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Summary of Presentation of Selected Redistricting Options for
Prince George's County Council Districts

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INTRODUCTION AND CAVEATS

This presentation describes redistricting strategies for Prince George's County Council Districts that can be considered while we wait for official 2020 Census data to be made available in late August 2021. I want to emphasize at the outset that any plans drawn at this stage on the basis of projections will need to be redrawn, perhaps substantially, once the 2020 Census data are released. As tempting as it may be, at this stage, to frontload many of the difficult questions and tradeoffs involved in a redistricting process, major decisions made on basis of projected data will undoubtedly be wrong.

All of that being said, the Commission does not need to be frozen until the data are released. There is a lot that can be done and decisions that can be made to prepare for the release of the census data. Most specifically, the Commission can gather commentary and suggestions based on the existing districts. If there is broad agreement either that the lines should be largely kept as they are or that they should be changed in specific or fundamental ways, then such decisions can help guide the redistricting process once the data are released.

Second, if the Commission sets out to change the existing districts more substantially, information can now be gathered as to the strategy and process the Commission will follow to distinguish valid claims from invalid ones. For example, the Commission can decide the extent to which it will base decisions on incumbency – that is, keeping current incumbent residences within districts or avoiding incumbent pairings. It can also decide what types of "community of interest" arguments (further explored below) it might incorporate into the plan, and it can use the hearings as an opportunity for communities to identify their boundaries. However, I would caution against, at this stage, letting any single individual define a community, as it can be difficult sometimes to distinguish between genuine community-of-interest arguments and pretextual ones that mask a more political purpose.

By way of a final prefatory note, it may be helpful to situate this redistricting process in the context of the one performed ten years earlier. Following several hearings around the county, the Commission proposed a bold redistricting plan ten years ago largely derived from "Census Designated Places" (CDPs). CDPs are communities designated and defined by the census, sort of a rough designation of "unincorporated communities that are locally recognized." The plan

also abided by a stricter population threshold than the plus or minus five percent deviation that the Constitution allows.

The Commission plan was summarily rejected by the Council. The Council started over from scratch to draw a different plan. In particular, the Commission plan was seen as too disruptive of the existing districts. Also, CDPs were seen by the Commission as not accurately reflective of community boundaries. The Council also wanted to abide by a rule of avoiding the split of any precincts.

This background is helpful, I hope, in considering how the Commission can most effectively perform its role in this two-stage redistricting process. It is ultimately up to the Commission itself, however, to decide the principles that will guide the plan. The next two months can most profitably be used toward that end.

DEFINING TERMS

The Commission expressed an interest in having a few terms that have come up in our discussions defined in advance of the June 21st Public Meeting. What follows are explanations of a few terms of art in redistricting and might be helpful for the public and the Commission as it initiates the redistricting process.

Least Change Plan

A least change plan is one that moves the fewest number of people as necessary in order to ensure compliance with one person, one vote. The goal of a least change plan is to keep districts as stable as possible and do what is minimally necessary to comply with applicable law. A least change plan is least disruptive to the incumbents, voters, and the electoral system as a whole. However, the benefits of a least change plan are only as great as the desirability of the existing plan. If an existing plan is seen as defective or undesirable for some reason, then the least change plan replicates those undesirable features.

Community of Interest

A "Community of Interest" refers to any group of people sharing a common interest that might be relevant to political representation in the redistricting process. The state of Arizona's definition is typical: "[a] group of people in a defined geographic area with concerns about common issues (such as religion, political ties, history, tradition, geography, demography, ethnicity, culture, social economic status, trade or other common interest) that would benefit from common representation." Redistricting is, in the end, about representing communities, so this concept is essential to any redistricting process. At the same time, the concept is slippery and is often used pretextually for partisan, incumbency-related, or other political concerns. Moreover, "who" gets to define the boundaries of a community becomes an important question, especially when no objective data exist about the underlying population. Communities also overlap, so it becomes important to have some rationale for "which" communities deserve representation in a given district. Finally, some communities prefer to be

split between two districts rather than unified in one, because they believe they will be more influential if they have a presence in more districts rather than controlling too few.

Deviation

"Deviation" refers to the difference between a district's population and the population of an ideal district that could be drawn if all districts had equal population. For example, if a city has 1000 people and ten districts, the ideal population of each district is 100 people. If a district has 115 people, we would say it has a deviation of +15%. Under the one person, one vote rule, local governments, such as Prince George's County, are ordinarily allowed to have districts that deviate plus or minus five percent from the ideal population of a district. So in the example above, the most overpopulated district could have 105 people and the most underpopulated district can have 95 people. Of course, while the one person, one vote rule sets the permissible limits for a redistricting plan, it does not imply that a jurisdiction should take full advantage of that limit. However, a more rigorous standard of population equality often comes at a price. To create a set of equal districts may require splitting precincts or municipal subdivisions, let alone make it more difficult to represent communities of interest.

EXAMPLE PLANS USING PROJECTED DATA

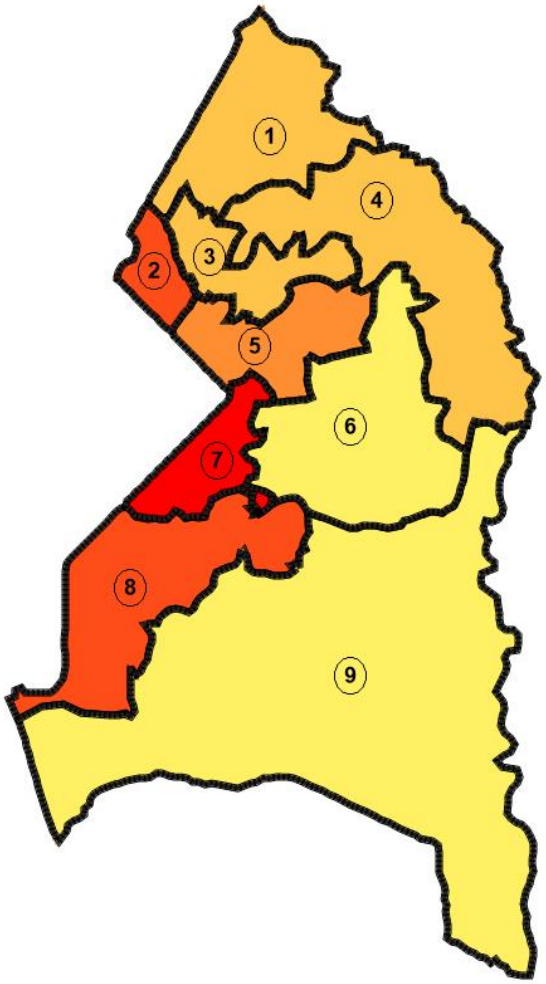
To reiterate, any plans drawn before the release of census data are almost certainly defective in one or another respect. Nevertheless, working with census projections can allow us to get a general sense of the shifts in population, and to understand which districts might be overpopulated and which might be underpopulated. We should still expect the projections to be off by a few percentage points, but the regional patterns might be revealing.

