before the full commission June 19 or July 3. If approved then, the mayor's office would be charged with establishing the orientation program.

APOLLO BANK: Locally-owned and operated Apollo Bank has opened its newest branch at 1826 Ponce de Leon Blvd. in the Coral Gables business district. Joining existing locations in downtown Miami/Brickell and Doral, the Coral Gables expansion marks the continuation of Apollo's strategy of establishing a presence in South Florida's chief business centers. The Coral Gables branch opening comes as Apollo marks its second year.

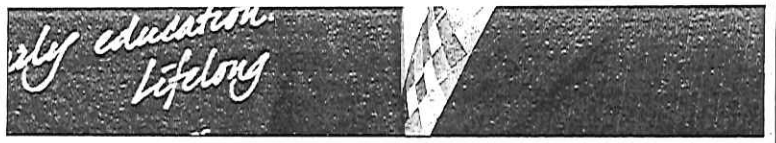

Photo by Maxine Usdan

Evelio Torres

Staking future on better education of youngest children

The profile is on Page 4

Commission salary hike gets new life at $46,000

By Lou Ortiz

■Mayor calls for a new sheriff in town, pg. 8
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The Miami-Dade electorate has rejected salary increases for commissioners countless times, but the streak of nays didn't stop the county's Charter Review Task Force from approving a proposed amendment to give salary hikes one more chance.

"Frankly, I think it's going to lose again," said task force vice chairman Evelyn L. Greer, one of 14 members present at the last meeting, who nonetheless voted for the proposed amendment.

The county commission formed the 20-member task force in March to review the county's Home Rule Charter and propose amendments, which, if the commission agrees, could go to voters in November.

The salary increase and an ethics amendment that could lead to commissioner ousters for a host of violations, also debated, will return for more debate June 20 or 26.

The electorate voted down pay increases for commissioners in 1963, 1976, 1984, 1990, 2006, 2008, 2010 and again in January.

Under the new proposal, commission salaries would be based on the median income in the county and only commissioners elected in 2016 would be eligible for a raise. Ms. Greer said the current median county income is about $46,000.

"In times of prosperity it will go up, and during lean times it will go down," said task force member Carlos Trujillo. "It will be fluid with the changes in time."

Task force member Hans Ottinot said drafting the ballot language is critical.

"We all agree that the salary has to be increased, but what is the appropriate number?" he said. "The language has to be simple, clear. I think if you have a reasonable number... it's passable. Some voted for it [raises] last time."

University of Miami Professor H.T. Smith, a task force member who served on the prior group as well, said his colleagues were "in the task force danger zone voting for this proposal."

"Some people [voters] will feel good because it's not happening now," he said about the 2016 date. "I can see some pluses. [But] we have to make sure they don't get a whole lot of other money under the table."

Meanwhile, under the ethics proposal, commissioners could lose their jobs for moving outside their districts, failing to attend meetings over a period of six months without good cause, engaging in consulting or being employed by a firm doing business with the county, or becoming a candidate for any federal, state or municipal office.

The county's inspector general would investigate complaints and make a determination, with the courts having the final say.

Task force members didn't vote on the ethics proposal. They asked the county attorney's office to clarify the definitions of residency and family, which the committee is expected to include concerning potential nepotism violations.

Different entities named task force members. The commission appointed 13, one by each commissioner. The mayor made an appointment as did each mayor of the four largest cities. The Miami-Dade League of Cities appointed two.

The task force has until July 17 to present recommendations to commissioners.

had been negotiating with the unnamed developer about the land for two years before talks cooled during the recession. "Now," he said, "we're having more negotiations and we need to change the zoning."

Mr. Quintero said the development would be a partnership between the county and the developer that could yield the Aviation Department an additional 3% in revenue from the profits of the commercial establishments.

He said the department is seeking to commercialize non-aviation land in and around the airport to help make debt repayments and "take the burden off airlines paying landing fees."

According to documents filed with the Regional Transportation Committee, "The projected revenue for the Miami-Dade Aviation Department is a combination of the annual fair market value of land rents currently estimated at $2,885,403 per year plus additional revenue based upon a negotiated percentage of the gross revenue. The negotiated percentage of the gross revenue is expected to be in the 3% range."

The committee unanimously endorsed an ordinance June 11 to permit the developments. The measure is to go to the full commission for action either June 19 or July 3.

