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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-
ISLAMIC RELATIONS, NEW YORK, INC.**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE INDEPENDENT
REDISTRICTING COMMISSION**

PRESENTED

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2021

Dear Chair Imumura and Commissioners of the Redistricting Committee:

Thank you for the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC or Commission) for organizing the series of public hearings. I am Ahmed Mohamed, legal director for the New York Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-NY). CAIR-NY is a leading civil rights and advocacy organization for the Muslim community across New York State. CAIR-NY is also a member of the Mapping Our Future coalition comprised of advocates dedicated to mobilizing the grassroots to get involved in redistricting and advocate for a fair process and fair maps.

As you may already be aware, the Muslim community was sliced and diced into numerous districts in a completely nonsensical manner during the 2011 redistricting. After the voters passed the proposition to create the IRC, CAIR-NY and others were optimistic that fair maps would be possible during this 2021 cycle. Unfortunately, the Commission failed to draft fair maps. Instead, the drafts are nothing more than partisan maps, which leave the people confused and make the jobs of advocates substantially more difficult. CAIR-NY implores the Commission to push aside partisanship, consider the public's comments, and impartially construct one set of maps that provide fair representation for all communities.

As an organization dedicated to defending the US and New York Constitutions and the rights of Muslim New Yorkers, we are tirelessly working to increase the civic engagement within our community. Each year, we exert countless hours and financial resources to fight unjust actions presented by government actors and to ensure our community engages in the electoral process. As part of our civic engagement work, we have conducted voter registration drives, candidate forums, phone banking, and formed the New York Muslim Voter Project with other civic engagement Muslim organizations.¹ All of our work is conducted in a nonpartisan fashion.

Additionally, unless the Commission draws fair maps, CAIR-NY will be forced to increase its expenditures on civic engagement activities to counteract the dilution of the Muslim vote that will inevitably occur if the Muslim community is gerrymandered similarly to the last redrawing of the maps.

Below, CAIR-NY submits maps for several Senate and Assembly districts that would keep the Muslim community—a community of interest—together. The proposed maps satisfy the redistricting criteria.

¹ <https://nymvp.org/>

I. Districting Criteria

The New York State districting criteria require that districts (1) do not deny or abridge racial minority voting groups; (2) contain equal numbers of people; (3) are contiguous and compact; (4) do not disfavor competition or favor or disfavor incumbents; and (5) maintain the cores of existing districts or political subdivisions and consider “communities of interest.” In the draft maps released by the Commission, the district maps encompassing the Muslim community were not compact and failed to satisfactorily consider the Muslim community as a community of interest—among other concerns. It is important for the Commission to prioritize compactness/contiguity and communities of interest. Doing so will result in maps that better satisfy the districting criteria than the current proposed maps.

II. Compactness/Contiguity as a Priority

An essential condition for fair districts is compactness. Compactness of districts is crucial, more so indirectly, to equal representation and promotes most of the other standards set for the Commission in the districting process. Prioritizing compactness in the districting process prevents artificial gerrymandering via cracking² or packing³. In the past, the Muslim community has been the victim of cracking.

Districts which are compact necessarily make such processes, cracking or packing, more difficult as there is less latitude to gerrymander the district boundaries. Compact districts will also result in mapmaking that is unlikely to significantly favor or disfavor any particular group. Moreover, prioritizing compact districts effectively will also support the satisfaction of requirements 1, 4, and 5 of the districting criteria.

III. Communities of Interest as a Priority

Although undefined under state law, a community of interest is typically a population that shares cultural, historical, or economic interest.⁴ Prioritizing communities of

² A procedure of splitting minority populations into multiple districts to dilute their vote share.

³ A procedure of squeezing majority populations into majority saturated districts to dilute their vote share.

⁴ See also <https://www.nyirc.gov/faqs>: “A community of interest is a population which shares enough social and economic interests of importance that suggest said community should be included in a single district for effective and fair representation. These might include similar standards of living, shared methods and patterns of transportation, or similar economic and societal concerns. For example, the population of a rural area might have different shared interests from those living in an urban area, as might those living in an industrial area from the priorities shared by those living in a primarily agricultural area. Shared interests within a

interest will aid compactness since communities of interest generally reside in the same area. It is important that the Commission does not split up or crack communities of interest, especially those historically disenfranchised in the districting process. The Muslim community is a community of interest that shares common values and cultural identity. The Muslim community is concentrated in areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. As mentioned above, in the past, the Muslim community has been cracked into many districts diluting their vote. Unfortunately, the proposed draft maps largely continue cracking the Muslim community.

Our coalition has members from all over NYC, and the potential for gerrymandering is a serious threat to our wide range of community members. We've already seen the impact of unfair redistricting on our communities – it has broken us into multiple districts, which makes prioritizing our shared needs nearly impossible. If further divided and separated, our already marginalized community will struggle to hold any significant political weight. Communities with common interests and needs must stay together for their needs to be met. We are already divided in terms of assembly, state and congressional lines, we can't afford to be divided any further.

IV. Recommended Maps⁵

A. Assembly Map for Kensington, Park Slope, and Little Pakistan, Brooklyn

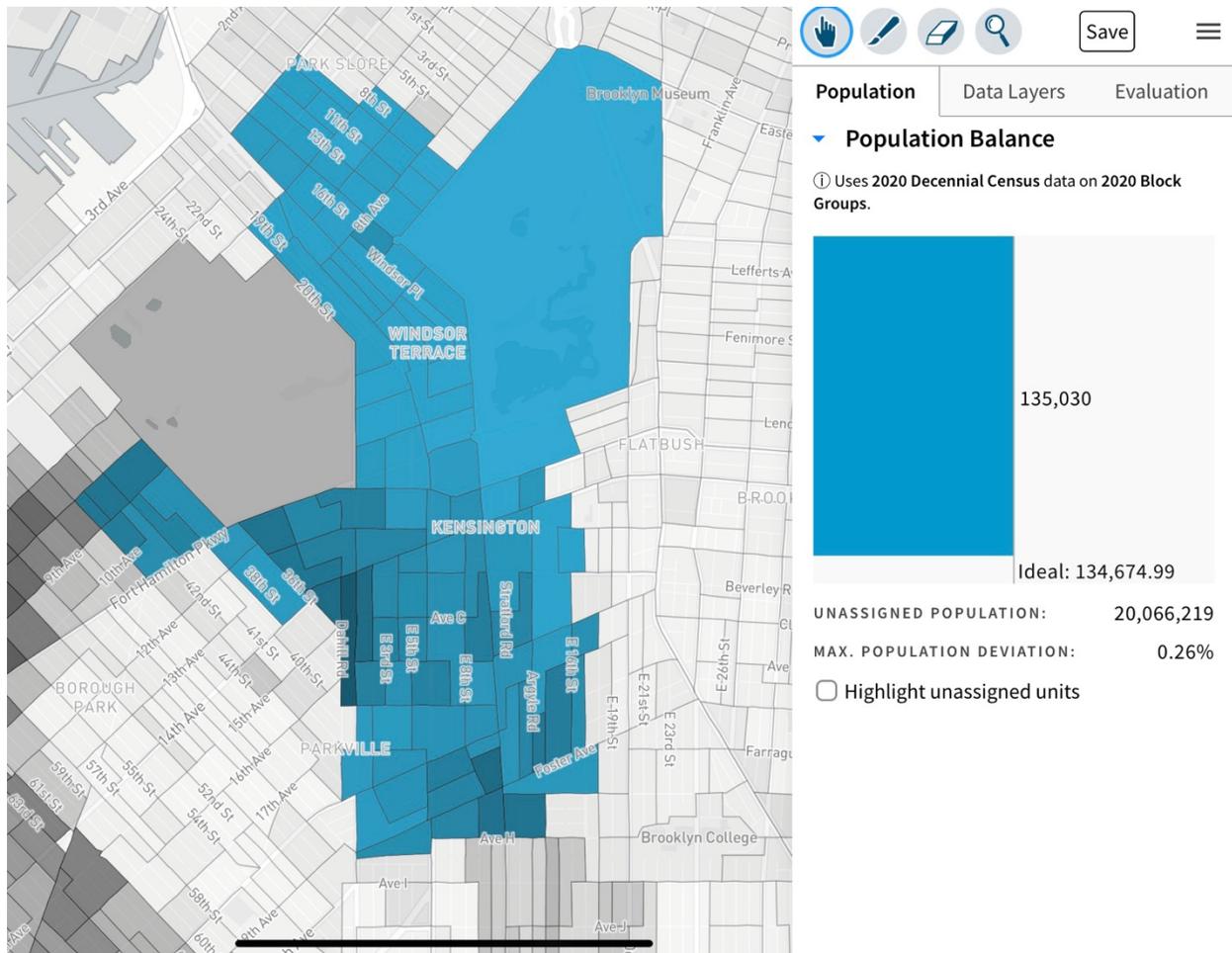
We recommend the following assembly map for the Kensington, Park Slope, and Little Pakistan area (Proposed Map M1). Proposed Map M1 is compact, contiguous and keeps the Muslim community in that area largely within the same assembly district. Proposed Map M1 is similar to the Letters AR map. Proposed Map M1, however, reconciles with the fact that the Letters AR map left out significant parts of the Muslim community. The proposed map largely keeps the Letters AR map intact while ensuring that the community of interest, in this case the Muslim community, is adequately represented and not separated. Keeping the Muslim community together will give the community an opportunity to have their voices heard in the electorate process and by elected officials who can respond to their needs.

