

THE INSIDER

HORSING AROUND: A new Miami-Dade County council will reach out for national and internationally equestrian and agricultural shows, along with industry conferences for the Tropical Park Equestrian Center, 7900 SW 40th St. The county commission Tuesday created by ordinance The Ronald Reagan Equestrian Center Council to secure major events for the park, to generate revenue for the county. According to the ordinance, the council will consist of 22 members, promote the center, make recommendations about programming to the commission and the county's Park, Recreation, and Open Space Department, review the center's annual budget, and submit an annual report. The council is to meet at least quarterly. Members will serve two-year terms. The center currently hosts more than 36 shows a year, according to the county website.

DERIVATIVES SWAP SUIT: The Miami-Dade County Commission Tuesday authorized the administration to take part in the lawsuit settlement over municipal derivatives against JPMorgan Chase. In July 2011, 24 state attorneys general and the District of Columbia sued Chase, which has been in "the business of underwriting tax free bonds and selling and structuring municipal bond derivatives since 1994," county documents show. The suit accused Chase of profiting from wrongdoing by "orchestrating bids" and "attempting to fix the price, rate or key terms" on certain transactions, from 2001 to 2005, according to county documents. The county was involved with a municipal bond derivative swap with Chase on April 27, 2004. Miami-Dade is expected to receive \$147,714 from the case. Chase did not admit to any wrongdoing. The administration is to determine if the settlement "adequately satisfied any recoverable harm that the county may have suffered."

"WE'RE NEUTRAL": Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts **Harvey Ruvin** made it clear once again Tuesday that he wants his office severed from the charter amendment recommendations proposed by the County Charter Review Task Force. The commission took up the task force recommendations, with suggested changes to the county's Home Rule Charter if commissioners and ultimately voters approve. One proposal would place the clerk's office in line of temporary succession in the event of a mayoral vacancy; another would turn over the procurement process to the clerk in the event of a conflict of interest by the mayor; and a third would require the clerk to certify incorporation petitions. In June, Mr. Ruvin tried but failed to convince the task force to remove his office from the three proposals. On Tuesday, he made his plea before the commission and used the same argument, saying the proposals infringe on the neutrality of the clerk's office. The clerk, he said, "must be maintained as an independent neutral party."



Harvey Ruvin

ANIMAL TAX QUERY: A non-binding ballot question will appear in the November general election, asking Miami-Dade residents whether they would support raising their taxes to improve animal services. The resolution approved by the county commission Tuesday states that voters would be asked to approve a millage increase of 0.1079 mills but gives no estimate on how much it would cost each household. An additional tax would reduce the number of dogs and cats euthanized annually. The resolution says the number of dogs euthanized is about 15,000 and cats 400,000. The program would also offer free and low-cost spay and neuter services, cheaper veterinary care and pet ownership education. The commission's Public Safety and Healthcare Administration Committee approved the resolution 4-0 July 10.

JUNGLE ISLAND OFF TABLE: Miami City Manager **Johnny Martinez** last week withdrew from the city commission agenda a proposed Jungle Island lease amendment that would have restructured the park's payments to the city to a profit-sharing arrangement, which would have extended the attraction's lease to 99 years and allowed Jungle Island to take in nearby facilities on city-owned Watson Island. The changes were supposed to help the attraction repay a nearly \$26 million debt to the city and county.



Johnny Martinez

TAX RATES PASS: The Miami-Dade County commission Tuesday agreed to tax rates proposed by Mayor **Carlos Gimenez**. The millage rates, which are applied to property values to generate revenue, cannot be increased once the commission sets them but may be lowered. The vote was 10-3. The countywide millage is set at 4.7035, the Fire-Rescue Service District at 2.4496, the Miami-Dade Public Library system at 7.3256 and the Unincorporated Municipal Service Area at 1.9283. A mill is a rate of tax equal to \$1 for each \$1,000 of assessed taxable property value, so a home with a taxable value of \$100,000, with a millage rate of 1, would pay \$100 in taxes. The mayor's proposed budget calls for \$4.3 million less in property taxes to offset the 2% increase in property values. The \$5.9 billion proposed budget does not call for a reduction in services. The county is not the only taxing body; other taxing districts also affect a homeowner's overall tax bill.

LOW FLYING BONDS: Bond ratings for Miami International Airport will remain negative while the American Airlines bankruptcy runs its course, Fitch Ratings reported this week. Chicago's O'Hare and Dallas-Ft. Worth have the same negative outlook from Fitch for the same reason. Only 11% of the nation's transportation infrastructure securities have a negative outlook, Fitch said, a number that isn't likely to dip lower barring changes in "the increasingly weak US economy, bank downgrades below projected funding ratings or a liquidity shortage..."

BIGGER BANAH: Sugar industry conglomerate Banah International has completed its new facility in Hialeah—a project expected to create nearly 300 jobs, the Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's economic development partnership, said this week. The 302,000-square-foot facility will be used to package and distribute pure sugar products. To celebrate, Hialeah Mayor **Carlos Hernandez** unveiled a new street name — "Banah Sweet Way" — during a ceremony Friday attended by Miami-Dade Mayor **Carlos Gimenez**, County Commissioner **Rebeca Sosa**, Beacon Council President and CEO **Frank Nero**, Banah founder and owner **Alexander I. Perez** and Banah CEO **Diego Leiva**.