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County needs another sheriff in town, not me, Gimenez says

By Lou Ortiz

Mayor Carlos Gimenez doesn't want to be the county sheriff.

Carlos Gimenez

That's what he told the Miami-Dade County Charter Review Task Force last Wednesday, when he made a special appearance at the group's meeting at County Hall.

"If someone decided they wanted to be the mayor and the sheriff, I'd leave town," Mayor Gimenez told task force members.

The sheriff's office was abolished in 1966 and became a position appointed by the county manager, with approval of the county commission. Miami-Dade is the only county in Florida without an elected sheriff.

But, since the county's charter was amended in 2007 to create a strong mayor form of government, the mayor automatically – when elected – inherits the powers and functions of sheriff.

The mayor typically delegates the powers and duties to his appointee, the police director of the County Public Safety Department, with the approval of the commission. However, the mayor is not required to hand over policing authority or prohibited from jointly holding both offices.

Charter task force member Terry Murphy introduced a proposed charter amendment that would require any mayor to delegate the policing authority and other duties of public safety effective on the second Tuesday following the general election.

"When people vote for mayor, they are not electing a sheriff," said Mr. Murphy, a doctoral student at Florida International University and president of Public Affairs Concepts in Miami. But any elected mayor "could declare himself sheriff of Miami-Dade County," he said.

Mr. Murphy added that Mayor Gimenez was "surprised to learn that the mayor is also the sheriff."

Some members of the task force were initially reluctant to go along with Mr. Murphy's amendment without getting the mayor's input, especially when such an amendment – once approved by commissioners and subsequently by voters – would erode some of the mayor's current powers.

But Mayor Gimenez told the task force he agreed with the amendment.

"I think that's fine with me," he said. "You could use the police powers in not a right way. I've always liked the separation."

Mayor Gimenez said he supported the concept raised by the previous charter task force in 2008 that would have continued the mayoral appointment of the police director with the proviso that the mayor "could not give day-to-day direction on operational matters [to the police director], except for budget purposes."

The task force passed the amendment unanimously, 11-0, after the mayor left the meeting.

Meanwhile, in an earlier vote, the 20-member group rejected a proposed amendment to make the sheriff's office an elected position. The proposal, by task force member Don Slesnick, was defeated 3-8.

"We abandoned the sheriff's office," Mr. Slesnick said. "Sixty-six of the 67 counties in the state have sheriffs. In some issues we want the people to have a vote, and in others we don't."

The previous task force also discussed the issue and decided to allow the position to remain appointed.

County commissioners approved forming the current task force in March. The task force is charged with reviewing the county's Home Rule Charter and proposing amendments, which, if agreed to by the county board, could appear before voters on the November ballot.

The task force consists of 20 members. The county board appoints 13, one by each commissioner. The mayor also makes an appointment along with one each by the mayors of the four largest cities in the county. The Miami-Dade League of Cities appoints two members.

The task force has until July 17 to present recommendations to commissioners.

A final report on all task force proposed amendments was expected June 13. Public hearings on the recommendations are expected June 20 and June 26, before sending the final report to the commission.

Charter team aims to ease petition drives, set vacancy process

By Lou Ortiz

Citizens in Miami-Dade County would have an easier time with petition drives for recalls and referendums if a charter review task force amendment proposal is approved by the county commission and put before voters in November.

The move to simplify the petition process – along with establishing a process for filling temporary vacancies in the office of mayor and among commissioners – were two amendments advanced last week by the county's charter review task force.

The task force was established by the commission in March. It is charged with reviewing the county Home Rule Charter and proposing amendments. It is up to the commission whether to ultimately approve the proposed amendments and put them before voters.

The amendment would end the circulation requirement, eliminate the need for notarization of signatures, and allow the petition to appear in English, Spanish or Creole, depending on the location in the county. The signature requirement of 4% would remain the same for recalls and referendums.

Task force Vice Chairman Evelyn Greer agreed to simplifying the process and eliminating the notary rule, saying the county Elections Department should not have a problem verifying the signatures. The proposal passed on a vote of 8-3.

Before the vote, the task force debated whether to raise the number of signatures required for a recall and referendum to 10%.