As discussed in our earlier meetings and depicted below, the principal regional pattern that the projections reveal is underpopulation of districts close to Washington, DC, and overpopulation of districts in the less dense, eastern part of the County. We do not really know how underpopulated or overpopulated these districts might be. So the process of balancing populations between them should be treated, in part, as an academic exercise. Still, because the projections are all we can work with for the next two months, we might ask: "If the projections turn out to be close to the mark, how might we want to alter the districts?"

To be clear, if the Commission decides that the existing set of districts is undesirable for reasons apart from population deficiency, then we could use the projected data to help reformulate a completely new plan. The districts in that new plan would need to be adjusted considerably once the new census data come out, but they could provide a different starting point than the existing districts.

Table 1. Projected Population Deviations for Existing County Council Districts

District	Population	Deviation	% Deviation
1	105309	3730	3.67%
2	98131	-3448	-3.39%
3	104716	3137	3.09%
4	103990	2411	2.37%
5	99887	-1692	-1.67%
6	106085	4506	4.44%
7	**93274**	**-8305**	**-8.18%**
8	96876	-4703	-4.63%
9	105944	4365	4.30%



Least Change Plans at Different Permissible Deviations

The distinguishing feature of a "least change plan" is its use of existing boundaries as a starting point. The truly *least* change plan is one that moves the fewest number of people to comply with applicable law. However, given that we are working with projections of uncertain reliability, we might investigate what a least change plan might look like at lower levels of permissible deviation. Presented below are three such plans with deviations of ±4.5%, ±2%, and ±1%.

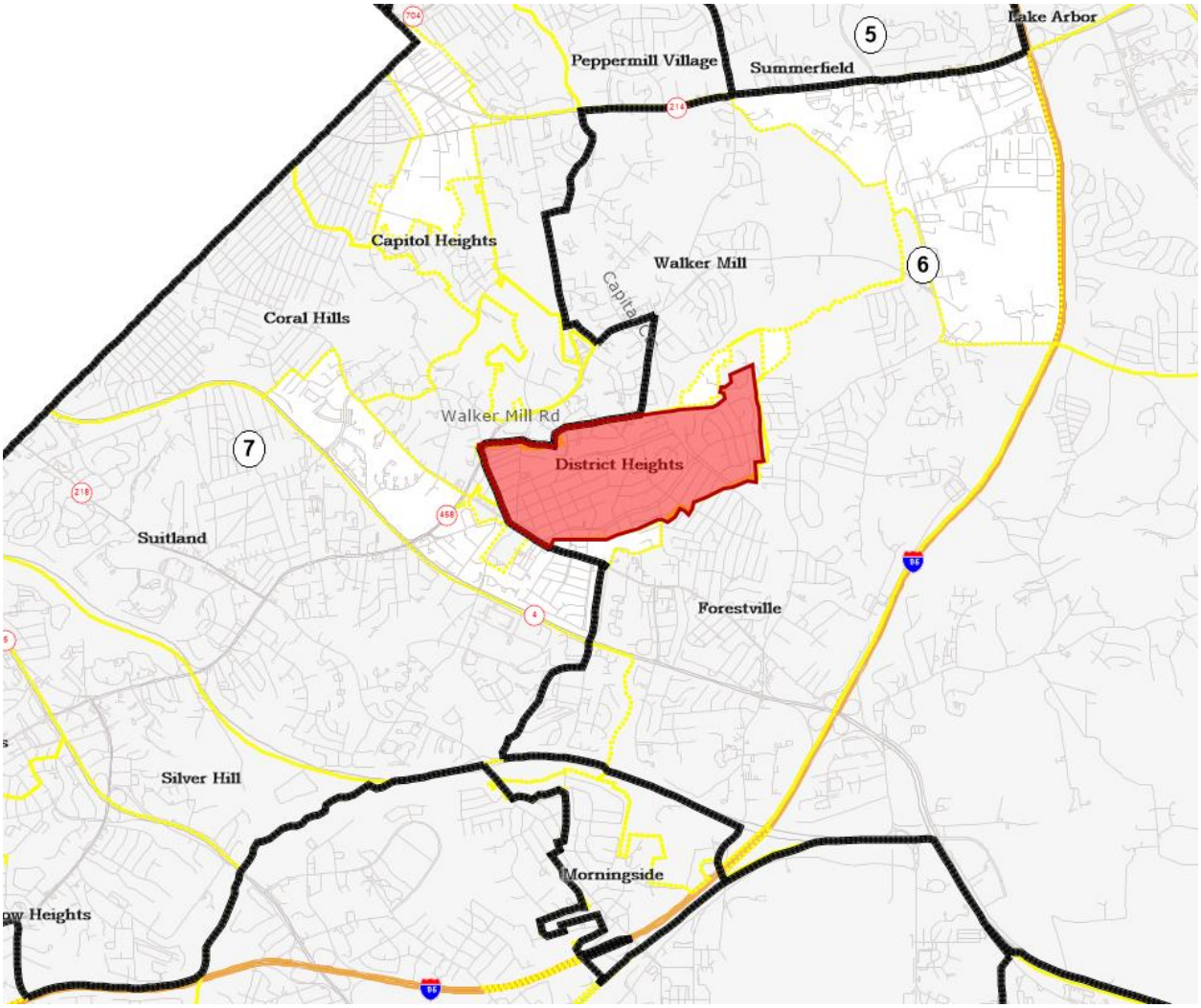
Least Change plan with ±4.5% deviation

The only existing districts that exceed 4.5% in deviation are District 7, which is underpopulated by 8.18% or 8,305 people, and District 8, which is underpopulated by 4.63% or 4,703 people. There are many ways to address this underpopulation. The simplest is to move two precincts comprising most of District Heights from District 6 to District 7, and one precinct from District 9 to District 8 in Southeast Fort Washington. The areas that would be moved are displayed in the maps below. As a result of these shifts Districts 6, 7, 8, and 9, would have deviations of -1.73%, -2.01%, -3.19%, and 2.85%, respectively, as detailed in the table below.

