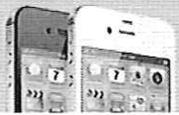


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MAMI-DADE CHARTER

Miami-Dade charter: What to do with unincorporated areas



GAZTUA

BY LUIS ANDRE GAZTUA
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This year's charter review committee has revitalized the push to make Miami-Dade County government smaller. Momentum is building to limit Miami-Dade County's role to that of a regional operator of transportation — air, sea and land — water and sewer, specialized public safety and economic development.

Advocates for this limitation believe that these specific functions would allow our mayor and county commissioners to better focus on regional issues and get them out of the business of local government. These folks feel that only cities should be in the business of providing municipal services. With that said, there are a few ways to get there.

INCORPORATE

Supporters of incorporation argue that the county inefficiently provides services to unincorporated enclaves surrounded by incorporated areas. These residents are jaded by current affairs and embrace a utopian sense of localized self-determination as their solution. They are certain that now is the time to decide whether they wish to live in a new city or stay in the unincorporated area of Miami-Dade County and believe that true local government will provide their solution to better services.

Unfortunately, the incorporation crowd's solution requires a heck of a lot more government in the form of new cities. Imagine, in addition to our 30-plus municipalities Miami-Dade residents will add dozens of new mayors and city managers, labor unions, potentially hundreds more city commissioners, and thousands of more public employees with pensions.

And don't forget to add all the new city departments, hurricane press conferences, lavish state of the city addresses, unique and nonconforming street signs, nonregional trolleys, traffic circles, trade missions, suburbans, hybrid vehicles and gorgeous city halls.

Mind you, each new city must also have a unique name and identity. So during your daily commute you can look forward to driving through: the Town of East Kendall, the Gardens of Center Kendall, the Village West Kendall, the Treetop Ewok Village at the Falls, and my favorite, *El Municipio de la Sawesera*.

Fortunately, residents in the unincorporated areas will need to approve any incorporation measures. Incorporation will be a tough sell once these folks figure that they pay lower taxes than their fellow residents who live in cities and that they'll need to build and buy their new government — personnel, services, and bricks and mortar — from scratch.

ANNEX

Annexation is a good solution when a set number of large local governments annex unincorporated areas in a way that allows the new super cities to sustain and serve the annexed while providing a greater value to the taxpayer.

To accomplish this, the Miami-Dade charter could be amended to allow the mayor, with super-majority override by the Board of County Commissioners, the authority to require the eventual annexation of areas that are completely surrounded by one or more super cities.

However, annexation becomes sloppy when small cities try to poach thriving unincorporated commercial areas with little or no residents. These cities seem to feel an inherent manifest destiny need to "grow" and

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Miami needs to rebrand to attract young entrepreneurs, professionals

increase property tax revenues by annexing the equivalent of ATM machines.

Sloppy annexation is bad news on a couple of fronts: (1) local small businesses are located in those areas and they can't vote on the matter (talk about "taxation without representation"), and (2) when these cities poach these areas for tax revenue those same small businesses will be hit with significantly higher unbudgeted property taxes and most likely will need to lay people off.

CONSOLIDATE

A consolidated city-county is a city and county that have been merged into one unified jurisdiction. As such it is simultaneously a city, and a county, which is an administrative division of a state. It has the powers and responsibilities of both types of entities.

For example, in Jacksonville a consolidation referendum was held in 1967, and voters overwhelmingly voted for a centralized government as a way to cut duplication, increase efficiency and restore confidence.

A consolidation in Miami-Dade would require the abolishment of almost all the cities and the creation of one regional super government. Needless to say, I unfortunately don't see that happening, ever!

There is another option — a hybrid where the large local government annexation model would eventually lead to a form of Municipal Darwinism. Just as stated in the previous section, all unincorporated areas would be annexed by our largest cities. Thereafter, if smaller cities fail to provide the services the taxpayers require and deserve — they then are to be dissolved and absorbed by the super cities. Thereby, creating efficiencies by limited consolidation.

I hope this helps the Charter Review Taskforce start a dialogue on the alternatives to mass incorporation.

Luis Andre Gazitua, a lawyer specializing in government affairs, authored the strong-mayor charter amendment approved by the voters in January 2007.

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YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS
Miami needs to rebrand to attract young entrepreneurs, professionals

I love Miami! I'm a native, left to attend college and grad school and to work, and moved back 31/2 years ago. Since I've been back, I've been heavily involved with various young professionals groups, civic groups and the business community, and one thing has echoed loudly: Miami is missing something.



KENNEDY ASSASSINATION
Castro and Kennedy's death: Connecting the dots?

In 1987, Florentino Aspillaga, the most valuable Cuban intelligence officer ever to defect, provided the CIA with detailed information that Fidel Castro's security forces knew and could have directed Lee Harvey Oswald's plan to assassinate President Kennedy in Dallas. This potentially provocative news was buried among thousands of documents written on the tragic subject.

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