

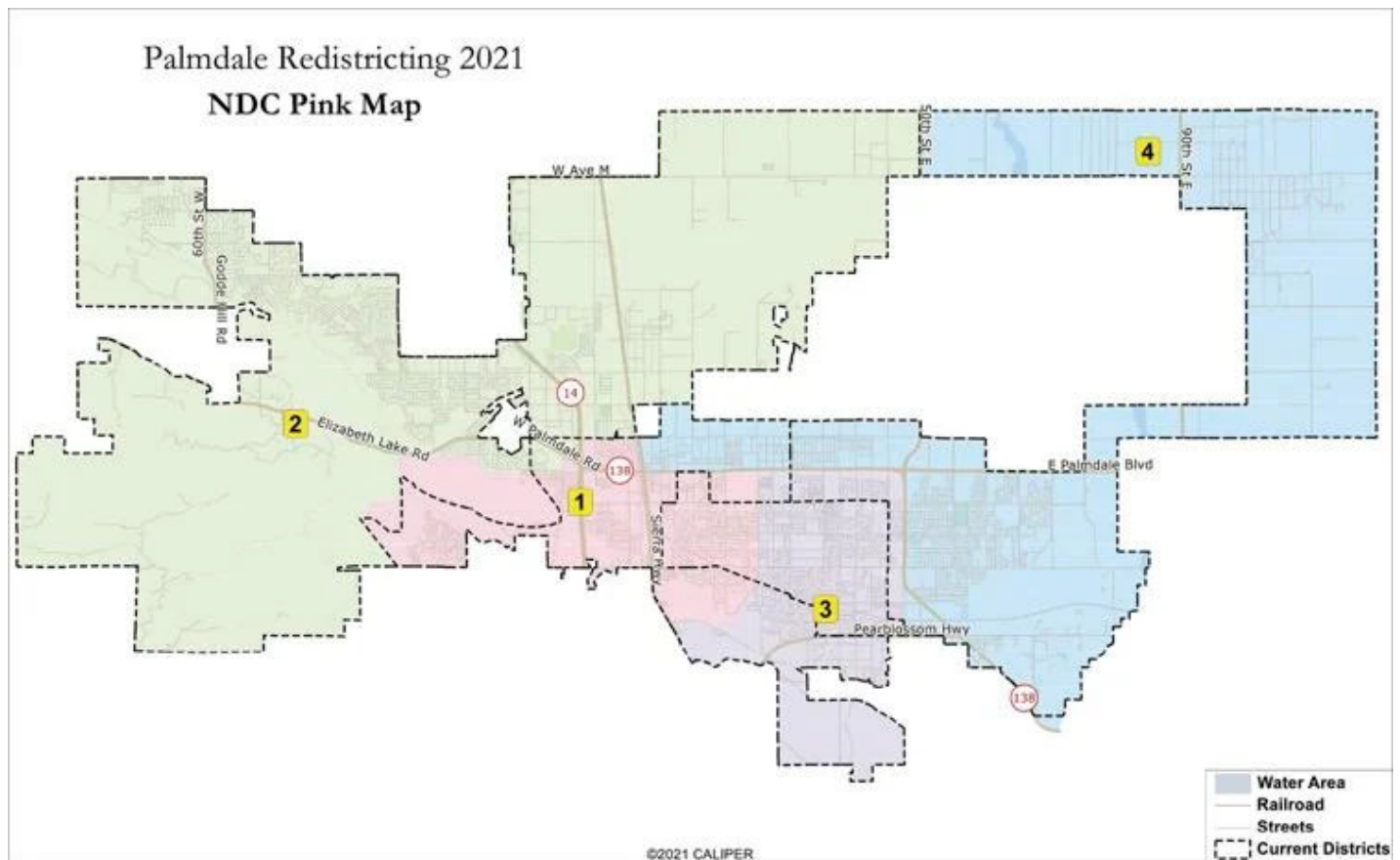
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Council bucks advice on map

City-hired company's option is selected

By ALLISON GATLIN Valley Press Staff Writer

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The NDC Pink map was selected, Wednesday, by the Palmdale City Council for new boundaries for the Council's four districts, even though its own advisory commission recommended a map submitted by ALVA.

Map courtesy of City of Palmdale

PALMDALE — Acting against the recommendations of its own Advisory Redistricting Commission, the City Council, on Wednesday, chose a map created by demographers hired by the city for new boundaries for the four Council districts.

The Council approved the NDC Pink map on a 4-1 vote, with Councilmember Juan Carrillo dissenting, after hearing from members of the public supporting a map submitted by ALVA, a coalition of Latino organizations. The ALVA map was one of three recommended by the

Commission; the others were Map 208, submitted by the public, and NDC's Purple map.