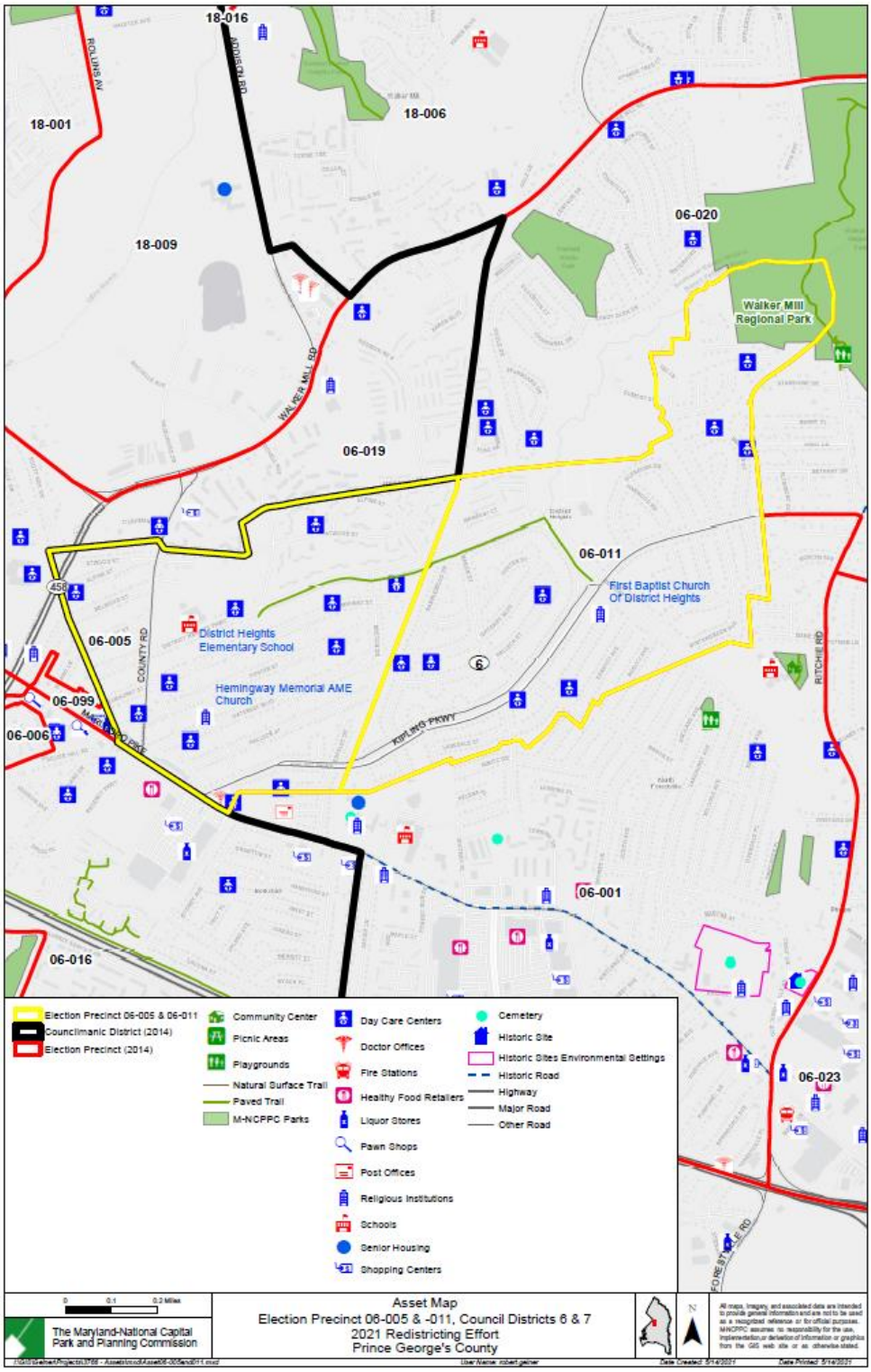
Table 2. Least Change Plan with District Deviations Under 4.5%

	Existing County Council Districts			<4.5% Deviation Plan		
District	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation
1	105309	3730	3.67%	105309	3730	3.67%
2	98131	-3448	-3.39%	98131	-3448	-3.39%
3	104716	3137	3.09%	104716	3137	3.09%
4	103990	2411	2.37%	103990	2411	2.37%
5	99887	-1692	-1.67%	99887	-1692	-1.67%
6	106085	4506	4.44%	99825	-1754	-1.73%
7	93274	-8305	-8.18%	99534	-2045	-2.01%
8	96876	-4703	-4.63%	98342	-3237	-3.19%
9	105944	4365	4.30%	104478	2899	2.85%

