

# Mansfield council includes prisoners in ward plan

City split on map meant to safeguard future income from state and federal government

6:46 AM, Sep. 21, 2011 | Comments

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Recommend

A A



Written by  
Linda Martz  
News Journal

MANSFIELD -- City council narrowly approved maps that will redraw lines for Mansfield's six wards, but still count two prison populations as part of the 5th Ward.

The measure passed 4-3 Tuesday. Three of the four Republicans on council -- At-Large Councilman Doug Versaw, 3rd Ward Councilman Scott Hazen and 2nd Ward Councilman Jeff Rock -- voted against it.

The redistricting plan, spurred by population shifts reflected in the 2010 census, goes into effect in December. It will coincide with the swearing-in of any new city council members elected Nov. 8.

Law Director Dave Remy prepared two plans for possible approval. One counted the more than 5,000 inmates at Mansfield Correctional Institution and Richland Correctional Institution as part of the 5th Ward. The other excluded them.

Inmates have been counted as city ward residents for at least the past couple of decades.

But Versaw said he saw no reason why that should continue.

"They are not citizens of Mansfield. They cannot vote. They have nothing to do with city council at all, in that we don't represent them," he said. "All of the wards in the City of Mansfield now have 8,000 people (with potential voting rights) --

except for Ward 5, which has 3,000. To me, that gives those people in Ward 5 'superrepresentation,' which I don't think is fair."

Prison inmates aren't counted on Lima's ward maps, Versaw added.

But council's fourth Republican, 1st Ward Councilman Mike Hill, said he was concerned that if the city doesn't include inmates, the federal or state government could view Mansfield as having a smaller population, causing it to lose future police grants. 5th Ward Councilwoman Pat Hightower agreed.

"They are very important to count, when they're looking at our totals," she said.

Hazen noted one plan much more dramatically changed ward lines.

"If you vote against putting the prison in, you're voting for some fairly interesting changes in political dynamics. If you vote to keep the prisons in, the wards are probably going to stay more like the way they were before."

Though he could see both sides, he was inclined to vote for a plan that didn't count inmates, Hazen said.

Remy said Ohio's Secretary of State certified Mansfield's official population at about 47,270 after census numbers came in, counting prison inmates.

Mayor Don Culliver urged council to count prisoners, based on the likelihood federal and state government will continue to cut grants to municipalities.

The City of Mansfield has already lost \$1.6 million to state reductions in local government funds and other revenues, Culliver said.

"They're talking about taking local taxes from us right now -- so don't tell me what they (the state) can't do," Culliver told Versaw.

**lmartz@gannett.com**

**419-521-7229**