



City of SANTA CLARITA

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CITY OF SANTA CLARITA SETTLES CALIFORNIA VOTING RIGHTS ACT LAWSUIT *Santa Clarita Will Institute District Based Elections for 2024 City Council Election*

At the special meeting of the Santa Clarita City Council on April 12, 2022, the City Council approved a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs who filed suit against the City back on December 29, 2021, claiming a violation of the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA). The City will institute district-based elections for the City Council seats, starting with the 2024 City Council election - **the election in November of 2022 will not be affected**. As part of the settlement agreement, the City will pay a total of \$370,000 to the plaintiffs, Michael Cruz, Sebastian Cazares and the group Neighborhood Elections Now, who are represented by lawyer Scott Rafferty from Northern California.

Although the five districts boundaries will be determined before the 2024 election, the City has always operated staggered elections, so only two seats will be up in November 2024. Regular elections will continue to be consolidated with statewide general elections in November of even-numbered years to fill expired City Council terms. Councilmembers serve staggered four-year terms, so the remaining three district seats will be up for election starting in November of 2026. The agreement goes on to state that by June 30, 2023, the City Council will pass an ordinance or resolution adopting a map with five council districts.

“This was a tough settlement to agree to,” said Mayor Laurene Weste. “Our City has thrived under the current at-large election process, through which residents are able to vote for all of the council members who represent them in this City. This new process means voters will only get to vote for one councilmember. This one councilmember will represent just one area of the City. However, it seems that fighting this lawsuit would be outrageously expensive with no possible successful conclusion. The Santa Clarita City Council has strongly pursued this issue for many years to keep our City whole, while most of the public entities around the City have

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switched to districts as a result of litigation or under threat of litigation. The settlement decision was made to avoid the unnecessary high expense that further litigation would incur with so little likelihood that the money spent would preserve the current system. The settlement also gives the City the ability to work with the community on the process to establish districts, rather than have a court dictate the districts.”

The next steps will be working on a map that will break the City up into council districts. The City will conduct several public hearings starting after the 2022 election to develop a final district map. The City will work with the Santa Clarita community in a transparent and collaborative process to develop the district map. More information will be released once details of the public hearings are available.