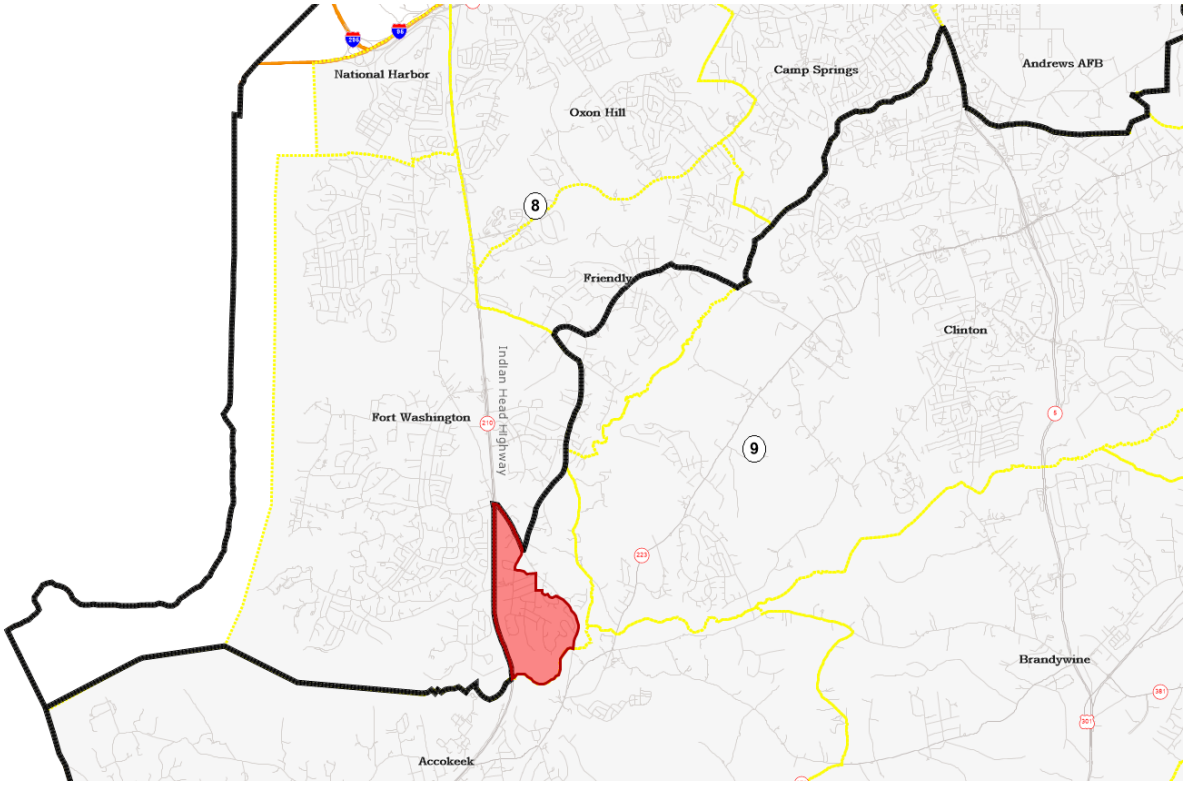
Remedy for Malapportionment of District 7:
Move of Two Precincts from District Heights from District 6 to District 7



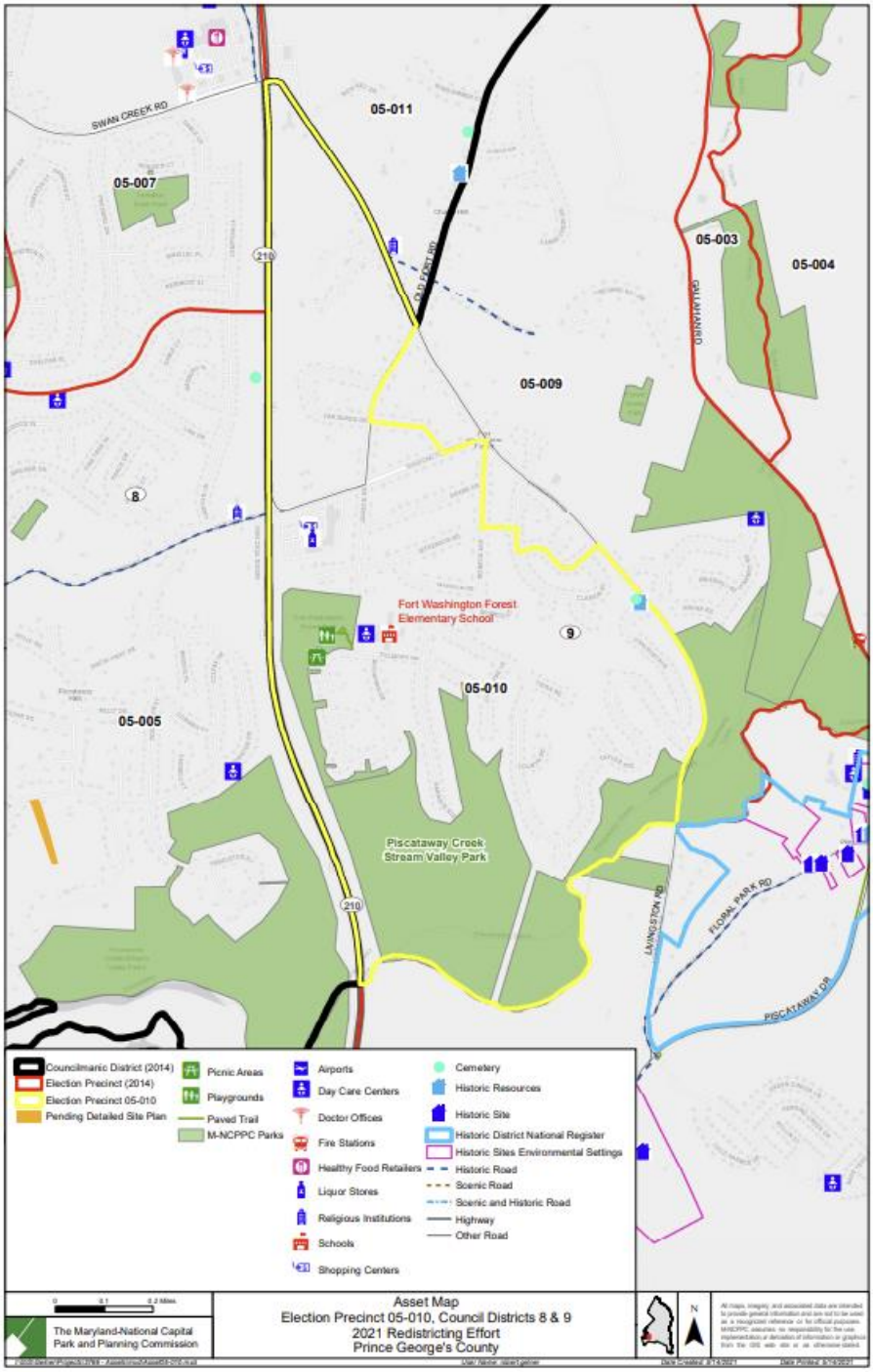
Detailed Map of Two Precincts in District Heights



Remedy for Malapportionment of District 8:
Move of One Precinct in Fort Washington from District 9 to District 8