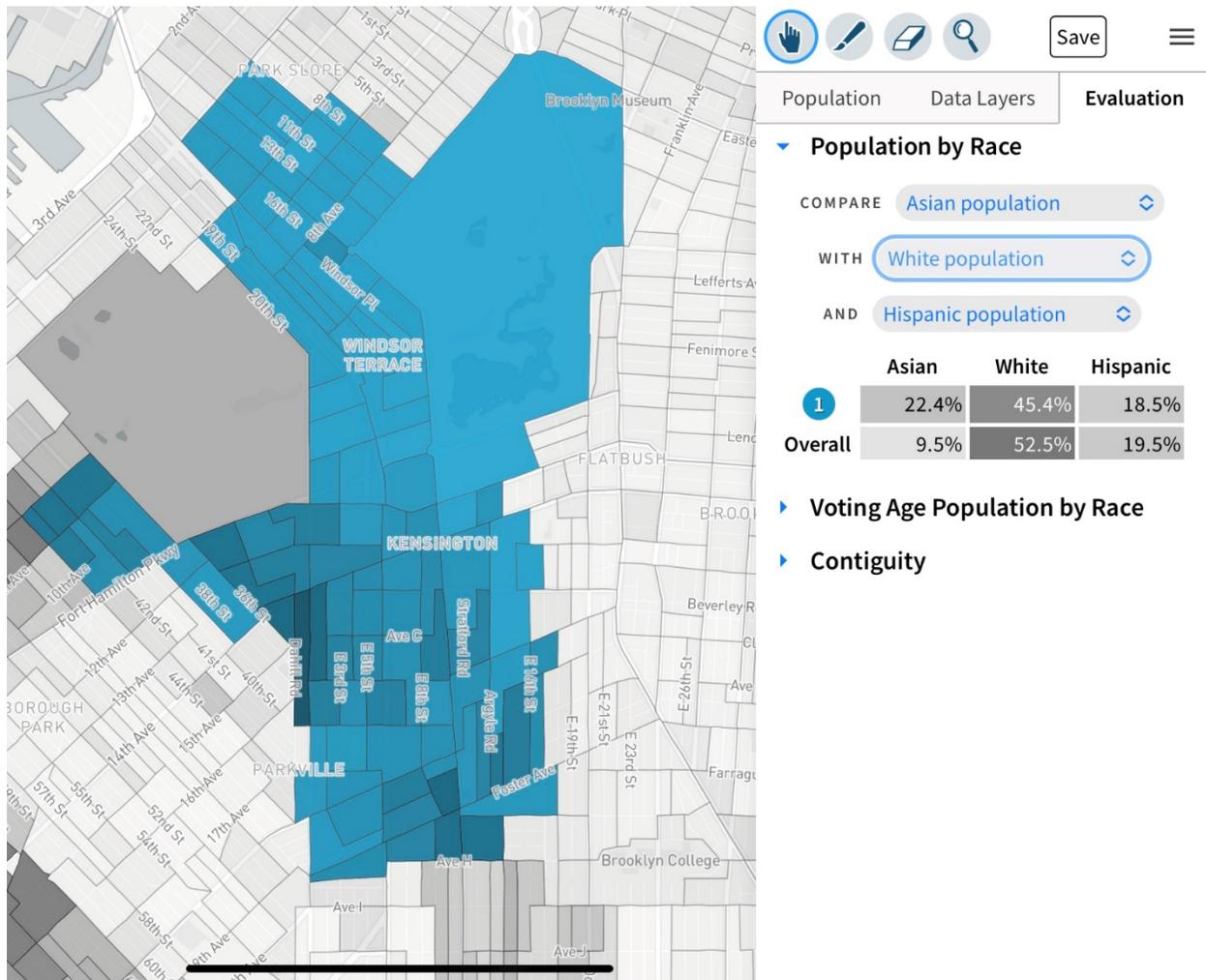
Community of Interest do not include relationships with political parties, incumbents, or political candidates.”

⁵ We cite to the Letters proposed maps for reference and comparative purposes. However, we share similar, if not more, concerns regarding the Numbers proposed maps. For ease of reading, to reduce repetitiveness, and to keep this written testimony short, we have decided to use the Letters proposed maps throughout this testimony.

Currently, the Muslim community in this area does not feel their elected officials respond to their needs because the maps have been drawn in ways that dilute their vote and erase their voices. We ask the Commission to adopt Proposed Map M1 as the assembly district map for this designated area. Below is Proposed Map M1; an online copy of Proposed Map M1 may also be viewed here:

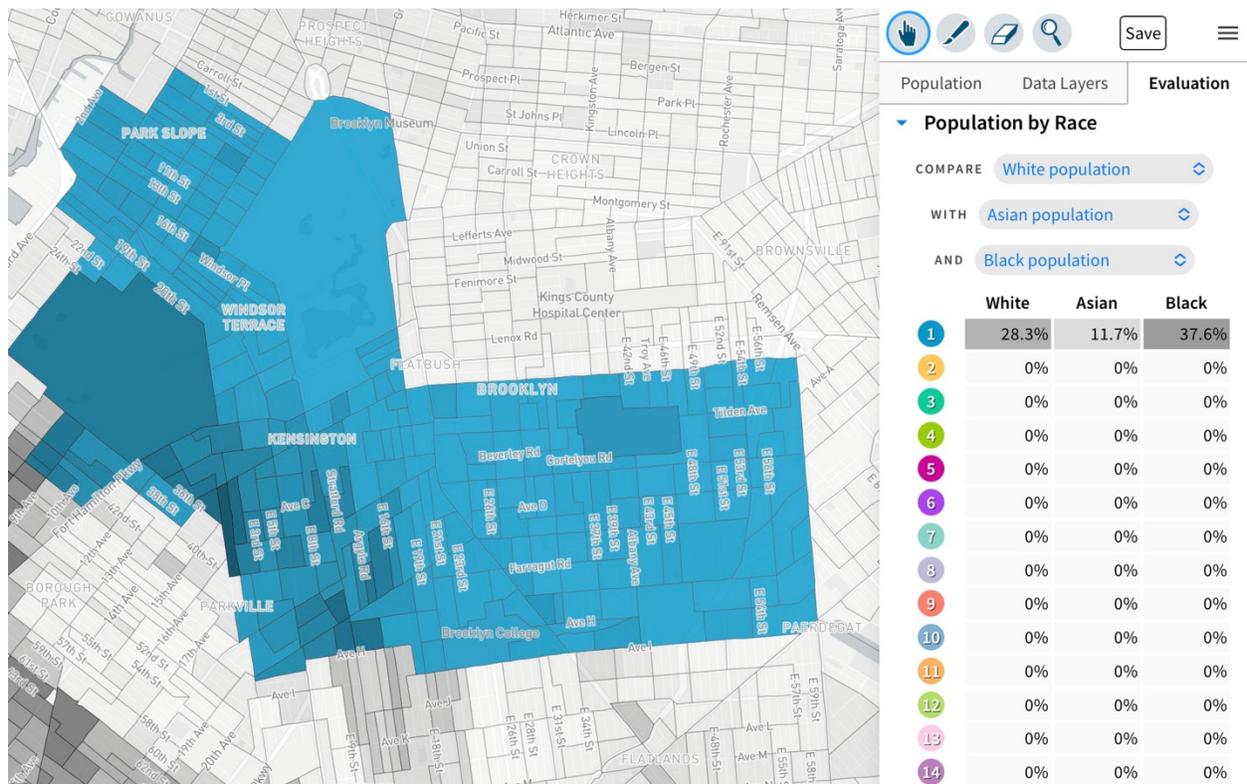
<https://districtr.org/plan/76370>.





