



Local Redistricting in 2021

Every 10 years, the U.S. Constitution requires a national census and the reapportionment of congressional seats based on population changes. Each state must then perform redistricting, or the redrawing of district lines from which public officials are elected. At the local level, this process is, and always has been, nonpartisan.

The Local Redistricting Process

Under current law, the local redistricting process must be complete by mid-November in order for clerks to publish election notices in advance of the following spring election. This process would typically begin in April and take approximately 180 days, following these three steps:

1. Adoption of a tentative county supervisory district plan (April – May)
2. Creation of wards / adjustment of ward lines by municipalities (June – July)
3. Adoption of a final county supervisory plan (August – September)

Note: These dates represent the typical timeline in years when census data is not delayed.

Delays in the release of 2020 federal census data have already caused Wisconsin counties to miss the July 1st deadline to perform required calculations, hold public hearings, and adopt tentative county supervisory district plans. These delays will, in turn, delay town and village ward creation/adjustment.

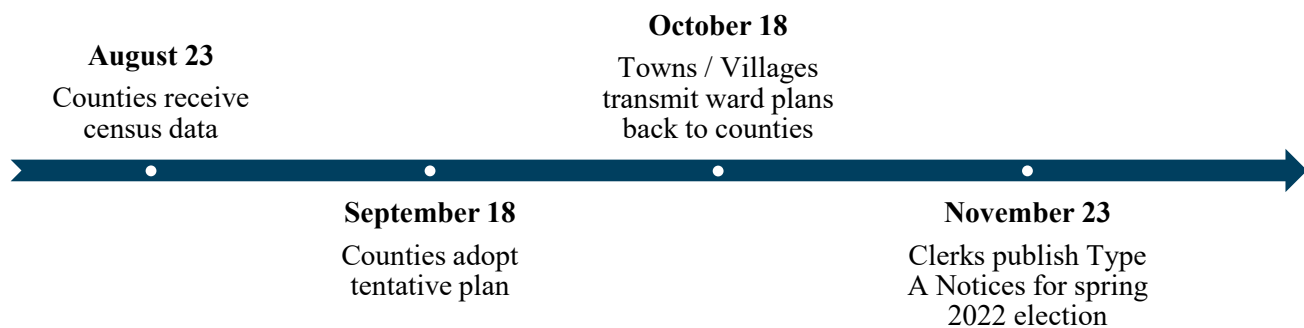
In light of these delays caused by the federal government, and the resulting inability of Wisconsin local governments to comply with statutory deadlines, the Wisconsin Towns Association, the Wisconsin Counties Association, and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities requested temporary relief from the typical local redistricting deadlines. This relief would have followed the same process for local redistricting as found in current law, but would have provided local governments more time to complete that process. Essentially, this relief would have delayed the effect of new county supervisory district lines and municipal ward lines for the purpose of local elections until after the 2022 spring election. These changes would not have affected state or congressional elections. After approval by the legislature, however, this plan was vetoed by the Governor.

Where do we stand now?

We are still waiting on census data from the federal government. Once that data is transmitted to the state and processed by the Legislative Technology Services Bureau, it will be forwarded to counties for use drafting county tentative plans. We are currently anticipating counties will receive that data around August 23rd, although that date is a hopeful estimate reliant on no further delays from the federal government.

Since we have already passed the statutory deadline for each county to complete its tentative plan, counties will now have to do their best to hold hearings and adopt tentative plans as quickly as possible. We are currently anticipating that counties will finalize tentative plans and transmit those plans to municipalities around September 15th. At that point, each town and village must adjust ward boundaries and transmit ward plans back to the county (discussed in greater detail below).

Your board should plan to transmit its ward plan back to the county by October 18th in order for the county to adopt a final plan before the November 23rd deadline for clerks to publish Type A Notices for the 2022 spring election. Missing this November 23rd deadline would create uncertainty going into the spring election cycle. It may be necessary to schedule a special town/village board meeting to meet this deadline.



The November 23 date for Type A Notices is the only definitive date. All other dates are suggestions only, based upon the anticipated receipt of census data.

Creation / Adjustment of Wards by Ordinance or Resolution

“Wards” are subdivisions of towns, villages, and cities created to facilitate election administration and establish relatively equal sized election districts (i.e. supervisory, legislative, and congressional districts). While wards do not have to be equal in population, they are subject to population limits, including:

- In a town or village with 10,000 to 39,000 population, each ward shall contain 600 to 2,100 people.
- In a town or village with less than 10,000 population, each ward shall contain 300 to 1,000 people.
- Towns and villages with less than 1,000 population are not required to be divided into wards, but may do so to help facilitate elections. See Wis. Stat. §§ 5.15(2)(a) & (b).

Once you receive a tentative plan from the county, your board must create wards by ordinance or resolution—making a good faith effort to accommodate the county tentative plan and creating supervisory districts that conform to the population requirements of the tentative plan. See Wis. Stat. § 5.15(2)(d). Each ordinance or resolution must designate the polling place for each ward, describe the boundaries of each ward, and number each ward using unique whole numbers in consecutive order (i.e. 1, 2, 3...). See Wis. Stat. § 5.15(4)(a).

You can find more information about ward creation and the local redistricting process in the County Decennial Redistricting Handbook, available online here:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/77ea05ac001/9ce2c80f-31da-4424-b016-2f61bcc0c7f4.pdf>