

The Power of Redistricting

How a Local Community Fought for Fair Lines in 2011

What is Redistricting and Why Does it Matter to Our Communities?

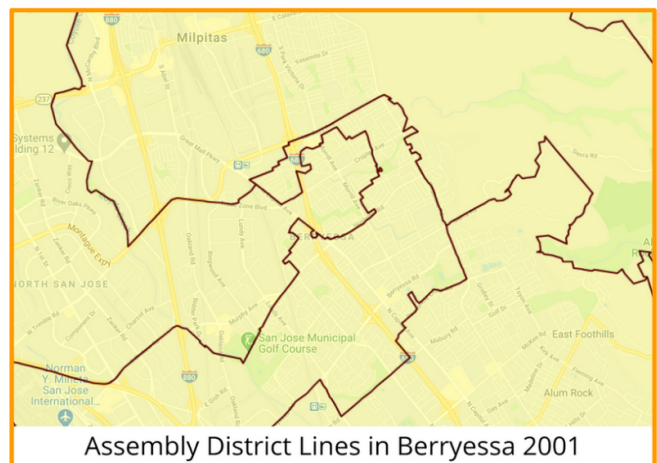
Redistricting is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to make sure our communities are represented fairly by our elected officials. Following the 2020 Census, district lines will be redrawn to reflect population changes. These lines have the potential to build or limit community power, by keeping existing communities together or splitting them into multiple districts. The Berryessa neighborhood in San Jose serves as an example of just how district lines can do this.

What Happened in Berryessa?

2001 Redistricting - Stripping Community Power

Prior to 2001, Berryessa—a 14-square mile, majority-AAPI neighborhood in San Jose—had one assemblymember and one state senator. This gave Berryessa and its Asian American communities a strong voice in advocating to their elected officials. It was clear who was accountable to their neighborhood, creating a more responsive relationship between legislators and constituents.

During 2001 redistricting, state legislators drawing the lines made a dramatic shift: they broke the Berryessa neighborhood into four assembly and two state senate districts. This change meant that Berryessa residents were only a small part of the voting population across four different assembly districts, making it hard for them to have a big say in who was elected to represent them. They also could not raise their concerns collectively to a shared representative.



2011 Redistricting - Local Coalitions Organize for Fair Maps

The 2001 split of the Berryessa neighborhood inspired the community to take action and speak up in the next redistricting cycle. In 2011, for the first time, an independent citizen-led redistricting commission was responsible for drawing California's legislative districts instead of lawmakers. The commission held public hearings to hear from Californians about their communities. This was the perfect opportunity for Berryessa to organize, speak up, and fix the district lines that divided their community.

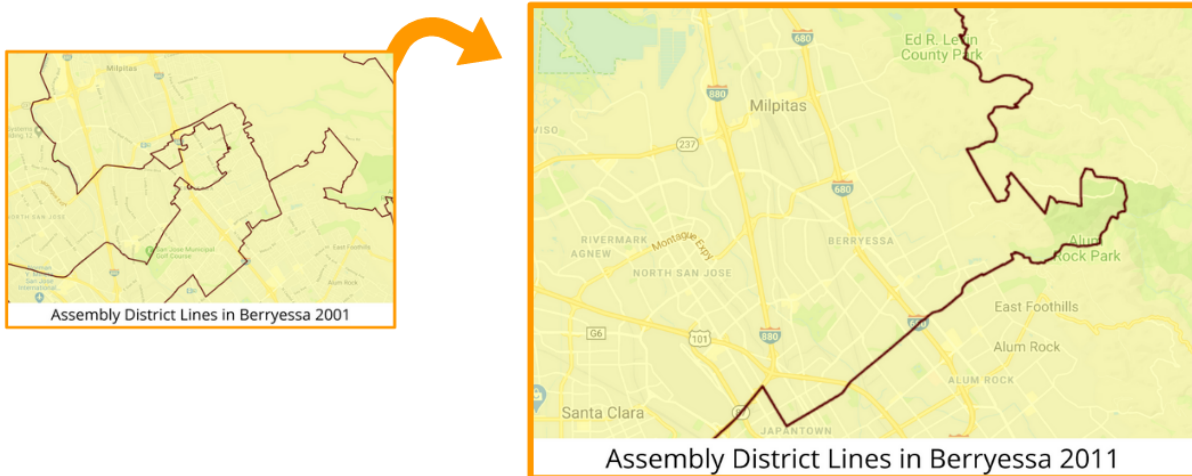
Berryessa residents and neighbors across San Jose came together to ask the commission to keep Berryessa whole. Groups including the Asian Law Alliance, Vietnamese American Roundtable, Berryessa Citizens Advisory Council, and Pakistani American Community Center generated support for the campaign, using ethnic media and coalitions built from the 2010 Census.

They organized their community members to testify to the redistricting commission, using both data and personal narratives to show why their community should be kept together. They worked in coalitions to draw maps of their communities and to draft proposed district maps. They also advocated to be placed in a district with nearby neighborhoods and cities that had similar demographics and community interests, so that they could have a stronger collective voice and shape policy for years to come.



2011 Berryessa Reunified

The efforts to turn out community and public comment to the commission were successful! Berryessa was reunified in single assembly and state senate districts. Following this win, an Asian American Berryessa resident and former member of San Jose's City Council was elected as Assemblymember for District 25.



Get Involved in Redistricting to Protect Your Community's Voice!

The case of Berryessa shows why district lines are important, with the potential to build political power within a community, and how powerful community voices can be.

Redistricting is happening in 2021. This is your chance to look at your district lines, and ask: Do they empower my community? Do I want them to change?

Learn more about redistricting and find out how you can get involved at bit.ly/ALC-CA-Redistricting