

Non-partisan Advocacy

By T. Duncan Abernathy, AIA-E

Advocacy scares people. All people, but especially those who have never tried it, find advocacy daunting. You have to pick a side and then support your choice and defend it against attacks. Who needs it?

You do. Your community does. And your profession does. Advocacy promotes change. Architects continually strive for change in efforts to improve the *status quo*, even those whose practice specializes in preservation.

Those who have never tried advocacy might need an issue many might find unrelated to architecture, especially if an opportunity comes that most everyone supports and that provides training. As a non-partisan opponent of gerrymandering, OneVirginia2021 is just the thing.

And once you see how easy advocacy is, you can translate your drive, your passion, and your expertise into advocating for your profession.

OneVirginia2021, a non-profit 501c3 organization, seeks to change the way voting district boundaries are drawn. Currently in Virginia, the General Assembly redraws the district lines every 10 years based upon the latest census. The census will be taken in 2020 and redistricting will be done during the 2021 legislative session.

Republicans hate gerrymandering. Democrats hate gerrymandering. Independents hate gerrymandering. (A poll conducted in 2017 by Public Policy Polling showed 62 percent of Trump voters and 76 percent of Clinton voters favored non-partisan redistricting.) But after winning an election, some office holders see it as a way to maintain their seats and decide they should retain the redistricting authority.

Partisan gerrymandering allows these politicians to redraw the lines to include those favoring their election and exclude those opposed to them. It results in oddly shaped districts that have no relationship to the Virginia Constitution's mandate that the districts be "compact." Racial gerrymandering was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court years ago. Only recently has it begun accepting cases of partisan gerrymandering.

OneVirginia2021 operates a statewide training and advocacy network. You may have seen volunteers at the Broad Apetit food fair on Broad Street in downtown Richmond Saturday, June 2. They were collecting names in support of OneVirginia2021's petition drive for a constitutional amendment to place the redistricting decisions into the hands of a third party.

OneVirginia2021's volunteers collected signatures again June 12 at polling places throughout the commonwealth during the primary elections. For details about the organization and how to volunteer and receive training, go here: <https://www.onevirginia2021.org/>. Once advocacy gets in your blood, you will find it easier to promote your profession and every other idea you espouse.