

Feb 14, 2023

Testimony re redistricting of Bay Ridge area

Thank you for reviewing my comments. As a long-time Brooklyn resident, I moved to Bay Ridge in 2014 with my family. But I've been visiting the neighborhood for years before that and had friends who grew up here. Also, as someone who is part Arab-American, I knew the area was home to many Arabic families and businesses, which I also appreciated. (I remember going to Atlantic Avenue years ago and being told by the Arabic shop owners "Move to Bay Ridge! That's where we're all going!")

It's a neighborhood I've watched evolved over the years. If you've ever watched Saturday Night Fever, you've gotten a quick glimpse into some of the history of Bay Ridge! Very Italian, Norwegian/Scandinavian, Irish for years (lots of dockworkers), then the Arabic, Eastern European and Hispanic population began to grow and more recently, Chinese. Friends who grew up here tell me this too - and also it explains why there is a Norwegian Parade on 3rd Avenue every year (plus lots of other parades - Bay Ridge loves its parades!).

The population is about 145,000 (Community District 10), half White, about 25% Chinese, 20% Hispanic, and 2.5% Black. (In the tally of White, it's important to note that Arabic is not broken out separately.) Walking down the street, you will typically hear about three or four different languages being spoken: Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian. And as you go through Bay Ridge, you'll see a mix of single family homes, two and three unit homes, plus many larger multi-family pre-war buildings that are mix of rent-stabilized units and co-ops. There is variety in many ways, but there is also a sense of neighborhood unity.

Dividing Bay Ridge into so many different districts feels wrong on so many levels. First, dividing the neighborhood separates the many Arabic families and businesses into different districts. In a time when districts lines are becoming increasingly mindful of unifying ethnic communities, this harsh chopping up of the Arabic population is inappropriate and unfair.

Secondly, it's a very defined area geographically, separated (for better or worse!) by highways. This makes Bay Ridge a neighborhood apart from Sunset Park and from other neighborhoods. We have parades and street fairs that run down our avenues - and bring our community together. We have the R Train, local stops only. We have Owl's Head Park. And we have Alpine Cinema, which is the Bay Ridge movie theater (and the envy of other neighborhoods!). We are a distinct entity - and if Bay Ridge is too large to be represented by one district, then two districts are doable. But four? It will dilute the sense of neighborhood in any representation we have.

And there's one more point I'd like to add that confuses me - for years, Bay Ridge has shared an Assembly district with parts of Coney Island. Now that the City Council district has been redrawn to match that, the new Assembly lines would no longer include Coney Island? Short of Coney Island getting its own representation, it's a historic tie that shouldn't be changed so quickly, especially now that the City Council lines were trying to match up! If the Bay Ridge district needs to add population, Coney Island should be the first choice to keep the representation aligned.

Thank you for all your efforts - and thank you in advance for keeping Bay Ridge whole!
Danielle Mowery