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## **Miami-Dade commissioners approve charter amendment making it easier to create new cities, reject elected sheriff proposal**

By Patricia Mazzei  
[pmazzei@MiamiHerald.com](mailto:pmazzei@MiamiHerald.com)

Miami-Dade voters will get a chance to make it a little easier to create new cities — but not as easy as advocates had wanted — after county commissioners approved putting a cityhood charter amendment on the November ballot.

They also rejected, some with anger, a pair of proposals that would have asked voters to turn the appointed elections supervisor and police director jobs into elected positions.

And commissioners upheld their plan to place two, four-year term limits to a vote on Nov. 6, despite a request from one of their colleagues to reconsider.

The decisions came Thursday in a marathon meeting on charter amendments and other ballot questions. It was the first commission gathering since last week's election in which two commissioners handily won reelection. Two others will go to runoffs.

The reelected ones, Commissioners Barbara Jordan and Dennis Moss, appeared emboldened by their decisive victories.

Both bashed Miami auto magnate and civic activist Norman Braman for running candidates against the four incumbents. Moss defended trying to reverse the term-limits question. Jordan chastised Commission Chairman Joe Martinez, who lost his mayoral bid against incumbent Carlos Gimenez, for putting forth the elections supervisor and police director proposals.

But no charter amendment drew more discussion or public comment than the one on incorporating neighborhoods that are not already a part of cities.

Commissioners voted 12-1 to give pro-cityhood groups more time to collect signatures to move their plans forward. They will now have six months to obtain signatures from 20 percent of the area's voters instead of three months to obtain 25 percent. That's still more, however, than the 10 percent a charter review task force had endorsed.

"It wasn't what we wanted, but it's moving in the right direction," Mack Samuel, a proponent of incorporating the North Central community east of Hialeah, said after the meeting. He had urged commissioners to accept the task force's 10-percent threshold.

Groups organizing incorporation drives, some of whose members attended the meeting wearing T-shirts reading "Let Us Vote!," will be required to host public meetings in three

different locations of their community to inform residents about cityhood plans.

The board tweaked the task force's original proposal, which would not have given commissioners a vote on incorporations, despite pledging when they created the task force in March that any amendments that received two-thirds of the task force's approval would go directly to the ballot.

"We are not really keeping our word with the voters," Commissioner Javier Souto warned.

Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz withdrew an alternate proposal that would have paved the way to incorporate the entire county.

Chairman Martinez cast the lone vote against the final plan, saying he wanted to require a two-thirds majority of the commission, instead of just a simple majority, to approve annexing unincorporated neighborhoods to existing cities.

Martinez, a former police officer, had proposed charter amendments to elect a sheriff and elections supervisor. He had said before Thursday that he didn't intend to run for sheriff — a position currently filled by the appointed director of the Miami-Dade Police Department — but didn't entirely rule out the possibility.

On Thursday, an angry Commissioner Jordan pointedly questioned Martinez's motives and timing a week after the election.

"The reason that it's on here in the first place, I feel, is self-serving," she said. "I resent the fact that they're on here because it's really playing games."

Martinez noted that the positions would not have been created until 2014

"This has nothing to do with timing, and this is certainly not self-serving," he said.

Both proposals failed. The elections supervisor amendment went down 9-3; the sheriff amendment, 10-2. Diaz and Martinez voted in favor of both; Commissioner Bruno Barreiro voted for the elections supervisor proposal but not the one for sheriff. Moss was away from the dais for both votes.

The board also voted 9-3 against Moss' proposal to rescind the term-limits question commissioners agreed earlier this year to place on the ballot. Moss said he wanted the commission to reconsider the plan in a post-Election Day "atmosphere that is freer of intimidation, threats and innuendo."

"We don't have to be afraid of Norman Braman," he said. "If we do our job and take care of our constituency, our constituency will support us."

But most of his colleagues were reluctant to change their minds on putting the question to a vote.

"To remove it after we told people that it was there — I can't do that," Commissioner Rebeca Sosa said.

Commissioners Diaz, Jordan and Moss voted for the proposal. Martinez was absent.