



“Gerrymandering” and “redistricting” are very popular in the news recently. This is because it is federal law to redraw districts boundaries, or redistrict, after the decennial census which is coming up in 2020. The purpose for this is to provide for equal representation. Therefore, it is imperative for all residents to complete both the State and the Federal census to maintain their services from and representation in their government.

Americans reside in several different districts; Congressional districts, State Senate & House legislative districts and even local districts, such as voting precincts and wards. For example, Wenham is in the 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional district, the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex and Middlesex Senatorial district and the 4<sup>th</sup> Essex Representative district. Wenham does not have 6200 residents so we do not have any precinct lines as stipulated by MGL 54 §6.

Article I, Section 2 of the United States Constitution stipulates that each state is allotted a portion of the 435 seats based on the size of its population relative to the other states. Consequently, after the federal census, a state may gain seats in the House if its population grows or lose seats if its population decreases..

Although Congress does have the ultimate authority, it is the state’s responsibility to redistrict according to Article I, Section 4 of the United States Constitution. The federal government instructs that districts must have nearly equal populations and must not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. States may impose additional requirements beyond the federal requirements, such as drawing districts that respect existing political boundaries, physical boundaries, or communities of interest; districts that are compact; and districts that are politically fair.

There are two ways that States can accomplish this requirement. States can either redistrict through their usual legislative process or through the use of a commission. If a state fails to act or if a state adopts a map that is deficient in some way, such as failing to adhere to the Voting Rights Act or a state requirement, the federal or state courts will impose a redistricting plan that satisfies constitutional requirements

Massachusetts like 36 other states, follow the legislative process to draw the district lines. In 1812, Governor Elbridge GERRY signed a bill that redistricted Massachusetts to benefit his Democratic-Republican Party. When mapped, one of the contorted districts in the Boston area was said to resemble the shape of a mythological SALAMANDER, hence the name GERRYMANDER. Gerrymandering is the practice of manipulating district boundaries to establish a political advantage for a particular party or group.

Other important terms that are popular in our community at this time are Warrant Hearing, Annual Town Meeting, Candidate’s Night, Annual Town Election and Campaign Finance. For more information on any of these terms, please reach out to your Town Clerk!

*Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Wenham Town Clerk April 11, 2014 and has achieved the designation of Certified Municipal Clerk in 2017. For more information on the clerk’s office, please go to [www.wenhamma.gov](http://www.wenhamma.gov) or follow the Wenham Town Clerk on Facebook.*