Some basics about the political structure of America:

There are 50 states in the US plus a few Territories.

Each State is divided into either Counties or Parishes.

Each County/Parish is divided into Towns, Burroughs, Cities, and Townships.

Each Town/Burrough/City/Township is divided into Voter Districts.

Where it gets more complicated is School Districts, Federal Congressional Districts, State Senate Districts, State House of Representative Districts, and various Judicial Districts. All of these districts just listed often cross over the boundaries of all the other districts.

The KEY to finding out what voters are eligible to vote for is their Voter District. From there, you can figure out what Judges, mayors, etc, they can vote for.

A big problem is Voters often don’t know what Voter District they live in. So the sign in process is designed to limit that down as far as we can . If we only have their state, then we show them all the candidates in that state. If we have the county, then we can limit it further, etc.

There are API’s that allow you to type in your address and get this info kicked back at you. But so far, I’ve only found expensive ones. Like 37cents per use. At that rate, I’d go bankrupt in a week if the site becomes popular.

But we can narrow it down pretty well using the Organized Table.

Someone enters a zip code, and a search of that table would return a State from the State Postal Codes columns.

This search would also return a list of counties from the County Name columns.

Choosing one of these would bring you to a list of cities from the County Subdivision, and Place Name columns.

If they still have more than one Federal Congressional District, State Senate District, or State Representative district associated with them, then we ask if they know their Voter District or School District. If they can pick their Voter District from a list, then we’re golden.

The Organized Table, is unfortunately HUGE. If this takes too much time at sign in, we should get their address and ask them to further refine the search when we present them with candidates.

Key for USA zip code to voter district table.

All of these numbers and designations are created by the Government. We should keep within their format to make it easier to change data or relate it to future tables that the government comes out with like lists of candidates.

**ZIP Census** – The US Census Department created areas called ZIP Census areas which differ very slightly on occasion from Postal Zip codes. Unfortunately, there are no relational databases that relate to postal code, only zip. So on rare occasion, everything we do will be entirely wrong and users need to be able to say “this is incorrect” and select the options manually.

Zip Name – This is a name used primarily by the post office and census takers for this region. It is not used commonly and this column could probably be eliminated.

FIPS State – This is the code that the Federal Government paperwork often uses to refer to a State. It is needed for comparing to other Government Tables.

State Postal Code – This is a two letter abbreviation for each state.

County FiPS – this is a Federal number for each county. Note that the first two digits of this number are the same as the FIPS on the state that this county is in.

**County name-** This is the common name for the county… the name that a user would know it by.

County Subdivision – This is a number associated with a part of a county. It could be a town or it could be something else entirely. I don’t know if these numbers are unique to the Federal Government or if they are just unique to the state that they are in.

County Subdivision Name – This would be the common name of the subdivision… the name that a user would know it by.

Place FIPS – This is a Federal Number associated with that region. Sometimes A “Place” and a “County Subdivision” are the same thing, and sometimes they are slightly different. So you can’t eliminate one column or the other.

Place Name – This would be the common name of the “Place”… the name that a user would know it by.

**voterDistrict**-This number is NOT UNIQUE NATIONWIDE, but it is unique within that County. This is the smallest unit of US government that we are interested in. From this point, all political associations can be made. The term “District” is tossed around loosely a lot. Voter District should refer to a tiny division of a couple miles, but many non-governmental agencies use the term improperly to refer to Federal Congressional Districts or other divisions. Any API’s that claim they can produce Voter Districts, need to be checked to see if they are actually producing the right number. Unfortunately because the states produce these, they don’t always have the same form.

Voter District Name - This would be the common name of the Voter District… the name that a user would know it by. Usually, anyway. Sometimes it’s another number that would be hard to memorize.

**congressionalDistrict113**- This number is for the Federal House of Representatives. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

**State Senate**- This number is for the State Senate. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

State House of Representatives- This number is for the State House of Representatives. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

Unified School District- Some areas split their schools into different school districts by age group and others have them all in one district. This is for one district. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

Unified School District Name – This is the common name for a particular school district.

Elementary School District – Number associated with the Districts for the wee children. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

Secondary School District – Number associated with the high school kids School district. These numbers are NOT UNIQUE ACROSS THE WHOLE USA. They are only unique within a particular state.

Population – population of that Voter District. This might come in handy for poling data later down the road when we compare the number of our users and the number of the local population.

ZCTA to place – This number, I believe, is the distance between the center of the zip code and the center of the “Place” field. This could come in handy if we get address to geolocation API somewhere.