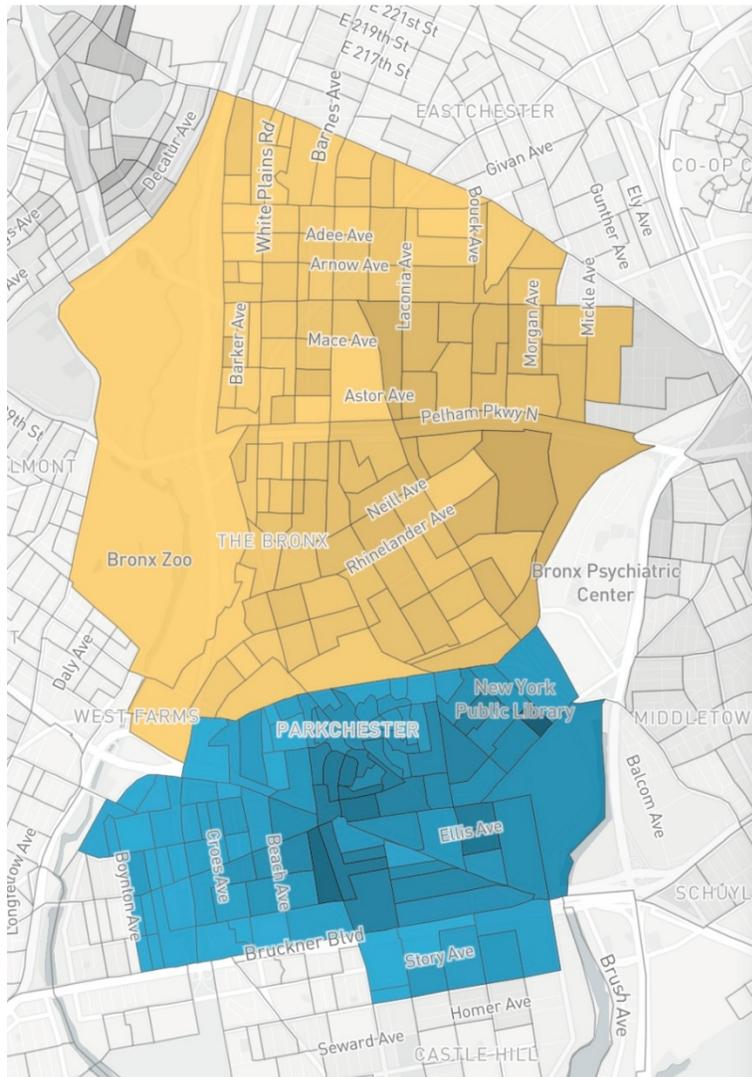
B. Senate Map for Kensington, Little Pakistan, Windsor Terrace, Park Slope, Flatbush, and Flatlands

We recommend that the Commission amend the proposed Letters Senate AB map by adding Park Slope in lieu of the Flatlands. See proposed Senate map below and at the following: <https://districtr.org/plan/79749> (Proposed Map M2). The Proposed Map M2 will unite the Muslim community in that area. As is, the Muslim community is cracked into multiple Senate districts and does not provide them with an opportunity to be heard or influence their elected officials. Proposed Map M2 is also more compact than the Letters Senate AB map. Accordingly, we ask the Commission to adopt Proposed Map M2 for this Senate district.



C. Assembly Maps for Parkchester and Little Yemen/Morris Park, Bronx

The current and proposed maps for Parkchester and Little Yemen in the Bronx substantially divide the Muslim community and dilutes their vote. With respect to the Letters Assembly Plan AD CB, the proposed map is not compact by any stretch of the imagination. Moreover, the proposed map seems to be drawn to separate and divide the Muslim community in that area. Similarly, Letters Assembly Plan AD CJ suffers from the same defects. The proposed maps are even more concerning considering how easy it should be for the Commission to draw very compact assembly districts in this area. Accordingly, we propose assembly district maps that keep the Muslim community together in each respective assembly district. Our proposed maps are also compact and meet the districting criteria. Below are the two assembly districts proposed maps (Proposed Map M3 and M4); the map can also be viewed at <https://districtr.org/plan/78322>.



Population Data Layers Evaluation

▼ **Population Balance**

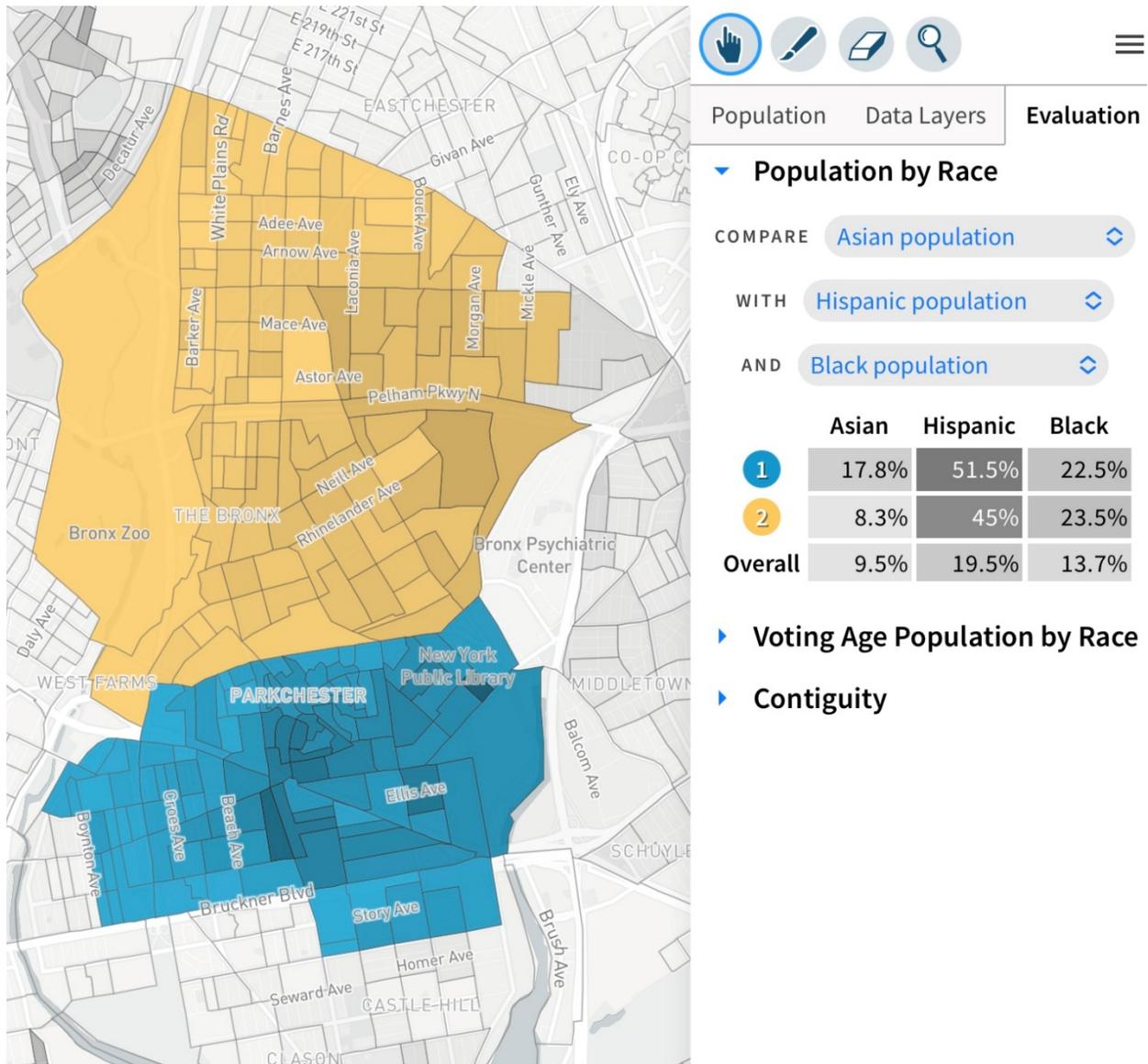
ⓘ Uses 2020 Decennial Census data on 2020 Block Groups.