Detailed Map of Precinct in Fort Washington



Least Change Plan with 4.5% Deviation Threshold

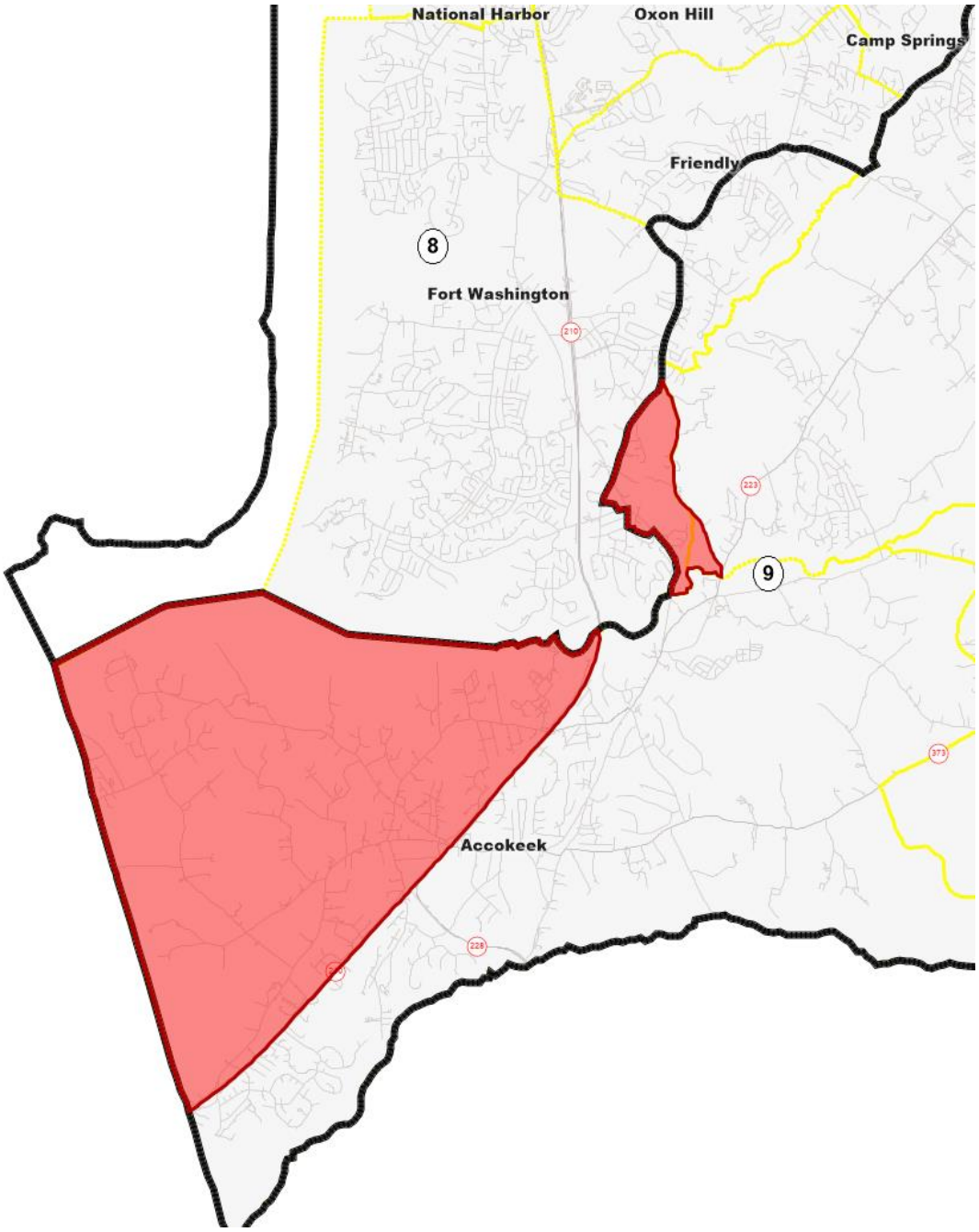
Least Change Plan with Projected Deviations of 2 percent or less

To achieve plans with lower deviations we can work off the previous changes and add to them. As seen above in Table 2, once those changes are made, Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 remain with deviations over 2 percent. We can continue to swap population from east to west to address the underpopulation of the districts close to Washington, DC, as seen in the maps below, which have highlighted in red the areas that would be moved between districts. To bring Districts 8 and 9 to deviations of 2 percent or less, we can move two precincts from 9 to 8, one from Fort Washington and one from Accokeek (which will split Accokeek). To remedy the malapportionment in Districts 1 and 2, we need only move two precincts in Adelphi from District 1 to District 2. To address the malapportionment between Districts 5 and 3, a precinct comprising the entire community of Landover Hills could be moved from District 3 to District 5. Finally, to address the population surplus in District 4, one precinct could be taken out of Bowie (thereby splitting Bowie slightly) and shifted from District 4 to District 6. Once those changes are made the population deviations are as follows.

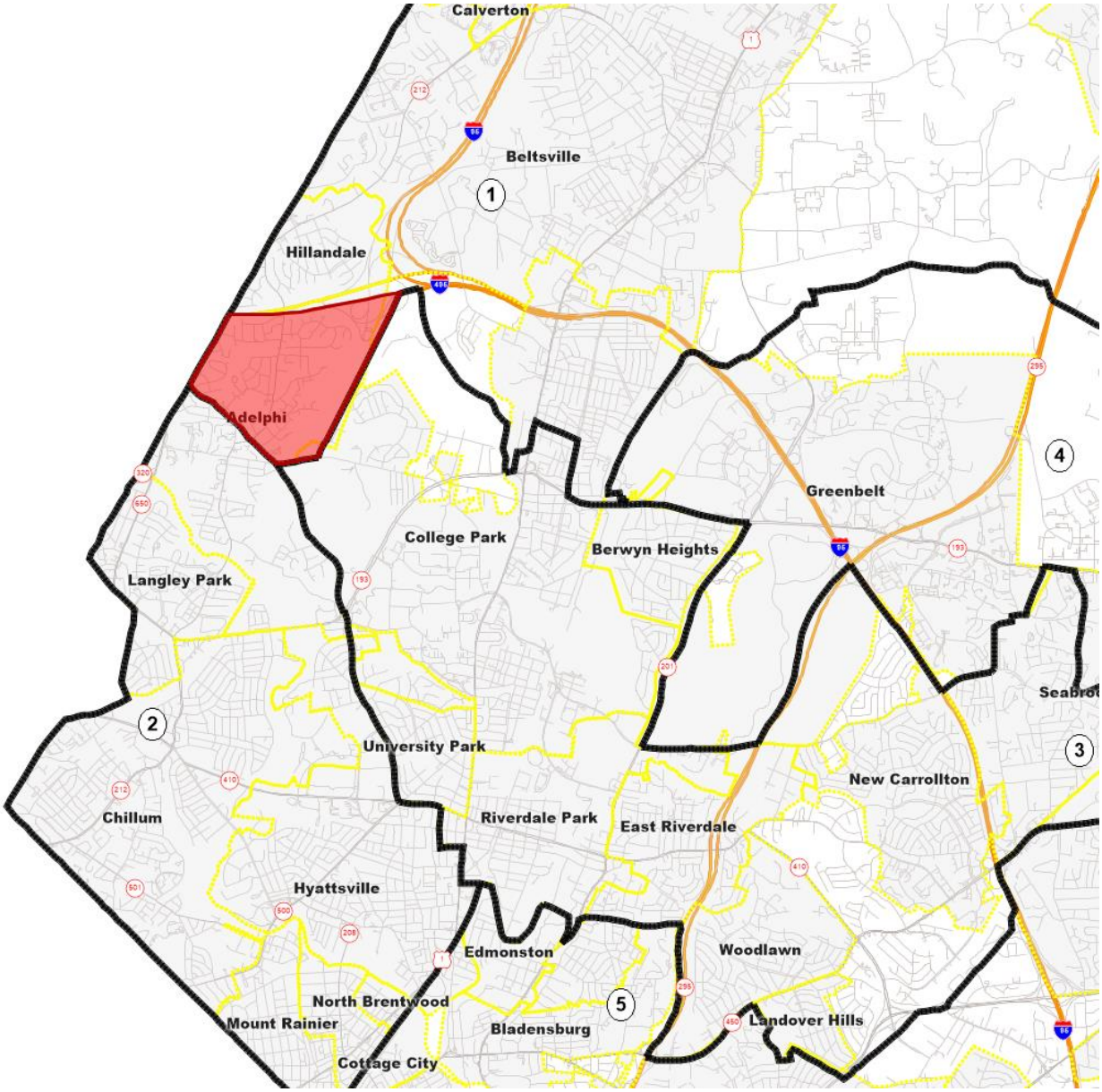
Table 3. Least Change Plan with District Deviations of 2% or less

