

2021 Reprecincting Instructions for Cities

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Overview

Reprecincting and redistricting take place after every federal census. Each governing body has individual requirements which impact other governing bodies.

City Responsibilities

After a federal decennial census, each city council must review its precinct and ward (if any) boundaries to see whether the existing boundaries comply with current laws. Use the *Iowa Code* to determine whether changes are necessary. Applicable code sections are listed throughout these instructions.

Each city with a population over 3,500 must file the following information with the Secretary of State (SOS) **even if the city does not make any changes to its precinct or ward boundaries:**

- Precinct Map(s) as GIS shapefile or block equivalency file
- Ward Map(s) as GIS shapefile or block equivalency file (if any)
- City Reprecincting Worksheet
- Certification of the population of each precinct (included as part of the Worksheet)
- Ordinance describing precinct boundaries
- Ordinance describing ward boundaries (if any)
- Agreements with counties (if any)

[\[§49.7\]](#)

In the reprecincting process, there are four groups of cities:

- Cities of population under 3,500 with NO wards
- Cities of population under 3,500 with wards
- Cities of population over 3,500 with NO wards
- Cities of population over 3,500 with wards

The following page notes what is required for each group, so carefully review it and this guide in its entirety. If you're unsure if your city has wards, ask the council members, mayor, and city clerk. Any city with wards will have at least two council members who were elected or appointed to represent a ward. If the council members, mayor, and city clerk don't know, review the city's ordinances because ward boundaries must be defined by ordinance per [Iowa Code 372.13\(7\)](#).

Upon receipt of a city's submission, the SOS will review it for compliance and contact the Point of Contact designated by each city on the reprecincting worksheet to communicate approval or changes required.

Throughout the reprecincting and redistricting timeline, please email your questions and assistance requests to precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov. The entire Elections Team watches that inbox, so your questions will be answered timely.

Cities of population under 3,500 with NO wards

A city in this group can be only one of the following types:

- 1) Population less than 3,500 AND no wards AND consists of only one precinct composed of only incorporated territory = **No Filing Requirement with SOS**
- 2) Population greater than 2,000 and less than 3,500 AND no wards AND mutually satisfactory agreement with a county for a joint city and county precinct = **File Copy of Agreement & Reprecincting Worksheet with SOS**
See page 5 for more information on joint city and county precincts.
- 3) Population less than 2,000 = **No Filing Requirement**

Cities of population under 3,500 with wards

A city in this group needs to work through the city responsibilities as outlined on page 1 and **MUST FILE** the following items with SOS **even if no changes to ward boundaries**:

- Precinct Map—GIS shapefile or census block equivalency file (no paper maps)
- Ward Map—GIS shapefile or census block equivalency file (no paper maps)
- City Reprecincting Worksheet—including population certifications of the precincts and wards; must be original with wet ink signature
- Ordinance describing ward boundaries
- Agreements with counties (if any)

Cities of population over 3,500 with NO wards

A city in this group needs to work through the city responsibilities as outlined on page 1 and **MUST FILE** the following items with SOS **even if no changes to precinct boundaries**:

- Precinct Map—GIS shapefile or census block equivalency file (no paper maps)
- City Reprecincting Worksheet—including precinct population certification; must be original with wet ink signature
- Ordinance describing precinct boundaries
- Agreements with counties (if any)

Cities of population over 3,500 with wards

A city in this group needs to work through the city responsibilities as outlined on page 1 and **MUST FILE** the following with SOS **even if no changes to precinct and ward boundaries**:

- Precinct Map—GIS shapefile or census block equivalency file (no paper maps)
- Ward Map—GIS shapefile or census block equivalency file (no paper maps)
- City Reprecincting Worksheet—including population certifications of the precincts and wards; must be original with wet ink signature
- Ordinance describing precinct boundaries
- Ordinance describing ward boundaries
- Agreements with counties (if any)

The SOS has purchased the Esri Redistricting Solution and is providing it at no cost to cities and counties. If your city is using it:

- The Point of Contact (POC) you provide will be assigned a username and password.
- Your city may have as many user assignments as you desire.
- The POC will receive an initial email from redistricting@esri.com with their user name and new password.
- Users will access this Solution at <https://redistricting.iowa.gov/redistricting/>.
- Your city will be set up as a separate group.
- Training will be provided live online by Esri. Dates are being determined, and you will be contacted with options. Additional training materials also will be provided

Census Data

If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you do not need to worry about loading census block data. 2020 census block data already has been loaded into the Solution.