134,786	
135,963	
Ideal: 134,674.99	

UNASSIGNED POPULATION: 19,930,500

MAX. POPULATION DEVIATION: 0.96%

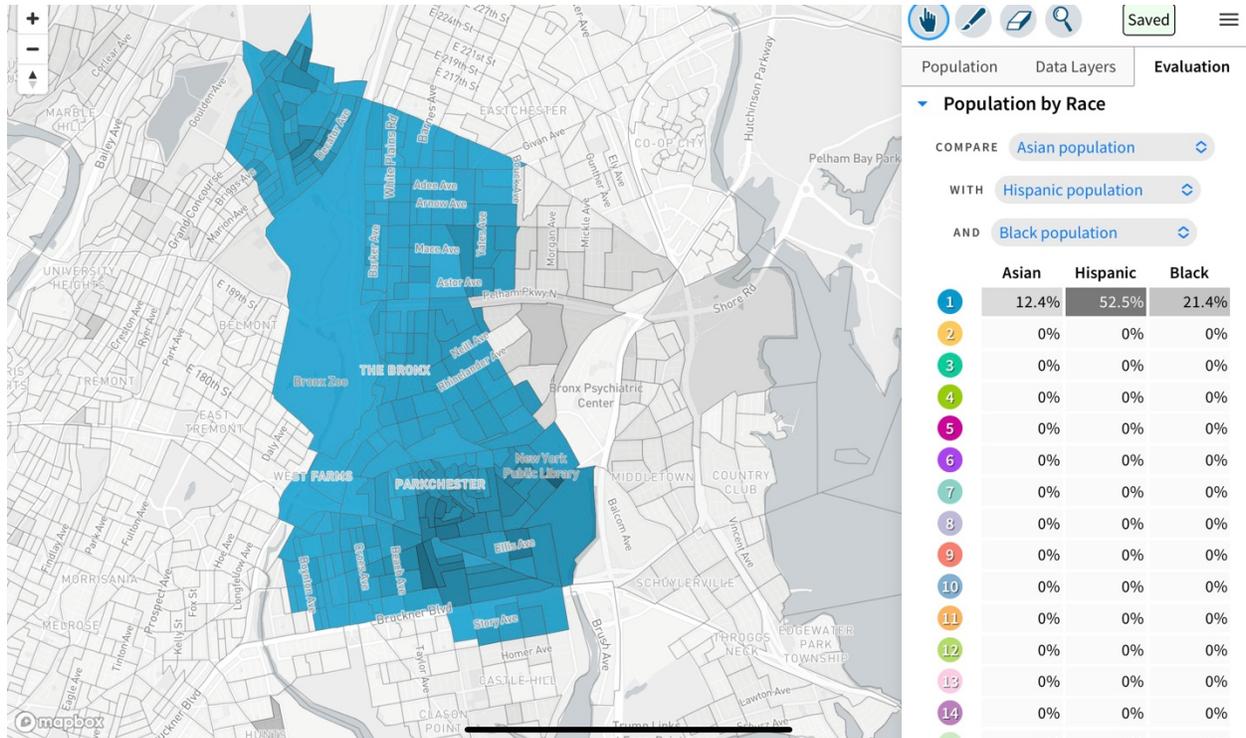
Highlight unassigned units

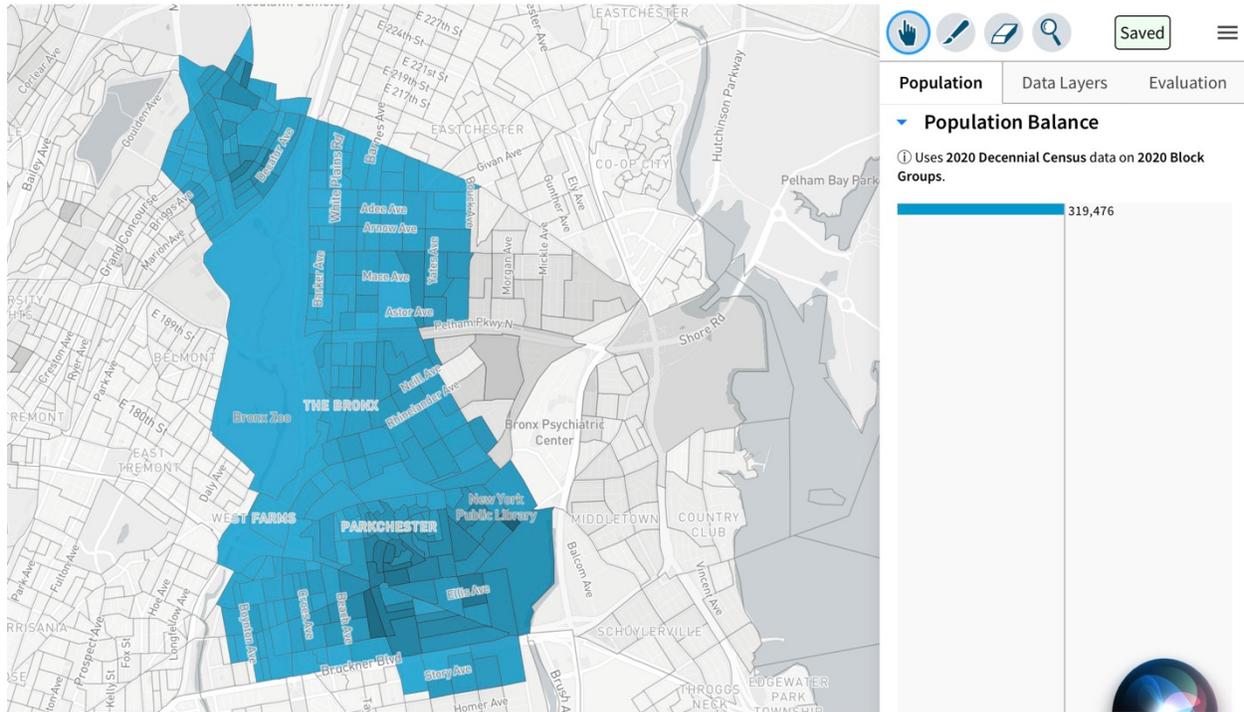


D. Senate Map: Parkchester, Little Yemen, Morris Park, Norwood, Bronx

The Commission’s proposed maps (Letters SD X, AQ, and AJ) split the Muslim community in Parkchester, Little Yemen, and Morris Park into 3 separate Senate districts. These maps are not compact in any way and do not allow for equal representation for the Muslim community. Simply put, the Commission’s maps do not meet the districting criteria as compactness and communities of interest are not seriously considered. The proposed Senate map we are proposing creates a straightforward and compact map that meets the districting criteria, including

considering the Muslim community of interest. Our proposed map combines our Proposed Maps M3 and M4 of the assembly districts and adds the Bedford and Norwood areas. The Senate proposed map is below (Proposed Map M5) and can be viewed online at: <https://districtr.org/plan/77452>. Accordingly, we ask the Commission to adopt our Proposed Map M5 as the Senate district map for this area.

