**From:** woodhaven.residents@gmail.com on behalf of Woodhaven Residents Block Association <info@woodhaven-nyc.org>
**Sent:** Monday, November 26, 2012 8:49 AM
**Subject:** Press Release: WRBA Condemns City Council Redistricting Final Proposal
**Attachments:** City Council Redistricting Final Proposal.jpg

**The Woodhaven Residents' Block Association**

For immediate release: November 26, 2012

# WRBA Condemns City Council Redistricting Final Proposal

The Woodhaven Residents' Block Association blasted the New York City Districting Commission's proposal to split Woodhaven's representation in the City Council.

The Commission had initially proposed placing nearly all of Woodhaven in a single City Council district. The WRBA submitted testimony to the Commission lauding this proposal, and even urged tweaks to ensure that a sliver of Woodhaven left outside the district would be incorporated. Instead of heeding the WRBA's testimony, the Commission did the very opposite by discarding their original plans for Woodhaven and slicing the neighborhood into three parts spread over two districts.

"The Commission decided to throw Woodhaven under the bus. It should be embarrassed about how its final proposal treats our community," said WRBA Director of Communications Alex Blenkinsopp. "Now that the final decision is in the hands of the City Council, we want all City Council Members to know that a vote in favor of this gerrymander is a vote against Woodhaven."

Woodhaven is currently divided between two City Council districts: District 30, represented by Council Member Elizabeth Crowley; and District 32, represented by Council Member Eric Ulrich. Instead of preserving the current division, the Commission significantly worsened the split by switching large parts of the neighborhood from Crowley to Ulrich and vice versa. In addition, the final proposal places the far west portion of Woodaven in the same district as the extreme northeast corner, but excludes any residential area in between.

At the WRBA's Town Hall on September 15, 2012, both Crowley and Ulrich made public statements indicating that the Commission's original proposal was preferable for Woodhaven.

At that Town Hall, Crowley said the initially proposed lines are "good news for Woodhaven. It actually puts you all together in one Council district." Ulrich said, "I think that Woodhaven, just like I think where I live in Ozone Park, should be in one district. It should be in one district. People ought to be able to hold their elected officials accountable. It ought to be easy for them to know who represents them in the City Council.... I just think that's the right thing to do. It's the fair thing to do."

Now the WRBA is calling on Ulrich and Crowley to make good on their public statements and to vote in the best interest of their Woodhaven constituents. The Block Association has written to both Council Members and urged them to vote against the final proposal. The draft lines will be enacted unless a majority of City Council members vote to send the Commission back to the drawing board.

"We don't know why the Commission decided to split and scramble Woodhaven's representation, but we won't

just sit there quietly as the City Council rubber-stamps this awful proposal," said WRBA President Edward K. Wendell. "This is an opportunity for City Council Members -- both our current representatives, as well as those who might want Woodhaven's support in the future -- to show whether they actually care about our community."

The WRBA has been an extremely strong voice for Woodhaven on redistricting matters this year. In January, it vigorously objected to the gerrymandered State Senate lines that split Woodhaven three ways. In March, the Block Association opposed the congressional lines that divided Woodhaven into two portions and basically separated Woodhaven from the rest of Queens.

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This press release is available online at http://news.woodhaven-nyc.org/2012/11/wrba-condemns-city-council.html.

Attachment: The map shows how Woodhaven's residential area would be divided if the Districting Commission's proposal is approved. The blue areas would fall within Council Member Crowley's district. The orange area would fall within Council Member Ulrich's district.

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**Written Testimony of the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association Before the New York City Districting Commission**

Queens Hearing
October 10, 2012

Thank you to all members of the New York City Districting Commission for the opportunity to testify. We would especially like to acknowledge former City Council Member Thomas Ognibene, who used to represent part of Woodhaven, as well as the other members of the Commission's Queens cohort, Ms. Linda Lin and former State Senator Frank Padavan.

This testimony is being submitted by the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association (WRBA). The WRBA, now in its 41st year, works on behalf of the residents of Woodhaven, an approximately 1.7-square-mile neighborhood in Queens. The WRBA serves as an advocate for Woodhaven residents, promotes neighborhood spirit by bringing together residents and local leaders, and seeks to engage all in the betterment of our community.