If you are using another mapping solution and need to load census block data, the TIGER files can be obtained at www.census.gov.

1. On the website, under “Browse By Topic” select “Geography”. Click on “TIGER/Line Shapefiles”.
2. Under “Download” choose “Web Interface”.
3. Under “Select a layer type” choose “Blocks” then select “Submit”.
4. From the “Block (2020)” drop-down menu, choose “Iowa” as the “State”, then select “Download”.

Resources

The following websites have information that will be useful in this process:

- Secretary of State <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/otherinfo.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau www.census.gov <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>
- State Data Center of Iowa www.iowadatacenter.org
- Legislative Services Agency <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/redistricting>
- American Fact Finder www.factfinder.census.gov

Drawing Precinct Boundaries

Precinct Requirements

Each city council must divide their city into precincts (if necessary). All precincts in all cities must meet the following standards:

- Precinct population cannot exceed 3,500

Find the population by adding together the census population data for the census blocks or other geographic units included in each precinct.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\]](#)

Important Note: Precinct boundaries can be changed for a limited number of reasons. Population growth is not one of them. If there are areas in your city where substantial growth is anticipated in the next ten years, you may wish to establish precincts with populations smaller than the 3,500 maximum allowed by law.

- Precinct must lie within one legislative district

Each precinct must be contained in a single legislative district unless this would cause the creation of a precinct containing the residences of fewer than 50 registered voters.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(b\)\(1\)\]](#)

- Composed of contiguous territory

Precincts must be composed of contiguous territory within a single county.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(c\)\]](#)

- Follow census block boundaries

Precincts boundaries must follow census block boundaries.

[\[§49.3\(1\)\(c\)\]](#)

- Voter convenience and electoral efficiency

Precinct boundaries must be drawn to best serve the convenience of voters while promoting electoral efficiency.

The convenience of voters means the precinct boundaries are easy to describe and identify and provide voters with relatively direct routes of travel to polling places. Electoral efficiency means reducing election costs by only creating as many precincts as necessary.

[\[§49.5\]](#)

- Include annexed territory

Territory annexed after January 1, 2020, must be included when drawing precincts. Use the annexed territory population certified by the city.

[\[IAC 721—21.30\]](#)

Joint City and County Precincts

To establish a precinct composed of both incorporated and unincorporated territory, the city and the county must adopt a mutually satisfactory agreement. Copies of agreements between the county and the city council of each city affected must be enclosed with the materials submitted to the SOS.

[§§[49.6](#), [49.7\(2\)\(a\)](#)]

This requirement does not apply when the total population of the city is fewer than 2,000.

[§[49.4](#)]

Cities in Plan Two and Plan Three Counties

Each county must adopt a representation plan for their board of supervisors. If you have questions about the representation plan in your county, contact the county auditor's office.

- Plan One** Board of supervisors is elected at-large without residency requirements.
- Plan Two** Board of supervisors is elected at-large but supervisors must live in the supervisor district.
- Plan Three** Board of supervisors is elected by supervisor district and supervisors must live in the supervisor district.

In Plan Three counties, the supervisor district boundaries must follow political subdivision boundaries (cities and townships) as much as possible. Because of this, the county should work with cities to draw city precinct boundaries. City precinct boundary plans are due 30 days before county plans.

[§§[42.4\(2\)](#), [49.3\(2\)\(A\)](#), [49.7](#), [331.206](#)]

County Auditor Review

Before the final adoption of precinct boundaries, the county auditor must have the opportunity to review the city council's plan and provide written comments on the plan. The auditor may suggest changes to improve how the plan will serve the convenience of the voters or promote electoral efficiency. The council must allow the county auditor between seven and 10 days for providing written feedback.

If the council rejects the auditor's suggestions, the council must provide reasons why the suggestions were rejected in the ordinance adopting the precinct boundaries.

[§[49.5](#)]

Public Hearing

The city council must hold a public hearing before final action is taken to adopt new precinct boundaries. Notice of the date, time and location of the hearing must be given in accordance with [Iowa Code Chapter 21](#).

