Four remap plans await Metro Council

By MIKE DUNNE
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When the Metro Council meets Wednesday afternoon to start the complicated and politically sensitive job of reapportioning itself, there will be at least four plans with which to work.

A pair of city council members submitted separate reapportionment plans Tuesday that would preserve a seat for each incumbent and would create four predominantly black districts.

The Black Elected Officials Association will submit a plan that will outline seven city council seats and leave the drawing of four parish council seats to the council itself, according to state Rep. Joe Delpit, head of the group’s reapportionment committee.

In both council-submitted plans, however, one of those four districts has a predominantly black population, but the majority of registered voters are white.

The plans were submitted by Councilmen Don Ayres and V.M. “Lank” Corsentino, even though last Thursday was the deadline for submitting a plan.

Only the League of Women Voters submitted a plan before the council-imposed deadline. The council is to meet in special session at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday to discuss reapportionment.

The plans submitted by the two council members closely track each other with differences only in the alignment of three districts — District 3 in the northern part of the parish, District 5 in the northern part of the city and District 7, a portion of the inner city.

Both plans substantially track the districts now being followed by the council.

The major difference comes in District 5, Corsentino’s district.

Under Corsentino’s plan, his new district would have a population that is 52.9 percent black and 46.1 percent white. But the registered voters’ statistics show a ratio of 58.6 percent white and 41.4 percent black.

Ayres’ plan would give Corsentino’s new District 5 a 60 percent black population to (See REMAP, Page 7-B)
a 39 percent white population. The voter registration figures show this black-white ratio evenly split with 50.1 percent white voters and 49.83 percent black voters.

The Ayres and Corsentino plans disregard ward lines in accordance with the voter-approved Metropolitan Council concept. Both plans differ in the three precincts between Hollywood Street and Prescott Road east of Plank Road - Ward 1; Precincts 25 and 26 and Ward 2, Precinct 23.

The League of Women Voters plan basically tracks a plan submitted by the Black Elected Officials Association to the U.S. Justice Department last year.

In the meantime, the black officials have notified the council that it would prefer three black city council seats with four parish council seats in an unconsolidated 12-member government rather than four predominantly black seats in a consolidated, 12-member Metro Council form.

Ayres submitted his plan to give the council a starting place, he said. "I felt a plan needed to be provided in accordance with the majority unofficial vote of our last unofficial meeting," Ayres said. "Black officials protested a special meeting two weeks ago, saying nothing could be done officially because the meeting had been improperly called.

At that time the council voted to go with a consolidated plan rather than a city-parish split council plan.

Ayres, who would have been put into a whole, new district by the LWV plan, said that he was not happy the LWV plan.

Lee Wesley, who was working with the group, was supposed to file the plan with Council Administrator Don Novack and Delpit was surprised to find out that that had not been done.

In Ayres' plan, there are four of the 12 districts which have population deviations higher than 10 percent of the target population per district. That could create problems with the Justice Department, which has already shot down the last council plan and is questioning consolidation.

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Ayres, who would have been put into a whole, new district by the LWV plan, said that he was not happy the LWV plan.

"I want to talk to someone to find out the reason they were scrambling everybody's district. Myself and every other councilman ran for and was elected in a defined district," he said. "I was elected by these people. They ought to have a right to dismiss me. They're denying my constituents the right to vote in my race if I should run or turn me out of office.

 Ayres said he would not guess what will happen at Wednesday's meeting.

He said there are two questions which need to be answered. One is the reapportionment plan itself.

But the bigger question is whether consolidated government — approved by the parish voters last September — will stand or fall.

The intent of consolidation was not to discriminate," Ayres said of the vote still opposed to consolidation but feels that the voters' voice must be heard.

The League plan would create some political problems. It would lump Council members Gary Bergeron and Corsentino into one district and Pearl George and Ben Peabody into one district. Ayres would be put in Peabody's old district, where he would be running in a virtually new district.