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SERVING TERRE HAUTE AND THE WABASH VALLEY

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## Prison part of redistricting considerations

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Terre Haute's City Council districts may soon be changing shape.

This year, the law requires the City Council to officially set new district boundaries in response to new U.S. Census population figures.

On Thursday at 5:30 p.m., officials from the city's legal department will be briefing members of the Terre Haute City Council in a special meeting on what to expect as they draft new boundaries this year. Most of the council members are new to the body since the last redistricting in 2002 and have not been through the process before, city officials noted.

"It's really just going to be educational," said Stephannie Gambill, paralegal in the city's legal department. She and City Attorney Chouil Lee will explain to council members what to expect as the redistricting process moves forward this year, she said.

Before the city's legal department can begin working on drafting new proposed district boundaries, one critical question must be answered: Will the city's council districts include inmates at the Terre Haute federal penitentiary or not?

Currently, the approximately 3,200 inmates at the federal prison, who are not permitted to vote, make up part of the city's 1st City Council District. That means that about one-third of District 1's population is shut out of the political process, effectively giving extra representation to the free population of District 1 compared to the city's other districts.

Terre Haute is not alone in facing this problem and many communities have taken steps to remove inmate populations from their representative districts, said Peter Wagner, executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative.

"Generally, legislators almost always conclude it doesn't make sense to give some people more representation than others,"

Wagner said. He would like to see Terre Haute follow suite and remove the inmate population from the city's population for purposes of redistricting.

The law requires that the population of city council districts be approximately equal. This year, the "ideal" district population will be 9,587, Gambill said.

As part of Thursday night's presentation, city legal officials plan to "discuss the prison population, that it skews the voting population," Gambill said.

"It's totally a puzzle game," Gambill said of the redistricting process, noting that she and other legal department officials do not take politics into account as they draft potential boundaries for council approval.

"We're not looking at registered voters or voting history numbers or how voter turnout has been in the past," Gambill said. "That's what politicians look at. We only, solely, consider Census numbers."

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