[§[49.5](#)]

Adopted by Ordinance

The precinct boundaries must be defined by ordinance, so ensure that the ordinance description matches the precinct plan. The ordinance must include the date it was adopted. Descriptions of the precinct boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. The ordinance also must include the precinct names or numbers. Do not use township range and section number of housing subdivision names in the descriptions.

[§§[49.7](#), [49.11\(1\)](#)]

Precinct Population Certification

Complete the precinct population certification in the City Reprecincting Worksheet after the precinct boundaries have been drawn. The certification must be signed by a person authorized by the city council. Send the certification to the SOS. For more information on what must be submitted to the SOS, see page 9.

[§[49.7](#)]

Important Note: The total population of all precincts included in the certification must be the same as the population of the city as listed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Drawing Wards

Ward Requirements

City councils may decide to divide the city into wards. Wards must meet the following requirements:

- Follow precinct boundaries [\[§372.13\(7\)\(a\)\]](#)
- Composed of contiguous territory [\[§§42.4\(3\), 372.13\(7\)\(c\)\]](#)
- Composed of compact territory

Wards must be as compact as possible. Detailed standards for compactness are found in [Iowa Code §42.4\(4\)](#).

[\[§§42.4\(4\), 372.13\(7\)\(c\)\]](#)

- Ideal Ward Population

Ward populations must be as close as possible to the Ideal Ward Population unless it is necessary to deviate in order to comply with other standards in [Iowa Code §42.4](#).

To find the Ideal Ward Population, divide the population of the city by the number of wards in the city.

Where the deviation from the Ideal Ward Population is absolutely necessary, the Maximum Allowable Variation between wards is ten percent (10%). Plans with variations exceeding that limit must include a justification that deviation is necessary to comply with the other legal requirements set forth in [Iowa Code §372.13\(7\)](#) and are highly likely to be rejected by the SOS.

[\[§§49.3, 372.13\(7\)\(b\), IAC 721—21.32\(372\)\]](#)

Best Practice: Use the City Reprecincting Worksheet to calculate the Ideal Ward Population.

The following items cannot be taken into consideration when drawing ward boundaries:

- Addresses of incumbents
- Political affiliations of registered voters
- Past election results
- Other demographic information beyond census head counts [\[§§42.4\(5\), 49.3\(2\)\(d\), 372.13\(7\)\(d\)\]](#)

Ward Population Certification

Complete the Ward Population Certification on the City Reprecincting Worksheet after the ward boundaries have been drawn. The certification must be signed by a person authorized by the city council. **Send the original certification with wet ink signature to SOS.** For more information on what must be submitted to SOS, see page 9.

[\[§49.7\]](#)

Final Plan Submission

Submission Deadline

Finalized precinct boundary plans must be submitted electronically to SOS no later than 60 days after legislative districts have become law or by September 1, 2021, whichever is later.

[\[§49.7\]](#)

The Iowa Legislature must approve the Iowa Congressional, State Senate, and State House districts before cities and counties can proceed with their reprecincting and redistricting process.

SOS Review

SOS will make every effort to review plans within two weeks after submission. Cities are encouraged to submit plans early, allowing time to make corrections if necessary. Any plans that are not approved by the submission deadline that are determined to need corrections will be corrected by SOS, and cities will be assessed the costs of making those corrections.

[\[§49.7\]](#)

Publication Requirements

After the plans have been approved by SOS, the city council must publish notice of the changes in precinct boundaries in a newspaper of general circulation once a week for three consecutive weeks. The last publication must occur no later than 30 days before the next general election. This date is Sunday, October 9, 2022. If no changes were made, publication is not required.

