

**State Reapportionment Commission Hearing  
Testimony by Mayor Carolyn Comitta  
Borough of West Chester**

**November 23, 2011**

Good afternoon, honorable members of the Reapportionment Commission. I am Mayor Carolyn Comitta and I bring you greetings from the citizens of the great Borough of West Chester!

I am honored and proud to be the first bi-partisan-elected Mayor of West Chester. As such, I truly represent ALL the voters of the Borough.

Along with me today, are two colleagues who will also testify: permit me to introduce, Rich Miller, graduate student at West Chester University, and Bret Binder, resident of East Bradford Township.

In order for you to fully comprehend the significant negative impact of the proposed redistricting on the Borough of West Chester and its neighbors, we believe that it is important for you to hear the complexity of concerns raised from our three perspectives.

Each of us will testify that we believe the proposed split / of the Borough of West Chester, is in direct violation of the Pennsylvania State Constitution. Mr. Binder will discuss this matter in detail. On display are two boards prepared by Mr. Binder, that show the existing and the proposed boundaries of the 156<sup>th</sup> and the 160<sup>th</sup>, along with the specific text from the State Constitution that we contend is being violated under the proposed redistricting.

West Chester is a 1.8 square mile, compact, historic urban municipality and is the County Seat of Chester County.

The Borough of West Chester has its own charms and challenges that are distinct from its neighboring municipalities. It is a complex community complete with a thriving retail / and restaurant district, our county government center, industrial areas, diverse neighborhoods, and a university campus.

In addition, West Chester serves our region, as the urban center for social, legal and financial services, culture, higher education and healthcare.

Currently, **all** of the Borough of West Chester, and **all** of West Chester University are included in the 156<sup>th</sup>. The proposal is to split the Borough into two separate House Districts. It would be an anomaly for **half** of the Borough, the seat of Chester County, to be moved to the 160<sup>th</sup>, which is essentially a Delaware County District!

If it is not a good idea to split a County, as Senator Costa, has stated in his November 18<sup>th</sup>, “Exceptions to the Preliminary Plan”, it is certainly not a good idea to split a county seat, especially one that is an urban center providing a myriad of essential services for the region. For example, Judge McEwen, the proposed splitting of the Borough of West Chester would be akin to splitting half of Media and putting it in a predominantly Philadelphia District!

In the spirit of open-mindedness, it is fair to ask, “Hey, couldn’t it be a good thing to have TWO people standing up for you in Harrisburg!”

Good question! And as you can guess I bring you / some good answers!

The West Chester Borough Council frequently works closely with our state representative to address state-regulated issues / such as: alcohol (the Borough has 39 liquor licenses!), community development, ageing sewer and road repairs, environmental regulations and public safety, such as equipment and training for our highly acclaimed police and volunteer fire departments as well / as our state university challenges and opportunities.

Moreover, West Chester Borough is under a Common Pleas Court Order regarding redistricting our Ward system, which has not yet been completed. Keeping the Borough in **one** House District will eliminate the possibility of conflicts with the State Plan.

Managing two districts within the Borough raises some important practical questions!

If two House districts split our town, we can imagine West Chester Borough Council or West Chester University students asking:

“Do we need **both** Representatives to support this idea?! How do we get them together to discuss this issue?! Where do we meet? Do our two reps agree or are there conflicting Delaware County issues at play- etc, etc...”

There is also the significant confusion and hardship generated for the elderly, and for students and minorities (not to mention the rest of us!)-

For the past 35 years, our state representative has had their District office / in the Borough within walking distance of over 19,000 of his or her constituents – including the elderly, low income / and students, many of whom don't drive. The proposed split would require half of West Chester's citizens to drive 40 minutes to Chichester to their representative's office!

In conclusion, instead of doubling our representation, we believe the proposed redistricting would significantly diminish our voice in Harrisburg and would compound the effort needed to address the Borough's diverse health, safety and welfare issues.

We ask this final question – “Is it in the best interest of the people is it constitutional, is it ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to split the great Borough of West Chester, risking diminishing the leadership and regional services of one of the urban jewels of our state??”

We believe it is absolutely necessary to keep the Borough together - and to keep it's State University together - under **one** House District in order for us to have the best chance of not just surviving but **flourishing** into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mr. Binder will share an alternative plan that will do just that.

Our future is in your hands. The people of West Chester thank you for your **thoughtful** consideration. Thank you. END