

The Miami Herald

Posted on Mon, Jul. 16, 2012

Charter proposal not fair to unincorporated areas

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After attending several charter task force meetings, I was disappointed to see how few appointees actually showed up. Those that did had radically one-sided views. They never really accepted any input from the audience and almost all of them were residents of cities who didn't have the foggiest idea of what life was like in the unincorporated areas of Miami-Dade County.

The decisions this charter task force rendered were completely without real study, research or analysis. One can see it in the very rushed product they delivered with no time for the public to absorb. They were showing the public that they supposedly created something bold and fresh, but it's hard to escape the feeling they were just pushing their own agendas.

One example: incorporation. Residents who attended the meetings said they did not want their voting rights diluted by removing the 25 percent requirement for signatures and watering it down to 10 percent to start incorporation movements. The task force's mission, it seems, was to weaken the protections afforded residents of unincorporated areas. Of the 20 members of the task force, 18 were from cities. They really don't have the right to dictate what the rules should be for unincorporated area governments because unincorporated residents can't dictate the rules for city government.

Unincorporated Miami-Dade — UMSA, in government shorthand — has the lowest property tax rate compared to almost all cities. UMSA residents also pay less in car insurance, homeowner's insurance, cell phones, land lines, FPL bills, etc., because they don't have fees/surcharges added to their bills.

UMSA's business owners don't have to deal with obtaining two occupational licenses (local business tax). The UMSA business owner just gets one from the county, thus not having to pass on higher costs to the residents in the area. UMSA's homeowners don't have to go to two building departments to get plans approved; they just have to go to the county. But a city's residents/business owners first have to get the county to sign off (per a 2008 law) and then get the final permits from the city's building department. Twice the work, time and money.

Almost all the residents of Miami-Dade County use the resources of the county — police, fire, Water & Sewer, Solid Waste and the public library system. So what advantage does incorporation bring to residents? Self-determination. That means you get a new group of politicians determining what things are appropriate for you and your property.

You must then deal with issues like the great pick-up-truck-in-front-of-your-house

dilemma. To park or not to park? The very necessary and rushed need for bike paths throughout all crowded streets, the side-walking of every green swale area, the motto of a newly minted city, perhaps with a name like the City of Tot Lots or the City of the Most Singles!

Then your politicians will also determine what salaries they want to get paid. The mayor, council members, clerks, code enforcement, unions, city attorneys and more personnel will be needed for that City of Gold (for them). They will start with a token amount and then gradually vote themselves generous pensions, expense accounts, travel accounts, etc. Don't forget the lobbyists — they will be on the payroll, too.

UMSA does not have to deal with much of that stuff. No duplication of services. The county answers to UMSA and vice-versa.

The task force failed to look at any of these issues from UMSA's perspective. They also failed to look at annexation properly. Once a city has its borders, it should not have the right to expand and gobble up money from UMSA. The city folks wanted a city, then they need to stay within their parameters and survive on their own finances.

The proposal by the Charter Task Force is not good for cities, either. Residents of cities have on various occasions said No to annexing other areas, but their city councils have not always listened.

After reading the ballot language on this incorporation issue and the other ballot items, voters will have to decide. But without the background information, it is impossible to make an informed choice. After intense study, my own decision on incorporation is definitely a big No!

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