[\[§49.11\(2\)\]](#)

What to Send

All cities must send the following to SOS even if precinct or ward boundaries did not change:

- A map showing the precinct boundaries
The map must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file. [\[§49.7\]](#)
- City Reprecincting Worksheet—original with wet ink signature
This includes the Precinct Population Certification which must be signed by a person authorized by the city council. [\[§49.7\]](#)
- Ordinance describing precinct boundaries
The ordinance must include the date it was adopted and the precinct names or numbers. Descriptions of the precinct boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. Do not use township range and section numbers of housing subdivision names in the descriptions. [\[§§49.7, 49.11\(1\)\]](#)

If the council rejects the auditor’s review and suggestions, the city council must provide reasons why the suggestions were rejected written into the ordinance adopting the precinct boundaries. [\[§49.5\]](#)
- Any agreements with counties
Include any copies of agreements with counties regarding precincts composed of both incorporated and unincorporated territory. This requirement does not apply if the city has a population fewer than 2,000. [\[§§49.4, 49.6\]](#)

Cities with wards also must include the following:

- A map showing the ward boundaries
The map must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file. [\[§49.7\]](#)
- Ward Population Certification—original with wet ink signature
The certification must be signed by a person authorized by the city council. This is included in the City Reprecincting Worksheet. [\[§49.7\]](#)
- Ordinance describing ward boundaries
The ordinance must include the date it was adopted and the ward names or numbers. Descriptions of the ward boundaries should name specific landmarks, such as roads and city or county boundaries. Do not use township range and section numbers of housing subdivision names in the descriptions. [\[§372.13\(7\)\]](#)

Best Practice: Retain a copy of the materials you submit to SOS for your own records.

Where to Send

Maps

Precinct boundary maps and ward boundary maps must be submitted as a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file.

- If you are using the Redistricting Solution provided by SOS, you'll submit your map(s) through that application.
- If you are using other mapping software, email map files to precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov. The maps must be a GIS shapefile or block equivalency file. In the subject header, include your city name and which file(s) are being sent.
Example: City of Winterset – Precinct Map

City Reprecincting Worksheet

Since the original Precinct and Ward Population Certifications with wet ink signatures must be submitted, mail the City Reprecincting Worksheet to:

Elections Division—Reprecincting
Iowa Secretary of State
Lucas Building, First Floor
321 E. 12th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319

Ordinances, Agreements, Proofs of Publication

The remaining required documents may be emailed to precinct.plan@sos.iowa.gov. Alternatively, you may mail them with the City Reprecincting Worksheet to the above address.

Send to County Auditor

Send copies of approved maps and ordinances to the county auditor's office. If the city lies in more than one county, send copies to the county auditors in each county.

Important Dates

Date	Event	Code Cite
April 1, 2021	Congressional and Legislative Redistricting Plan Delivered Deadline for the Legislative Services Agency (LSA) to deliver its first plan for congressional and legislative redistricting to the secretary of the senate and chief clerk of the house.	§42.3(1)(a)
May 15, 2021	Temporary County Redistricting Commission Established Deadline to establish a temporary county redistricting commission in counties with Plan Two or Plan Three supervisor representation plans.	§331.210A(1)(a)
September 1, 2021	City Precinct Boundary Changes Completed City councils must complete any changes in precinct and ward boundaries no later than 60 days after legislative districts have become law or by September 1, whichever is later.	§49.7(2)(a)
September 15, 2021	Deadline to Pass Congressional and Legislative Boundaries The General Assembly must pass plan establishing new congressional and legislative district boundaries by this day.	Iowa Constitution, Article III, Sec. 35
October 15, 2021	County Precinct and Supervisor District Boundary Changes Completed County boards of supervisors or temporary county redistricting commissions must complete any changes in precinct and supervisor district boundaries no later than 90 days after legislative district have become law or by October 15, whichever is later.	§49.7(2)(b)
January 15, 2022	City and County Precinct Boundaries Effective City and county precinct boundaries are effective for all elections held after this date.	§49.7(5)
October 9, 2022	Precinct Boundary Publication Deadline Last day to publish the third in a series of notices of changes in precinct boundaries. Publication is not required if no changes were made.	§49.11(2)
November 15, 2022	Adoption of School Director District Plans Begins First day the school board may adopt a resolution redrawing director district boundaries.	§275.23A(2)
May 15, 2023	Adoption Deadline for School Director District Plans Deadline for the school board to adopt a resolution redrawing director district boundaries.	§275.23A(2)
July 1, 2023	School Director District Boundaries Effective School director district boundaries are effective for all elections held after this date.	§275.23A(5)
August 1, 2023	Community College Director District Boundary Changes Completed Community college board must complete any changes to director district boundaries no later than August 1.	§260C.13