The WRBA strives to be responsive to the residents of Woodhaven. Our efforts take many forms: we are in regular touch with our elected officials at the city, state, and federal levels to emphasize the importance of particular issues; we serve as a conduit with the local police precinct, Community Board, government agencies, and other organizations to help maintain the safety and quality of life in Woodhaven; we establish programs on our own to deal with problems such as the shortage of parking, the proliferation of graffiti, and the growing problem of abandoned houses; and we give residents a chance to speak up and be heard at our monthly town hall meetings.

We have already had two opportunities in 2012 to serve as Woodhaven's voice on the issue of districting: once in testimony that we submitted to the New York State Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment (LATFOR), and once in a letter we sent to the Special Master who redrew New York's congressional lines. Both times, we had the same hope that we have now: for all of Woodhaven to be included in one district.

In its Preliminary Draft Plan, the Districting Commission accomplished what neither LATFOR nor the Special Master was able to do: unite Woodhaven. For that, we commend the Commission. Your proposal reflects a deep

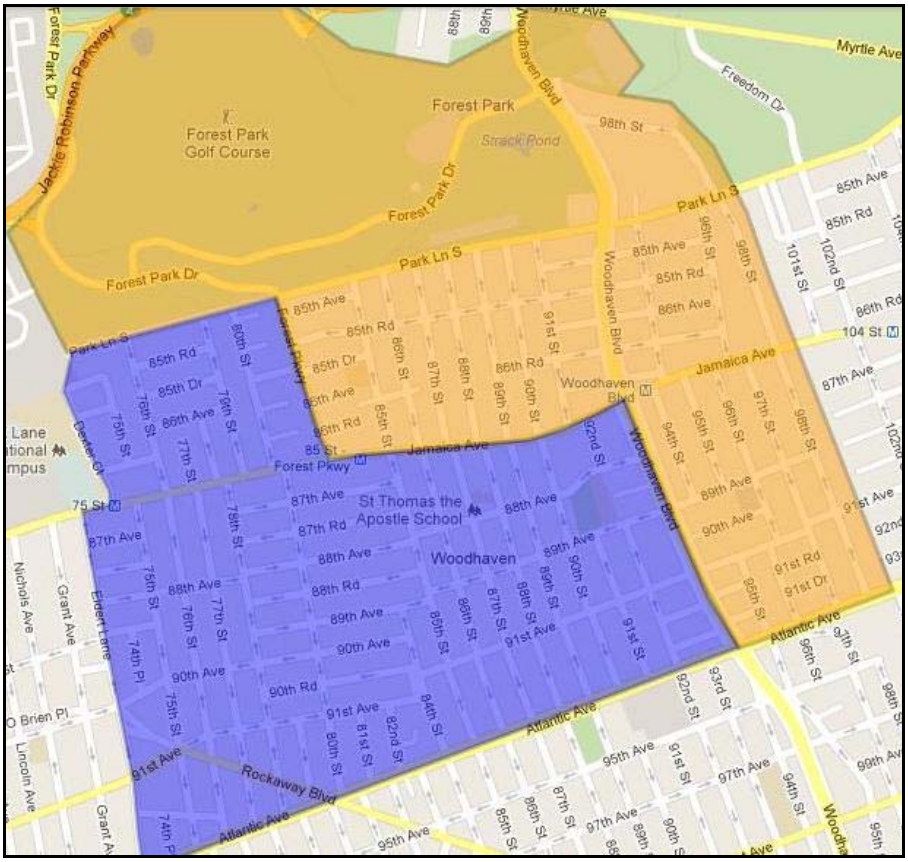
understanding of our neighborhood, and a genuine recognition of the importance of unifying a community's representation.

Our primary goal in this testimony is to applaud the Commission for how its initial proposal treats Woodhaven, and to encourage the Commission not to make any sweeping changes to this proposal when it comes to our neighborhood.

Though we are generally pleased with the draft lines put forward by the Commission, we would like to point out that a small portion of Woodhaven has been separated from the rest of the neighborhood, and we would like to request that the district borders be tweaked slightly so that the entirety of the neighborhood lies within the same district.

## I. The Current Split

In the status quo, the population of Woodhaven is divided roughly in half between City Council Districts 30 and 32. The map below shows Woodhaven's parameters and how it is currently split. The orange section lies in District 30 and the purple section lies in District 32.



This division is highly undesirable. Woodhaven is a distinct community with a clear identity. It should be kept whole. The WRBA strives to maintain our neighborhood's cohesiveness.

Our current City Council lines make it more difficult for fellow residents to know who's representing them and whom to ask for help. In addition, having a single City Council representative who understands the entirety of our community is crucial for our collaboration with him or her, and it also makes it easier for that City Council Member to build and maintain a relationship with our whole neighborhood.