	Existing County Council Districts			<2% Deviation Plan		
District	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation
1	105309	3730	3.67%	102136	557	0.55%
2	98131	-3448	-3.39%	101304	-275	-0.27%
3	104716	3137	3.09%	101758	179	0.18%
4	103990	2411	2.37%	101740	161	0.16%
5	99887	-1692	-1.67%	102845	1266	1.25%
6	106085	4506	4.44%	102075	496	0.49%
7	93274	-8305	-8.18%	99534	-2045	-2.01%
8	96876	-4703	-4.63%	102085	506	0.50%
9	105944	4365	4.30%	100735	-844	-0.83%

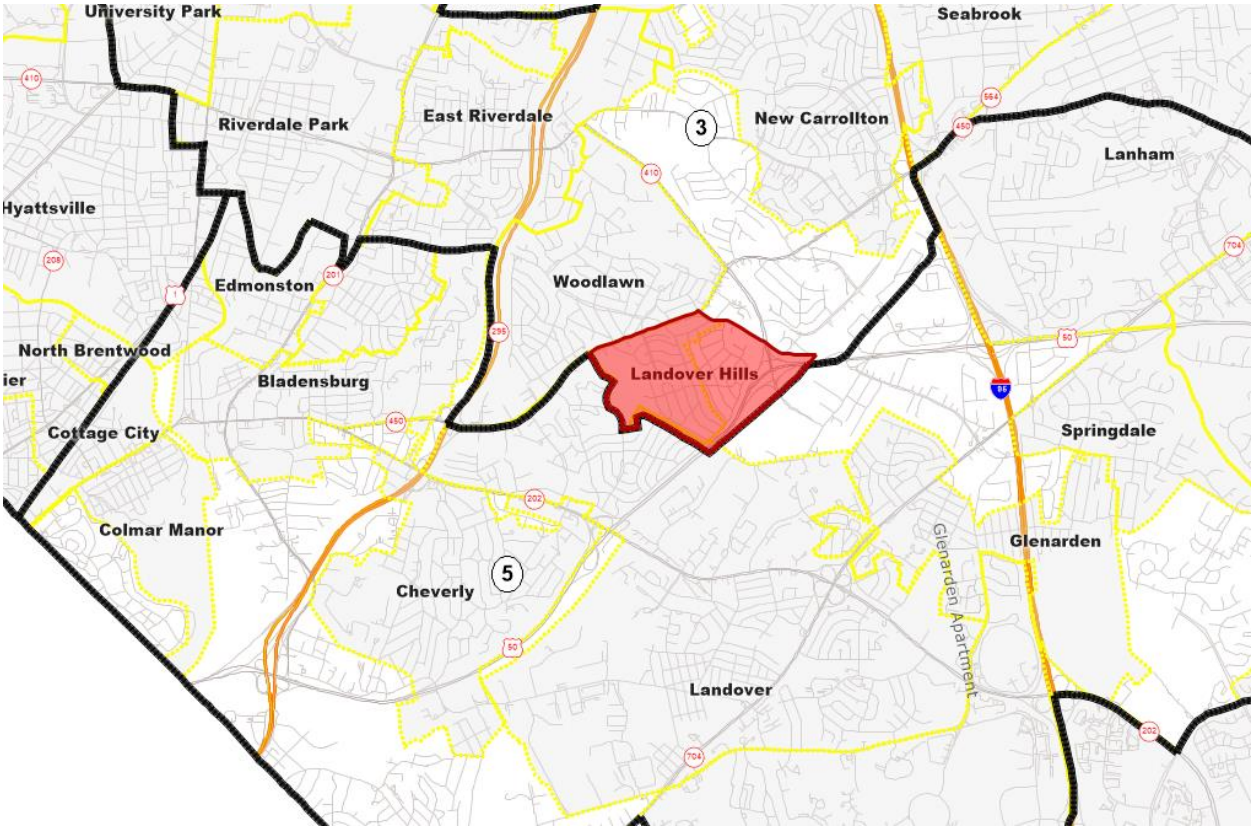
Remedy for Malapportionment of District 8:
Move of Two Precincts from District 9 to District 8,
One from Fort Washington and a Second from Accokeek