It was the Council's second attempt to approve new maps as part of the decennial redistricting process. On Feb. 2, the Council rejected the two maps recommended by the Commission, the ALVA map and Map 208, sending the matter back to the Commission for review.

At a Feb. 9 meeting, the Commission voted to resubmit the two maps to the Council, along with the NDC Purple map.

At that meeting, consultant NDC presented more detailed analysis of the ALVA map that showed it had the potential to be ruled as racial gerrymandering, from the way it apparently chose some census blocks to include in a district while avoiding others, creating a jagged dividing line that did not follow identifiable boundaries.

This was disputed by supporters of the ALVA map, including attorney Kevin Shenkman, who successfully sued the city, in 2013, to force it to move to district representation to comply with the state Voting Rights Act.

"The notion that the ALVA map is a racial gerrymander based on this cursory analysis of superimposing district lines on a Latino (citizen voting age population) map is ridiculous," he said, adding that NDC is not qualified to give that sort of legal advice.

"The ALVA map is not a racial gerrymander. I am an attorney, I specialize in voting rights, and frankly, I don't think there is anyone in California who knows these issues better," Shenkman said.

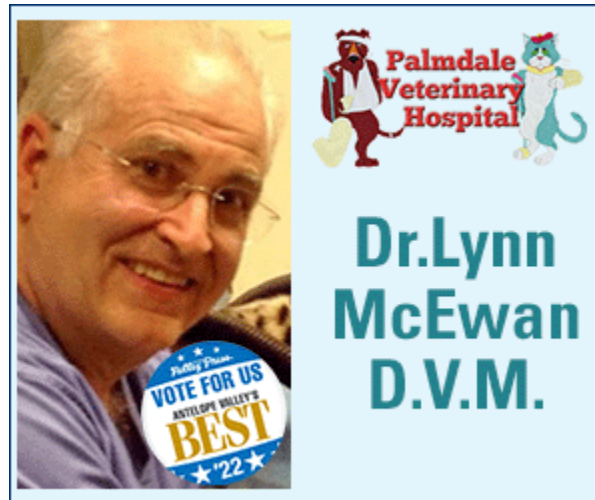
Shenkman also noted that NDC was the same consultant used by the city in its earlier Voting Rights Act case, and who created a map that was rejected by the court.

All of the maps considered create three districts with a majority-Latino voting age population.

"ALVA would like to emphasize their belief that the ALVA map is stronger than the NDC Purple map at protecting the voting rights of Latinos and African-Americans," Marcos Alvarez said. "If you adopt a map with less protections, you will meet with a lawsuit and once again waste millions of our hard-earned tax dollars."

Mayor Pro Tem Richard Loa pushed for approving a map not recommended by the Commission in order to prevent new district boundaries that would place himself and Councilmember Austin Bishop in the same district, or would switch their districts' numbering.

The ALVA map and Map 208 would place the two Council members in the same district, while the NDC Purple map would swap the designations of District 1 and 2, Loa and Bishop's districts.



Loa argued that any of those maps would thwart the decision of the residents in those districts that elected Bishop and himself.

"The voters spoke, and this would, to some extent, reverse that," he said. To that end, he supported the NDC Pink map.

"We know the priority of Councilman Loa because he has made it abundantly clear," Xavier Flores, a supporter of the ALVA map, said. He said that incumbents and future candidates were not considered in creating it.

Shenkman offered that the state's Fair Maps Act does not allow incumbents' residence to be considered in drawing districts.

The NDC Pink map is not a radical departure from the current map, but it does shift pieces of each district to bordering ones. For example, District 4 takes in a portion of District 1 on the north side of Palmdale Boulevard and east of Sierra Highway, and District 1 takes in parts of District 3 east of Sierra Highway.

Mayor Steve Hofbauer supported the NDC Pink map because the district lines are very defined and it creates compact districts.

The NDC Pink map meets federal and state criteria, NDC consultants said.

The discussion was complicated further by a request to consider changing from the current format of four Council districts, in which residents vote only for the Council member in their district and with the mayor elected from residents citywide, to a five-district format in which the mayor's post would rotate amongst the five Council members.

The matter was on Wednesday's agenda, but tabled until the March 2 meeting.

Shenkman, who spoke during the public comment period, also sent a letter to the city, dated Jan. 16, stating "the failure to adopt a five-district map leaves the City of Palmdale vulnerable to further litigation for violating the California Voting Rights Act, particularly in light of the results of the at-large elections of 2018 and 2020."

The letter cites the losses of mayoral candidates V. Jesse Smith, in 2018, and Xavier Flores, in 2020, as examples of how the Black and Latino vote is diluted in the at-large mayoral election.

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