Such representation is important because many of the issues that affect Woodhaven are priorities in all quarters of the neighborhood. People from every corner of Woodhaven take the same subway line, shop at the same grocery stores, play in the same parks, attend concerts at the same bandshell, face the same parking problems, and attend the same annual street fair. All of Woodhaven is served by the same police precinct and the same Community Board. It only makes sense for all of Woodhaven to be represented by the same City Council Member, too.

## II. The Districting Commission's Proposal

The Commission's proposed district lines would place nearly all of Woodhaven in District 30. It appears that the Districting Commission appreciates the shortcomings of the status quo that we described above, and has formulated a way to resolve them. **We are firmly in favor of the way the Districting Commission's Preliminary Draft Plan unites nearly all of Woodhaven. It is a huge step forward.**

At the WRBA's town hall on September 15, 2012, both of the City Council Members who currently represent part of Woodhaven spoke in broad terms about how a neighborhood typically benefits when its City Council representation is not split. The proposed district lines almost perfectly provide the outcome our City Council Members said would be an improvement.

We understand that not all neighborhoods are happy with the proposed lines. As the draft map undergoes modifications, we encourage the Commission not to make any sweeping changes that would undo the good work it has done regarding Woodhaven.

The map below shows Woodhaven's parameters under the Districting Commission's proposal. The orange section would lie in District 30 and the purple section would lie in District 32.

The map makes clear that a portion of Southeast Woodhaven, the District 32 portion, would be separated from the rest of the neighborhood. **Though we are generally pleased with the way Woodhaven's proposed district lines are drawn, we would prefer that no part of Woodhaven be separated from the rest of the neighborhood.**

This carved-out portion—which we'll call "the subsection"—includes 98th Street between Jamaica Avenue and 91st Avenue, as well as nearby stretches of 97th Street, 89th Avenue, 91st Avenue, and Jamaica Avenue. There is nothing different about the subsection that warrants detaching it from the rest of the neighborhood.

In addition to the aforementioned arguments for keeping communities united, there are four specific arguments in favor of placing the subsection in District 30.

**First, the subsection, though only a small segment of the neighborhood, is still densely populated.** The city-level representation of hundreds of people will be adversely affected by their exclusion from Woodhaven. The change we are requesting should not be brushed aside as a mere triviality.

**Second, the entirety of the subsection currently lies in District 30.** In other words, the only portion of Woodhaven that would end up in District 32 is a segment that is not currently in District 32. This will result in maximum confusion

for residents, and minimal familiarity with the area by the City Council Member who would represent it. It's the worst of both worlds.

**Third, the subsection has special exposure to issues that are especially important to Woodhaven as a whole.** Foremost among these is the debate over the future of the inactive Rockaway Branch rail line. The abandoned train tracks abut the backyards of many residents in the subsection. On September 29, the WRBA held a public forum on the future of the tracks, and turnout from the subsection was exceptionally strong. These residents' opinions are tremendously important and influential in voicing a neighborhood-wide stance about what should be done with the tracks.

In recent weeks, the WRBA has spent a significant amount of time in the subsection. We have relationships with residents there. We are familiar with their traffic problems, their crime situation, and other issues that are informing the WRBA's approach to neighborhood-wide issues. In other words, the subsection is an important part of Woodhaven, and should be districted the same way as the rest of Woodhaven.

**Fourth, it makes mathematical sense for the subsection to be in District 30.** According to the Districting Commission's Preliminary Draft Plan, District 32's population would be 156,426, whereas District 30's population would be only 154,937. Moving the subsection from District 32 to District 30 would actually even out the numbers, rather than exacerbating the population differential between these two neighboring districts.

## III. Conclusion

As far as Woodhaven is concerned, the New York City Districting Commission has done excellent work. The WRBA is pleased that the Commission, unlike LATFOR and the Special Master, truly seems to understand Woodhaven and the importance of keeping it intact. We hope that any changes to the draft lines do not erase the excellent progress the Commission has made in unifying Woodhaven's representation. The proposal, however, is not perfect, and we hope that the Commission finds a way to keep every square block of Woodhaven in the same district, which its initial proposal almost—but not quite—managed to do.

Respectfully,

The Woodhaven Residents' Block Association

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| Edward K. Wendell | President |
| Janet Chan-Smith | First Vice President |
| Alexander J. Blenkinsopp | Second Vice President |

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| Roger Hennin | Third Vice President |
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