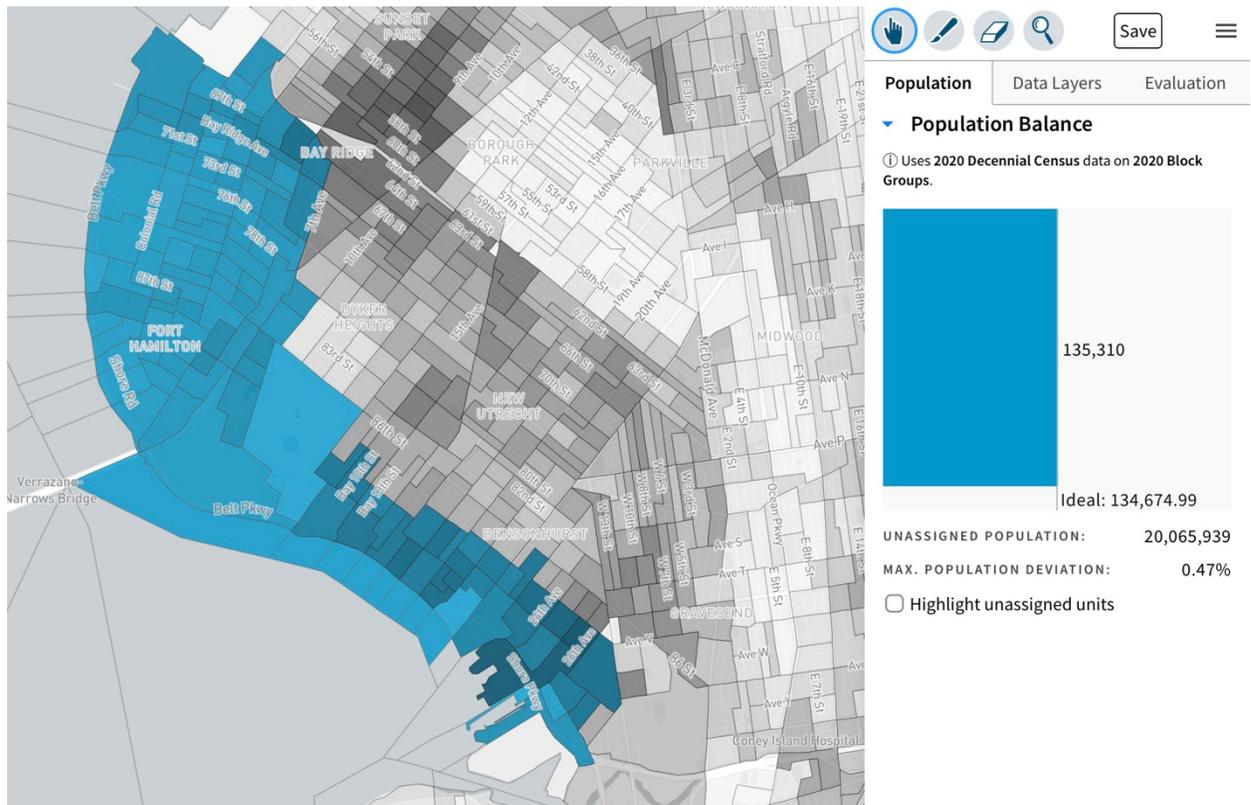


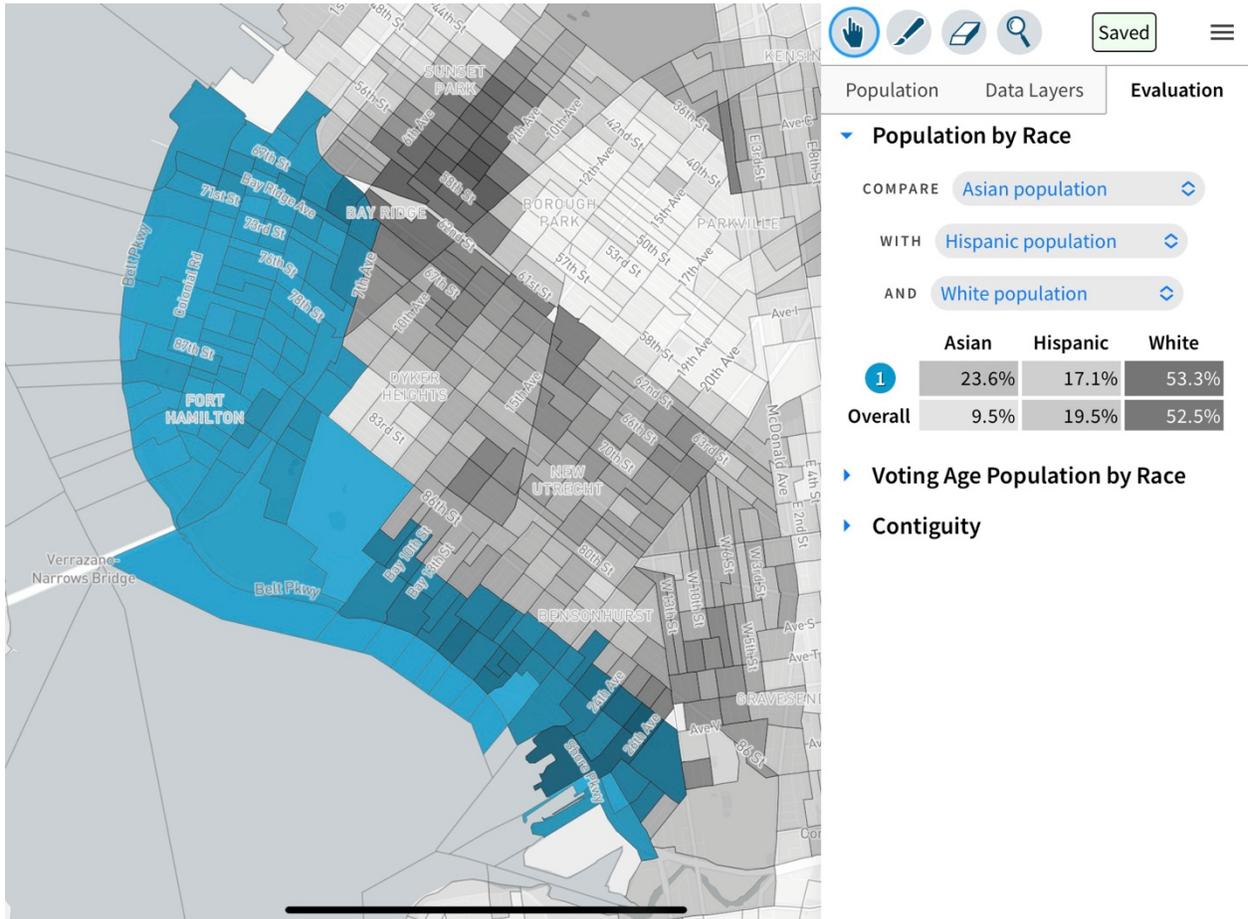


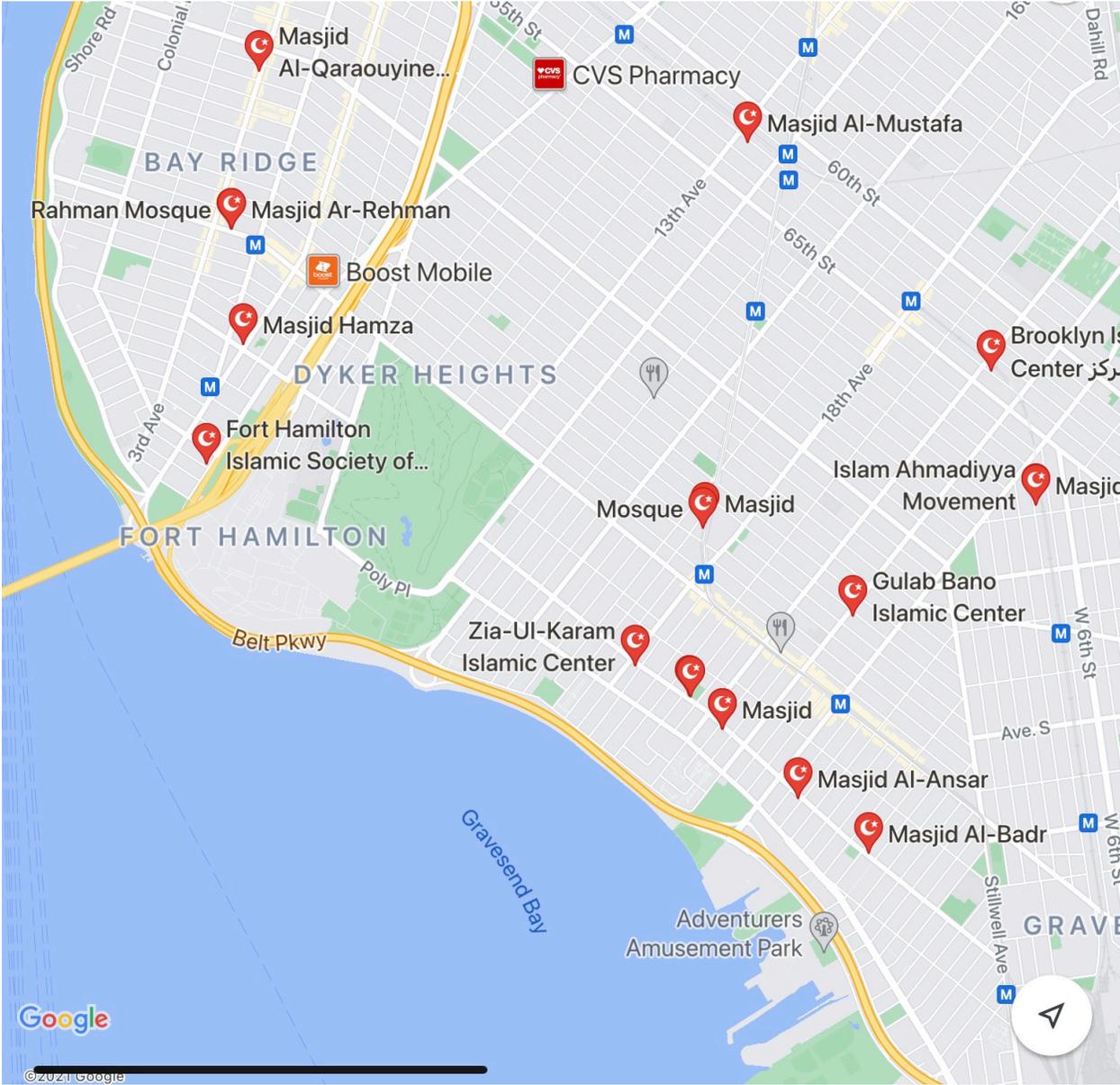
E. Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

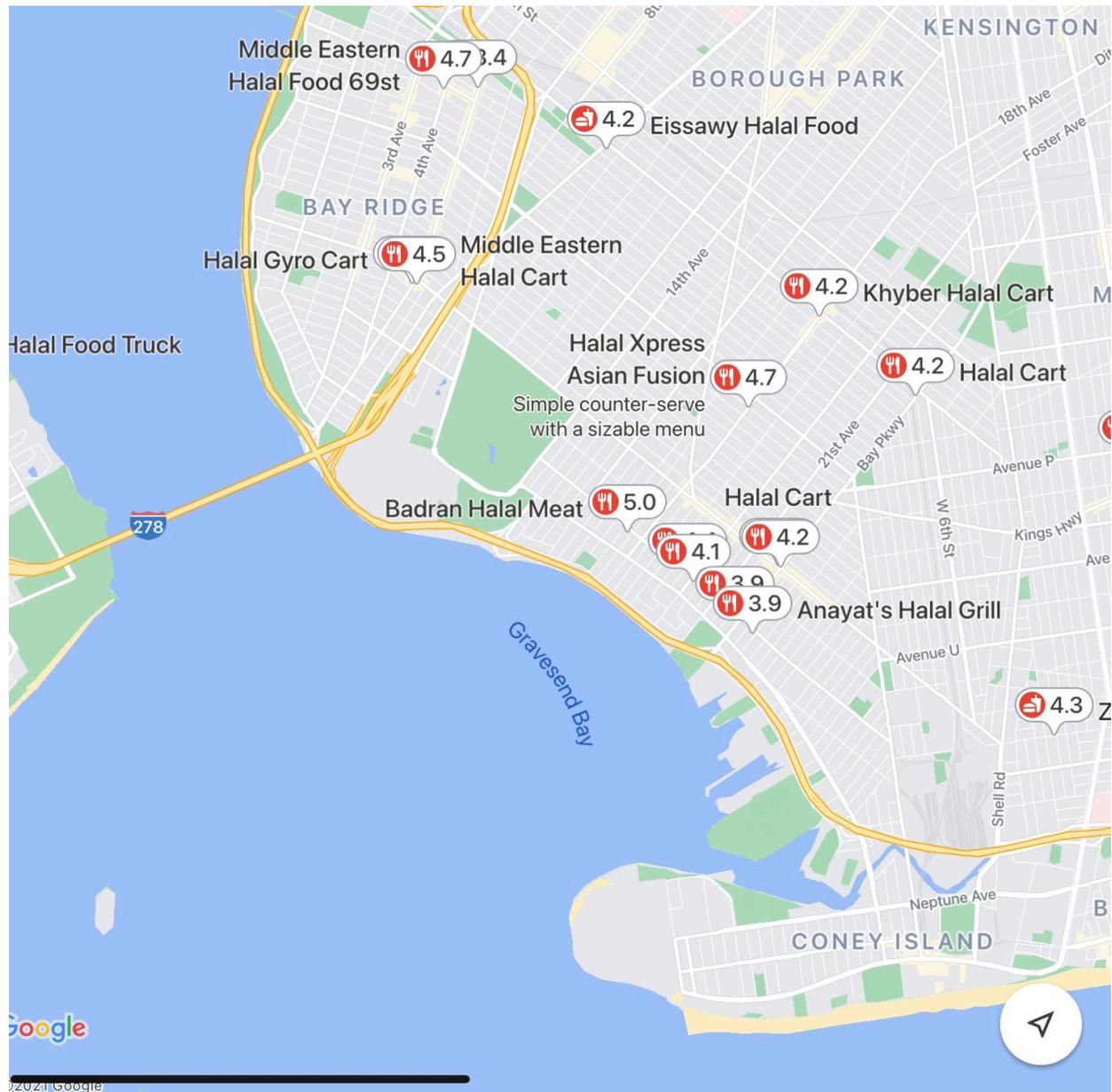
The Arab community, which is overwhelmingly Muslim, in Bay Ridge has historically been divided into multiple assembly districts resulting in members of our community being in up to 4 assembly districts even though they only live a mere block or two apart from each other. This is a classic case of cracking a community apart. The Bay Ridge Muslim community has therefore been unable to exert their political will or unite to achieve their goals for their community. Unfortunately, the proposed maps continue the historical disenfranchisement our community has been relegated to.

Accordingly, we ask the Commission to adopt the assembly district map we are proposing. See below for the map (Proposed Map M6). Additionally, we are attaching additional evidence that show the mosques or masjids (Muslim house of worship) and the Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern halal (food that meets Muslim religious dietary requirements) restaurants or business within Proposed Map M6. The additional evidence showcases the large Muslim community of interest and the need for the community to be included in a single assembly district.