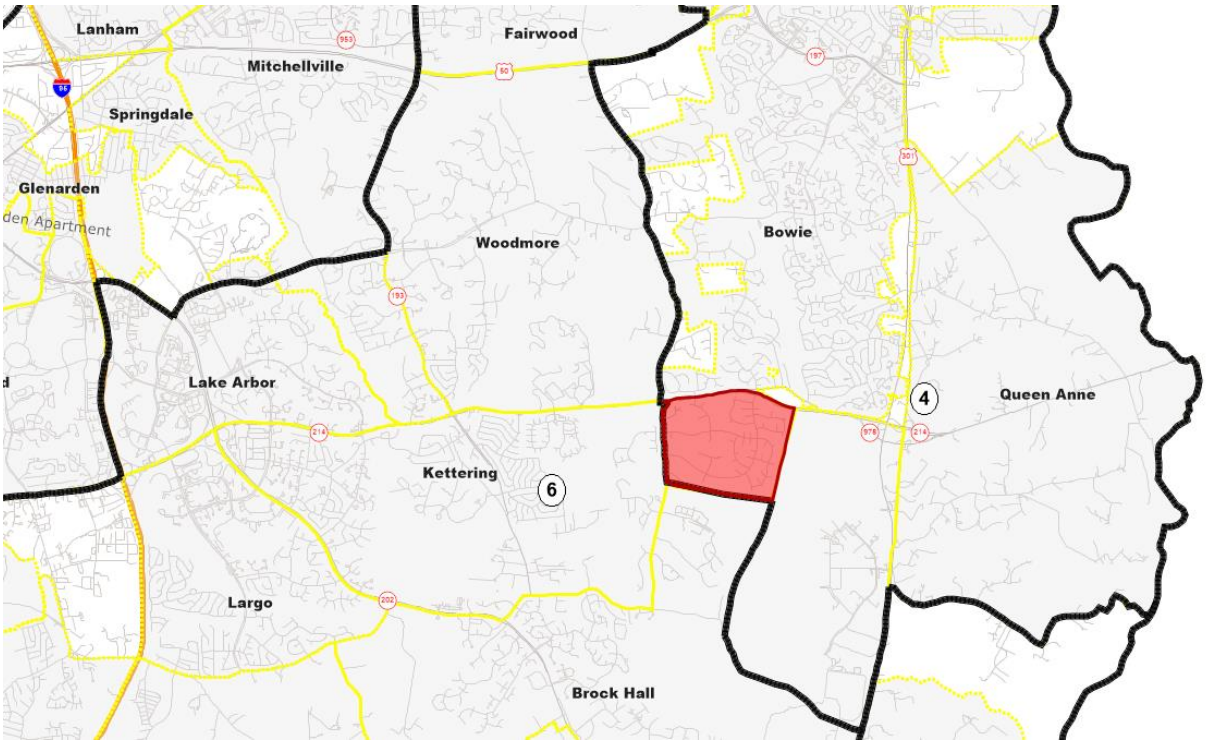
Remedy for Malapportionment of District 2:
Move of Two Adelphi-based Precincts from District 1 to District 2



Remedy for Malapportionment of Districts 3 and 5:
Move of Precinct Encompassing Landover Hills from District 3 to District 5



Remedy for Malapportionment of District 6:
Move of One Precinct from Bowie, from District 4 to District 6



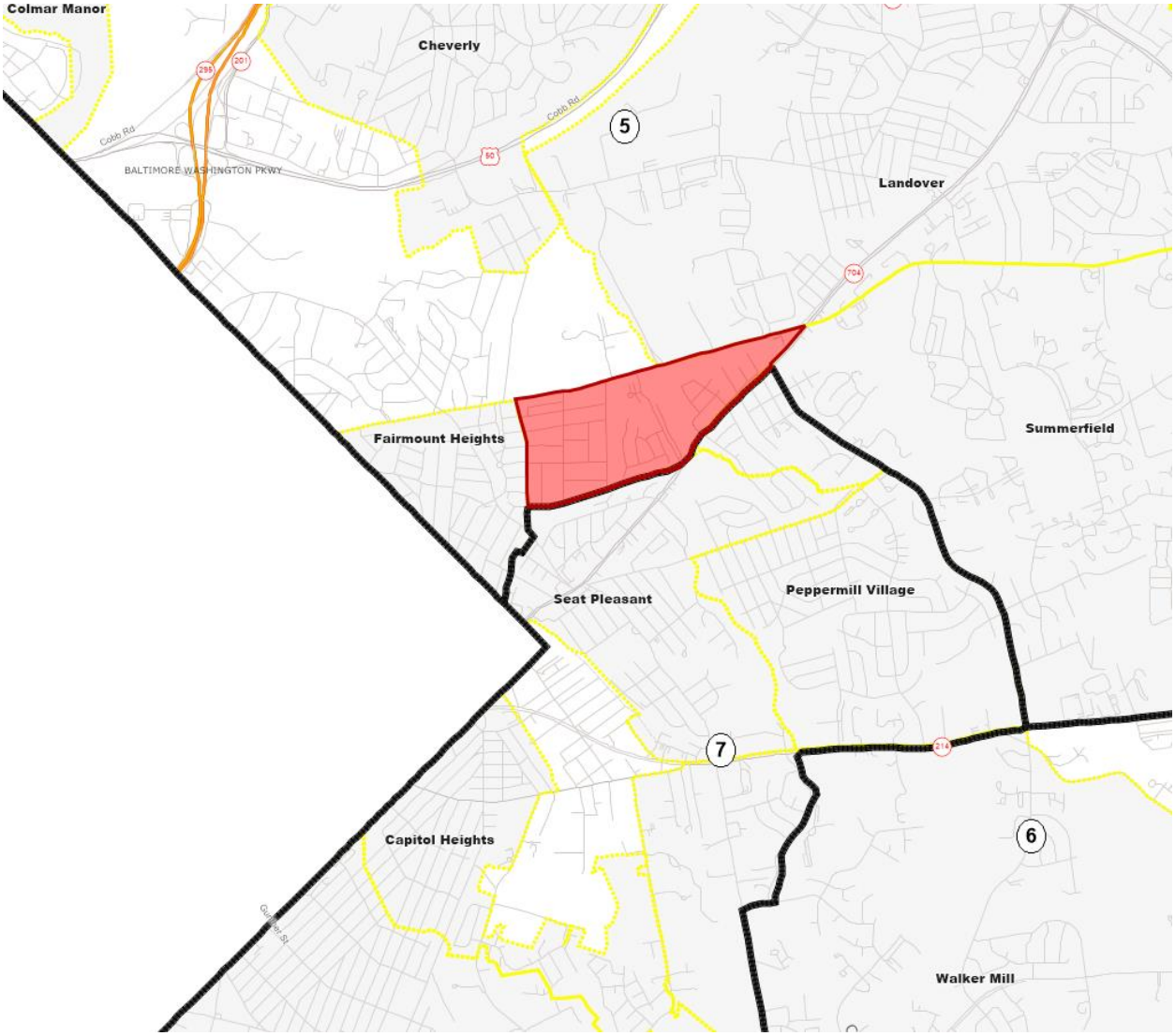
Least Change Plan with Projected Deviations of 1 percent or less

