor John Gioia of Richmond. "If we are not careful to avoid a gerrymandered plan, the public might decide to take the job away from us next time."

Gioia's district experienced the least population growth and will likely see only small changes. All four options show he will gain nearly 24,000 residents of Pinole and Tara Hills, currently in Uilkema's district.

The board will conduct countywide hearings in May and June, and adopt a final map in late summer.

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