

Petitioners seek to increase number of Boulder County commissioners from 3 to 5

Second item would change representation for geographic commissioner districts

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Critics of the current size of Boulder County's Board of County Commissioners are hoping to ask voters in November to expand that panel's size and to change the way commissioners are elected.

Petitions are being circulated to place an item on November's ballot to increase Boulder County's three-member governing board to a five-commissioner panel.

In a second ballot question, voters would be asked to choose between two methods to elect representatives to the five-person board.

One option would be for each of the five commissioners to be a resident of a specific geographic Boulder County district and be elected only by voters living in that district.

The second option would be for three of the board members to represent specific geographic districts and elected only by voters living within the district up for election. The other two commissioners would represent the entire county and be elected by voters from the whole county.

Currently, each of Boulder County's three commissioners has to live within a specific geographic part of the county but is chosen in a countywide election and not just by voters within the district from which the candidate is seeking election.

That present system does not lend itself to fair or direct representation, according to Gary Cooper, a Lafayette Republican who's a candidate for the Board of County Commissioners District 3 seat up for election this year.

"As it stands now, the city of Boulder ultimately determines who gets elected" to each of the three board seats, Cooper contended in a news release from the District Representation for Boulder County organization.

"Smaller cities or areas such as Lafayette or Niwot have little say in who becomes commissioner and who gets to represent that area's ideals or interests," said Cooper, a real estate broker.

Cooper and Beverlee White, a Republican activist who lives in Louisville, are leading the drive to collect signatures from at least 10,835 registered county voters by July 27 to get the proposed five-commissioner initiative onto November's ballot.

Cooper said Monday that volunteers' efforts to circulate the petitions the last two weeks have been going well.

He estimated that the five-commissioner proposal, with either three or all five of those commissioners elected directly from the districts they're running to represent, is a "perfectly nonpartisan" plan that would give people who are not Democrats — including members of other political parties and candidates unaffiliated with any party — a better chance of winning a commissioner's seat.

The last Republican to hold a Boulder County board seat was Sandy Hume, who was a commissioner from 1991 through 1994.

Boulder County's three current Board of County Commissioners districts are:

- District 1, a southwest Boulder County area that includes part of the city of Boulder lying west of Foothills Parkway and the north and west areas of the city, along with the mountain communities of Nederland, Ward and Jamestown. Boulder Democrat Elise Jones now represents District 1.
- District 2, a northern Boulder County that stretches from Allenspark in the west to Longmont in the east and includes Lyons and Hygiene. Longmont Democrat Deb Gardner now represents District 2.
- District 3, primarily a southeast county district whose western boundary is the South Foothills Highway, Foothills Parkway and the North Foothills Highway and includes Louisville, Lafayette, Superior and the Boulder County portion of Erie as well as Niwot and Gunbarrel. Lafayette Democrat Cindy Domenico now represents District 3.

County commissioners who were in office in September 2011 set those boundaries based on population counts in the 2010 census. Barring a change in the size of the county board, those boundaries will remain in place through the 2020 elections and will be adjusted in 2021 for elections in the following decade.

Regardless of whether the District Representation for Boulder County questions make it onto November's ballot, Republican Cooper and the other candidates in this year's election for the District 3 seat — Louisville Democrat Matt Jones and Lafayette Green Party member Cliff Willmeng — are competing in a countywide election to succeed term-limited Domenico in that county board office.

Also seeking the District 3 seat is Lafayette Democrat Andrew O'Connor, who failed to advance to the primary from the Boulder County Democratic Assembly but who has said he is running as a write-in candidate.

The District 1 and 2 seats aren't up for election until 2020. Jones and Gardner cannot seek re-election then because of term limits.

Cooper said that if the five-commissioner initiative makes it onto November's ballot and is approved by voters so that each commissioner represents one of five geographic districts, the three board members holding office as of next January would have to draw and adopt boundaries for the five new county districts, with elections from those districts starting in 2020.

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