The changes made thus far have involved moves of whole precincts. Once we push deviations below 2%, only two districts from the previous plan remain with a deviation exceeding 1%. District 7 is underpopulated by 2.01% and District 5 is overpopulated by 1.25%. A more equal population can be easily achieved by moving approximately 1700 people from District 5 to District 7. Every precinct on the border between those two districts, however, contains many more people than what is necessary. Therefore, the map below splits a precinct just east of Fairmont Heights to achieve deviations in Districts 5 and 7 that are now -0.46% and -.30% respectively.

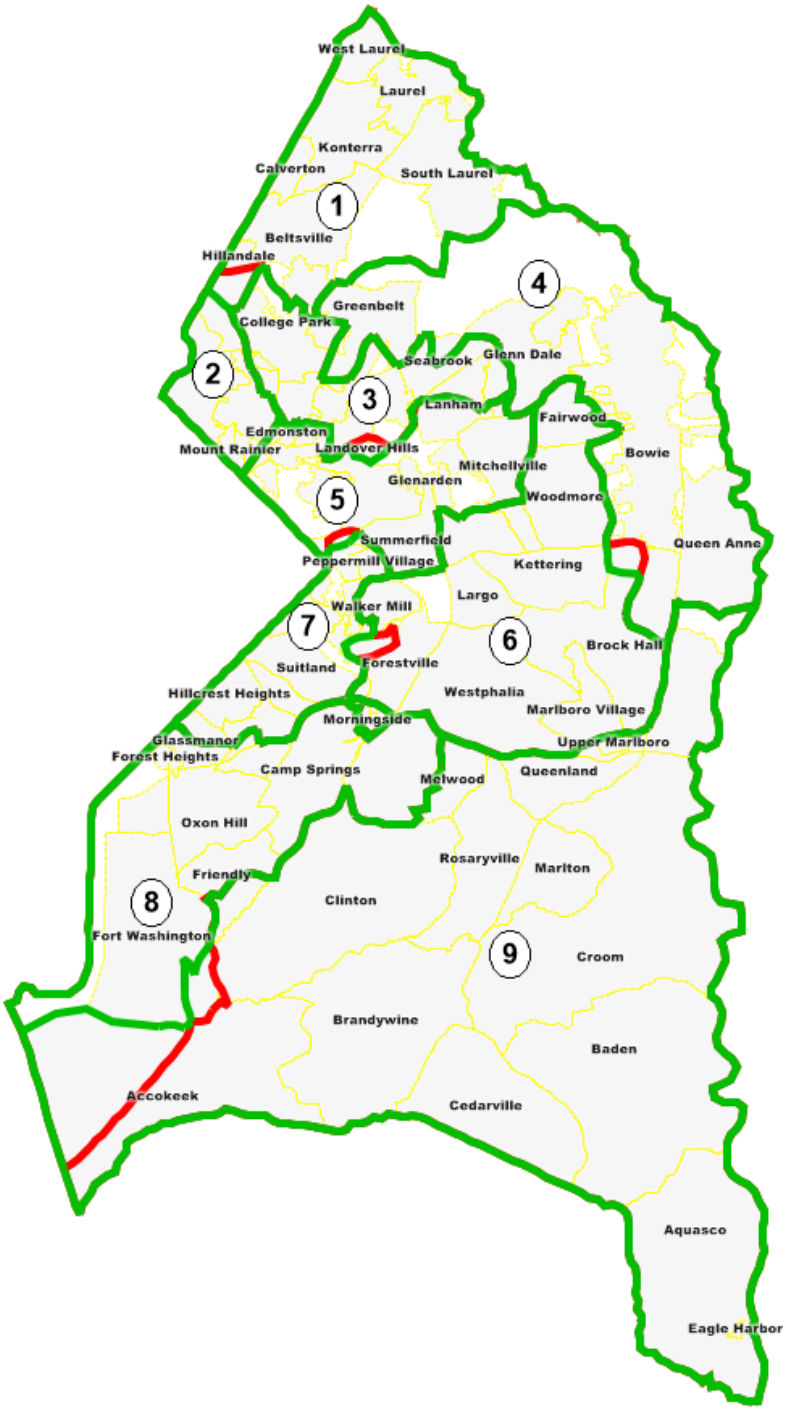
Table 4. Least Change Plan with District Deviations of 1% or less

	Existing County Council Districts			<1% Deviation Plan		
District	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation	Projected Population	Deviation	% Deviation
1	105309	3730	3.67%	102136	557	0.55%
2	98131	-3448	-3.39%	101304	-275	-0.27%
3	104716	3137	3.09%	101758	179	0.18%
4	103990	2411	2.37%	101740	161	0.16%
5	99887	-1692	-1.67%	101107	-472	-0.46%
6	106085	4506	4.44%	102075	496	0.49%
7	93274	-8305	-8.18%	101272	-307	-0.30%
8	96876	-4703	-4.63%	102085	506	0.50%
9	105944	4365	4.30%	100735	-844	-0.83%

Remedy for malapportionment of Districts 5 and 7: Move Partial Precinct East of Fairmont Heights from District 5 to District 7



Conclusion

This exercise in lowering deviations between districts demonstrates how seemingly small changes can dramatically decrease the population variances between districts. The map below, depicting in red the changes that could be made to existing boundaries to achieve lower than one percentage point deviation in all districts, appears to present rather insignificant changes with large payoffs from the standpoint of population equality. However, such changes might not be considered small by the nearly 20,000 people affected by them. Moreover, as noted above, the drive to achieve closer population equality may come at the cost of splitting additional precincts and towns. Nevertheless, this experiment with projected census data illustrates the character of the changes that would need to be made at different population thresholds once the 2020 Census data are released in August.

Comparison of Existing Districts to Plan with 1 Percent Deviation:
Red Boundaries Indicate Changes Made to Achieve Equal Population