Carlos Hernandez

County sets aside charter proposals, commission lambasts its study team

By **LOU ORTIZ**

Members of the Miami-Dade County Commission on Tuesday lambasted some proposals and practices of the Charter Review Task Force — a commission-created panel — with commissioners ultimately deciding not to deal with its proposals until Aug. 23.

The 20-member task force, created by the commission in March to review the county's Home Rule Charter, was taken to task by some commissioners for its members' chronic absentee rates at scheduled task force committee meetings and for coming up with questionable charter amendment proposals.

Under the Home Rule Charter, adopted in 1957, the county electorate determines the form of government. Every five years, the county commission decides whether the charter needs revisions or changes and then appoints a task force to make amendment recommendations.

If the commission agrees with the task force recommendations, charter amendments go before voters as ballot questions for approval.

The commission in March formed the current task, giving it until Tuesday to present amendment recommendations.

But before the chairman of the task force, State Sen. **Rene Garcia**, made his presentation Tuesday afternoon, the commission had already decided that morning to schedule a special meeting Aug. 23 to discuss the recommendations and hold a public hearing. The vote was 7-6; a vote to reconsider — before Sen. Garcia spoke — failed.

The commission has been expected to debate and act on more than a dozen charter amendment proposals, ranging from allowing more resident input during municipal incorporations to asking voters to approve higher salaries for commissioners — an issue that has failed at the ballot box a number of times.

Commission Chairman **Jose Martinez**, who is running for mayor against incumbent **Carlos Gimenez** on Aug. 14, spearheaded the move to postpone action on the task force recommendations.

"We're dealing with our constitution," he said, adding that a two-hour debate on the merits of the recommendations followed by commission action would not be fair to Miami-Dade residents.

"We're not going to take action on these things today," he said.



"We'll just deal with it at a later time."

Joe Martinez



"I would like to involve the public. I have a lot of questions. I would like to research every item, and I would like to do it right."

Rebeca Sosa

"We'll just deal with it at a later time."

Commissioner **Barbara Jordan** and others agreed, saying the commission should not be "rushed or bullied." Ms. Jordan, who is also up for reelection in August, said the commission should "take the time and go through them carefully." She also called some of the recommendations "reckless."

"When we do things in a hurry, we make mistakes," said Commissioner **Rebeca Sosa**, who chronicled the absenteeism at scheduled meetings among the task force, which only managed to get a two-thirds vote on only four of its recommendations because it often lacked a full contingent of 20 members.

The commission indicated in March that it was its "intent" to place on the ballot all charter amendment proposals that garnered 14 votes on the task force.

"I would like to involve the public," Commissioner **Sosa** said. "I have a lot of questions. I would like to research every item, and I would like to do it right."

The commission, which voted 7-6 to create the task force, debated what members meant by "intent" in March.

The word "intent is the big deal here," said Commissioner **Javier Souto**. "We have to be very careful what we say and do. This is a very serious process."

"We cannot say one thing one day and say another thing another day," he said. "I don't want to rush. On the other hand, we have to listen to the people and respect the things we have created. We need to respect process... That is the system of government in the USA."

Task force recommendations included:

■ A two-thirds commission vote to move the Urban Development Boundary. The line was initially implied in 1975 in the county's first Comprehensive Development Master Plan and explicitly noted in the land use map in 1983. The line defines where development is allowed and where it cannot go. The aim is to protect agricultural land, the Everglades and wetlands, among other things.

Development is prohibited roughly west of Southwest 172nd Avenue and into Southwest 157th Avenue. The development border extends to Eureka Drive in Cutler Ridge south to Southwest 137th



"I don't want to rush. On the other hand, we have to listen to the people and respect the things we have created."

Javier Souto

Avenue in Homestead.

■ A limit of two four-year terms per commissioner that would begin with the 2012 election. The commission has voted to place a similar ballot question before voters in November.

■ A salary increase for commissioners in 2016 tied to the median county income that would rise or fall based on that average.

■ A process to fill a mayoral or commission vacancy.

■ A simpler petition process for recalls and referenda that would require signatures from only 4% of the electorate, eliminate the requirement for their notarization and allow the petition language in Creole or Spanish, depending on the area.

■ An increase from one year to three on a bar to repeal or amend an ordinance enacted via petition.

■ A move to require the mayor to delegate policing authority and powers to the police director on the second Tuesday after election.

■ A shift of the intergovernmental affairs office from the commission to the mayor, whose duty is to carry out legislative policies.

Different entities chose task force members. Each of the 13 county commissioners appointed one. The mayor made an appointment, along with each mayor of the county's four largest cities: Miami, Hialeah, Miami Gardens and Miami Beach. The Miami-Dade League of Cities appointed two.

The committee met 13 times. The first meeting was held April 19 and the last June 26. The meetings included five public hearings. The 2008 task force had 18 months to complete its work.



We want to hear from YOU!
Phone: (305) 358-2663

Staff Writers:

Scott Blake
sblake@miamitodaynews.com

Lou Ortiz
lortiz@miamitodaynews.com

Melisha Perrin
mperrin@miamitodaynews.com

Marilyn Bowden
mbowden@gmail.com

Letters to Editor
editor@miamitodaynews.com

People Column
people@miamitodaynews.com

Michael Lewis
mlewis@miamitodaynews.com