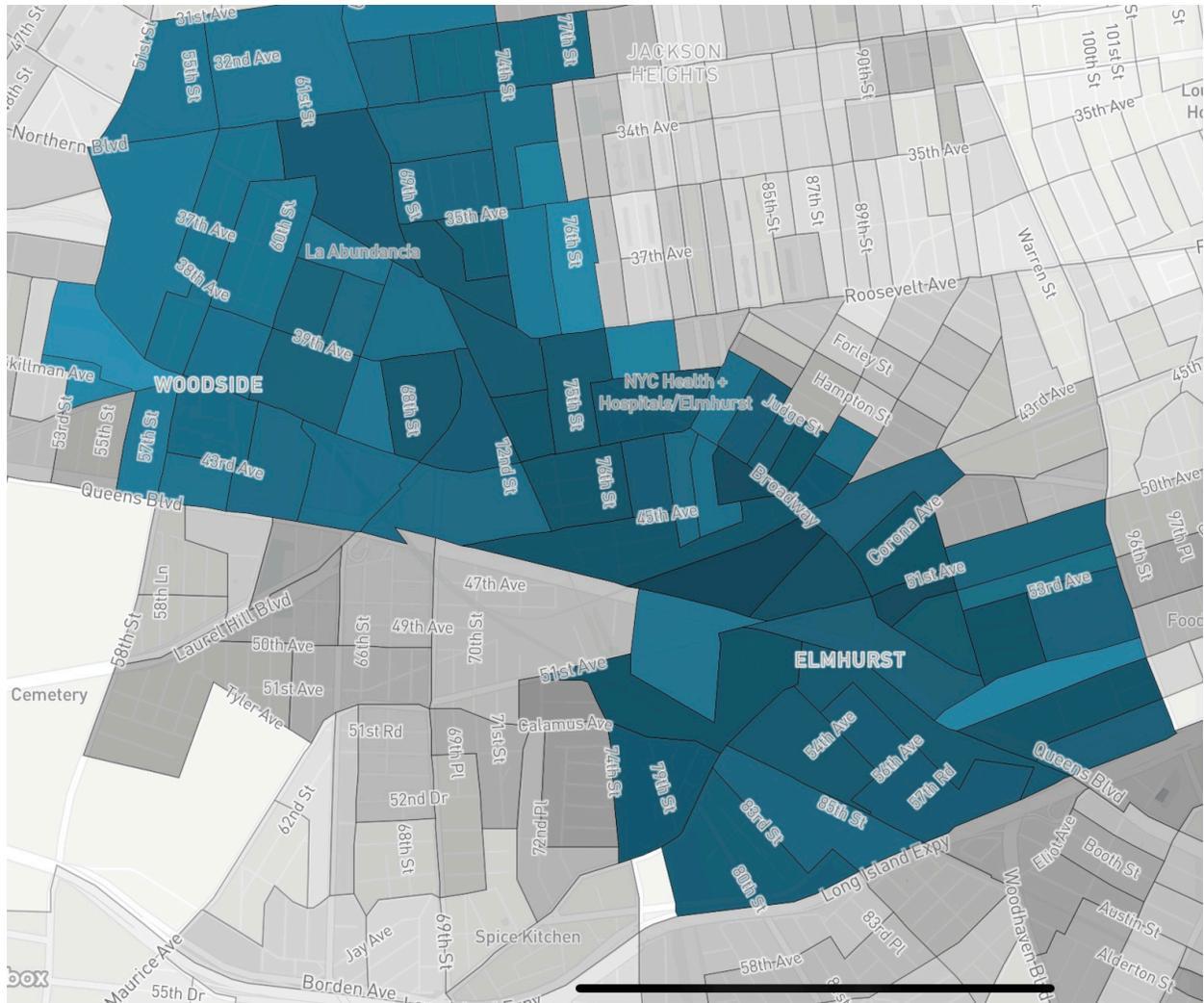


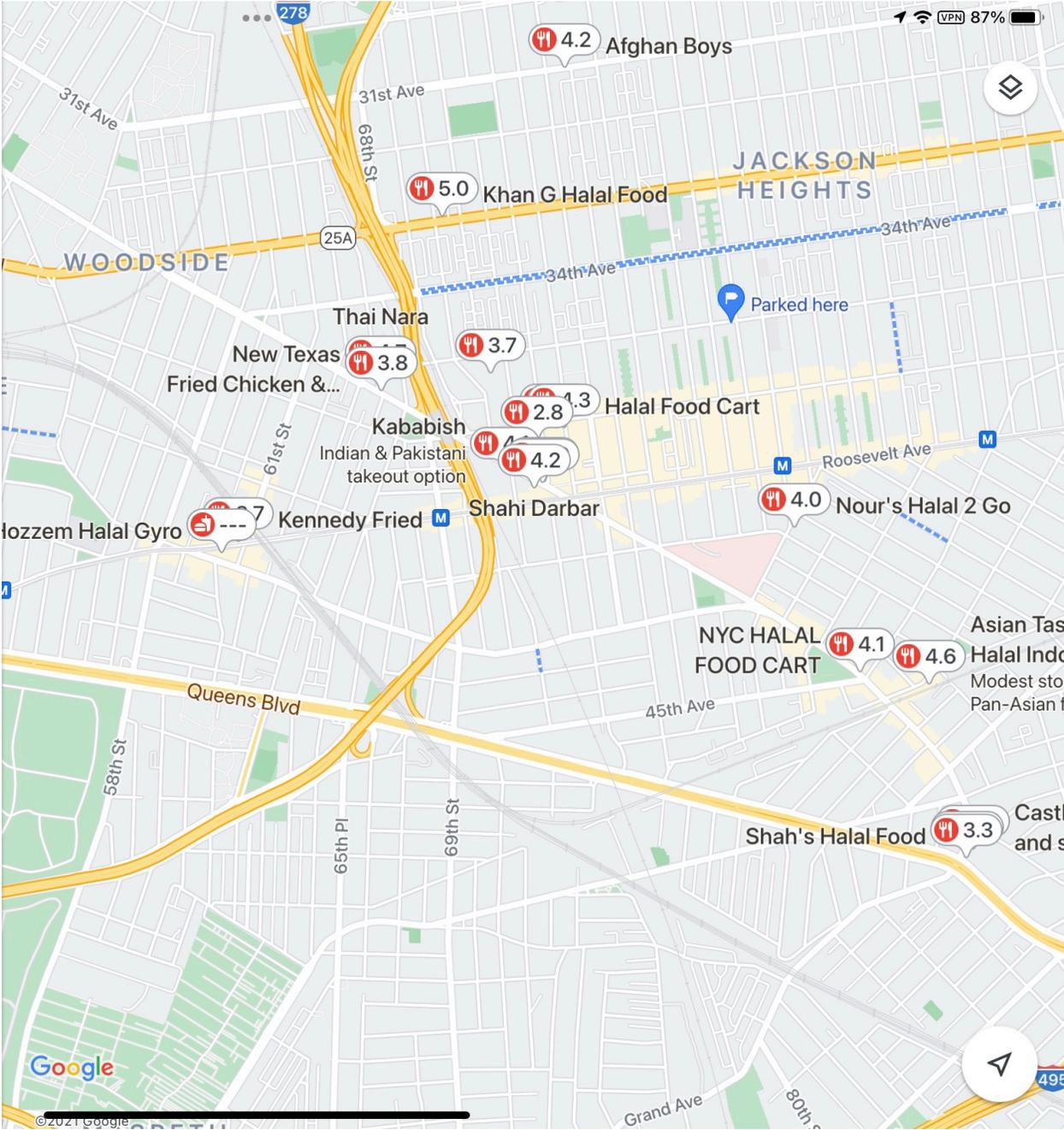


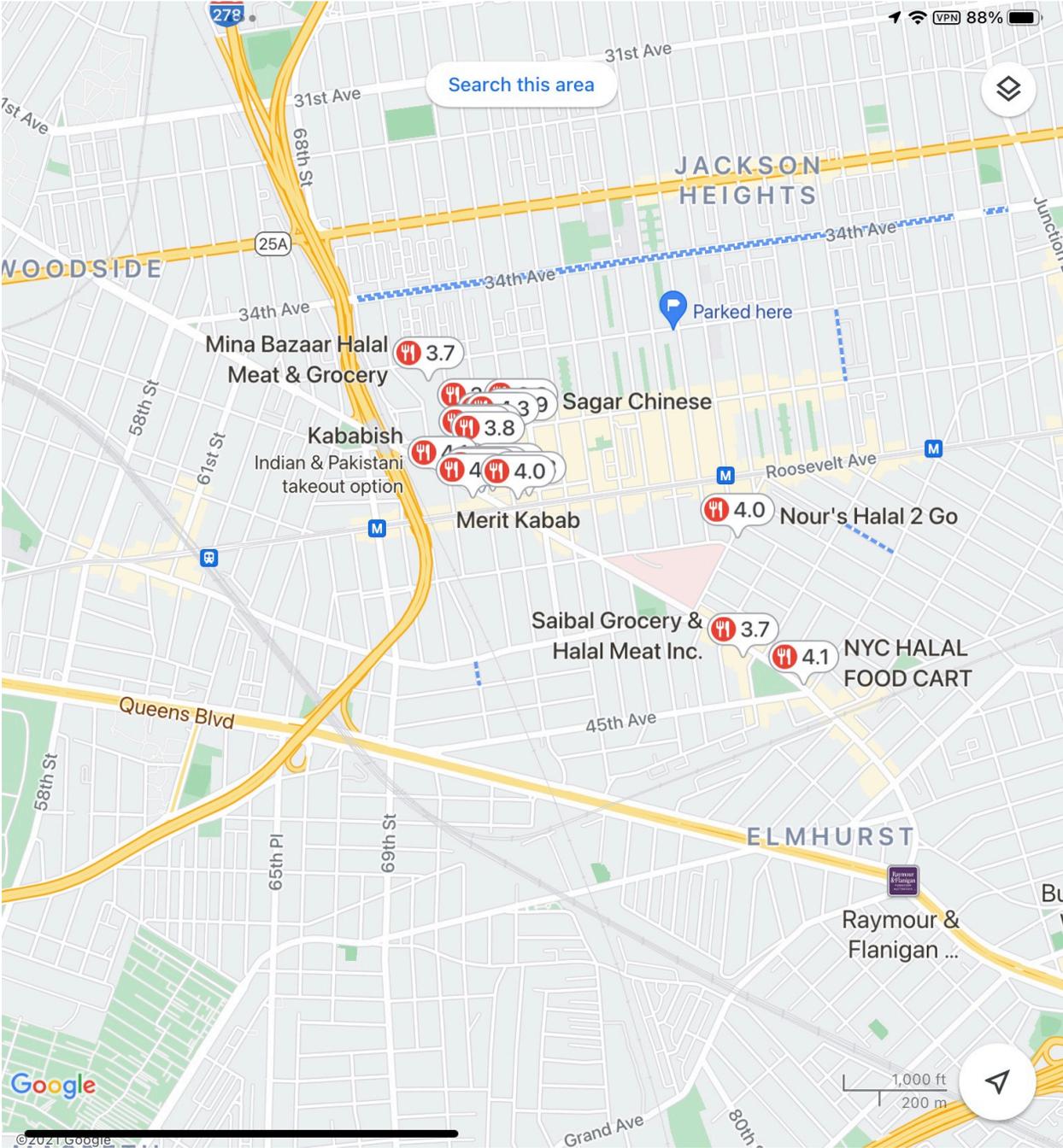
F. Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, Queens

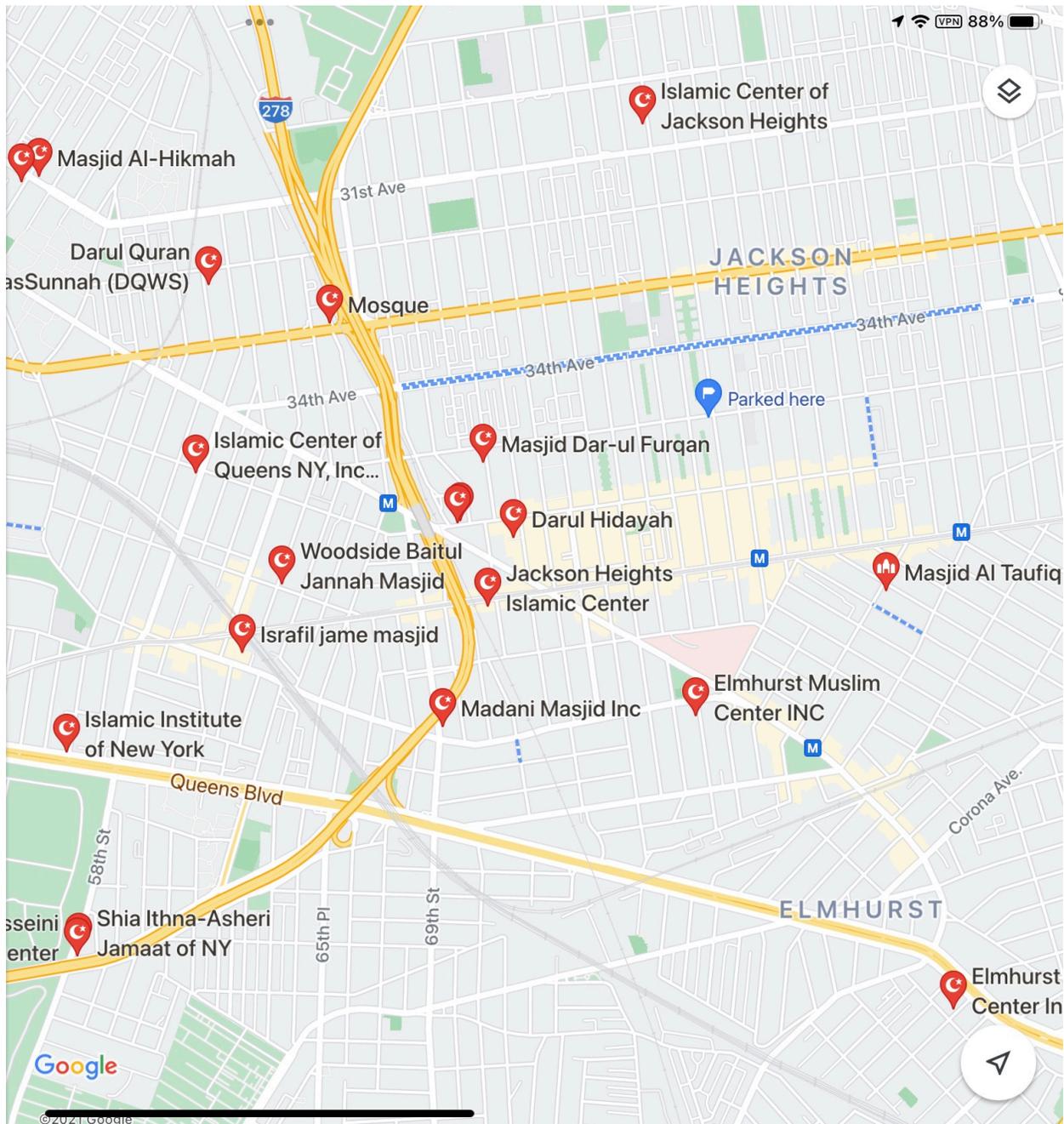
For the Jackson Heights and Elmhurst area, we recommend that the Commission adopt our proposed assembly map, which is found below (Proposed Map M7) and online at: <https://districtr.org/plan/89059>. Proposed Map M7 is more compact than the Commission’s proposed maps and does not divide up the Muslim community. The area covered by Proposed Map M7 consists of a large Muslim community that

should be grouped together under one assembly district. Below are maps of mosques and halal businesses within Proposed Map M7 to illustrate the Muslim community of interest. Accordingly, we ask the Commission to reject cracking and adopt Proposed Map M7.









G. Jamaica, Queens Village, and Glen Oaks, Queens

As it stands, the current maps and the Commission’s proposed maps split the Muslim community in Jamaica and Queens Village in half. Rather, we recommend that the Commission adopt a map that unites the Muslim community, per the districting

requirements, while maintaining a compact district. Our proposed map does that. Our proposed map (Proposed Map M8) is below and can also be viewed at: <https://districtr.org/plan/89061> (the blue color map).



V. Conclusion

The Commission is tasked with a sacred mission of responsibly drawing fair and representative maps. We are appreciative for the opportunity to present our recommendations. It is vital for the Commission to unite the Muslim community in the maps as we have proposed. For too long, the Muslim community has been cracked into various districts at every level of government. Without fair maps, the Muslim community's voting power will continue to be diluted, their best interests will continue to be ignored, and further marginalization will occur. We ask you to adopt our proposed maps so that the Muslim community has a fair opportunity to vote in elected officials that are responsive to their needs and values. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

COUNCIL ON AMERICAN-ISLAMIC RELATIONS, NEW YORK INC.

/s/ Ahmed Mohamed

Ahmed Mohamed, Esq.

Legal Director