

# Fury over plan to alter ward boundaries

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**O**PPPOSITION parties in the eThekweni municipality are fuming at new ward demarcation proposals which they say could see thousands of their voters moved into other wards.

They say the changes are an attempt to ensure the ANC secures more votes in the 2011 municipal elections.

The parties have accused municipal manager Michael Sutcliffe of being secretive over the process so that people are not alerted to the fact that they have only until Friday to make objections or submit amendments to the proposals.

The proposed ward delimitations have been drafted to create wards with more or less the same amount of registered voters.

Sutcliffe said: "My understanding is that, from my side, I need to meet with councillors and other stakeholders and identify wards where there are issues or not. As far as I know, I have until the end of January and people are on recess now any way.

"I will look at probably convening a meeting early in January," he said.

However, the DA and Minority Front (MF) believe that the changes seek only to assist the ANC in winning more wards in elections.

The parties cited examples

of how wards under their control would be affected.

DA caucus leader Tex Collins said that Forest Hills was being taken out of Ward 9 – his ward – and "given" to Kloof, which was in Ward 10. The DA won Ward 9 by just 14 votes in the last municipal elections and the Forest Hills area had accounted for at least 1 000 votes, he said, adding that it would make more sense to take the area of Kwabozithini out of the ward, as it was separated from the rest of the area "by a mountain".

Similarly, Forest Hills was so far from Kloof that it made no sense to move the area to Ward 10.

"On the map it looks like the pragmatic thing to do, but on the ground it's a different scenario. I have no problem with demarcation as a proposal if it was balanced for everyone and did not favour one party over another. This is nothing more than an exercise to entrench ANC strongholds where they currently do not have them," said Collins.

Rick Crouch, the DA councillor in Ward 10, said the demarcation proposal for his ward would see a large part of Hillcrest – on the Heritage Market side of Old Main Road from Hospital Road to St Helier Road – being taken out of the DA Ward 10 and moved to the ANC-controlled Ward 14.

"Some people are going to be surprised to find that they

were previously in a DA ward and will now be in an ANC ward," he said.

MF caucus leader Jayraj Singh said his party was concerned particularly over Ward 69 in Chatsworth, as the boundary for this ward was now being extended into Lamontville. This ward had always been an MF stronghold, but there was now a "little bit of concern" with the extension into an ANC stronghold.

Singh said Sutcliffe should have called a public meeting over the matter but had not done so. "We can't be blamed for feeling that he is shrouding the process in secrecy," he said.

Sutcliffe said he understood that municipalities had until the end of January to respond to the proposals.

However, a Demarcation Board official said municipalities had until December 18 (this Friday) to submit their responses to the draft proposals. Municipalities should have held public meetings in this regard.

The official said that if neither consensus nor an alternate proposal was submitted, the board would likely revert to the original draft.

"We urge people to contact their municipalities and get involved in the process as soon as possible, or else they may find themselves in a ward they are unhappy with for the next five years," he said.