"I want to make sure it's simplified... not [made] more difficult," Isis Garcia-Martinez told fellow task force member Terry Murphy, who had initially proposed raising the percentage of signatures to 10%, along with eliminating the circulation and notary requirements.

Mr. Murphy said 10% is fair and makes sense considering the elimination of notarization and circulation requirements, coupled with the previously approved extension of the petition process from 60 to 120 days, which gives petitioners double the time to gather signatures.

He also sought to have organizers state a cause for petitions, and in the case of recalls allow a rebuttal statement of 25 words on the ballot by the person facing the challenge.

But task force member JC Bermudez and others on the panel rebuffed the recommendations.

"Twenty-five words in rebuttal defeats the purpose of the recall," Mr. Bermudez said.

Mr. Bermudez said gathering signatures of 4% of registered voters "is not as easy as people think. This is about opportunity and fairness."

Task force member Lawrence Percival agreed. "This is a citizen's process," said Mr. Percival, who made the motion to accept the proposed amendment without the 10% requirements.

But member Don Slesnick said Mr. Murphy, who withdrew his name from the proposal, raised some valid points. "Why are we lowering the bar?" Mr. Slesnick asked. "This is not one [issue] the people brought to our attention."

Meanwhile, on a vote of 12-0, the task force agreed on a succession process in the event of vacancies among commission members and mayor, including adding a 10-day qualification period for potential candidates and increasing the time for holding a special election from 45 to 90 days.

Under the proposal by Mr. Murphy, the commission could appoint its chairman to discharge certain mayoral duties, unless he or she becomes a candidate for the office, in which case the vice chairman would get the nod.

If the vice chairman also sought the vacancy, the temporary mayoral duties would rest with the clerk of the Circuit Court.

The temporary duties, until an election is held, would include the ability to declare a state of emergency in the event of hurricane, appoint department heads and waive the bidding process for making emergency procurements.

"The clerk of the court is a natural," said Mr. Murphy. "The clerk of the court is closely related to county business. He has the authority to conduct audits, jointly participates in appointing the director of the finance department, and makes recommendations on banking institutions for county deposits."

For vacancies among the commission, the board could make temporary appointments by majority vote, and the person appointed could only serve until an election is held.

The task force consists of 20 members. The county commission appoints 13, one by each commissioner. The mayor also makes an appointment along with each of the mayors of the four largest cities in the county. Two members are appointed by the Miami-Dade League of Cities.

The task force has until July 17 to present its recommendations to county commissioners.

A final report on all task force proposed amendments was expected June 13. Public hearings on the recommendations are expected June 20 and June 26, before the final report goes to the commission.

Insulate Jackson's board in county charter, review team told

By Lou Ortiz

A new Jackson Health System board should be permanently etched into the Miami-Dade County Home Rule Charter and free from political meddling, with seven to nine members who have no conflicts of interest, the chairman of Jackson's Financial Recovery Board told members of the county's Charter Review Task Force.

The blueprint for the future board laid out by Marcos Lapciuc was supported by testimony last Wednesday from Frank Sacco, president and CEO of Broward County's Memorial Healthcare System. But Martha Baker, president of the union representing doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals at Jackson, testified against adding such a board to the charter.

The 20-member task force was formed by the county commission in March to review the county's Home Rule Charter and propose amendments, which, if the commission agrees, could appear before voters on the November ballot.

Jackson and its financial burdens have been on the task force agenda during the past three meetings. Jackson CEO Carlos Migoya along with Mr. Lapciuc and his temporary board have been working to turn around the cash-strapped hospital for more than a year.

"Jackson must have a permanent board structure," Mr. Lapciuc told task force members, and the "board must have total operational autonomy, not subject to political whims or politics. Contracts are life and death matters."

Task force member J.C. Bermudez agreed. "I think those three things should be considered and put before the voters of Miami-Dade County," he said. "It's critical to our community. It [Jackson] provides the last [health] step for everyone."

But Mr. Lapciuc said "the checks and balances [county commission] need to remain," he said. "We [also] don't want to deviate from our mission" of helping the less fortunate.

Photo by Maxine Usdan

Protect a new Jackson board from political meddling, Marcos Lapciuc told charter review task force.

Mr. Lapciuc added that "only permanent board status will allow Jackson to persevere and attract top doctors. They need to feel there is permanence and stability."

He said any permanent board structure should include transparency, not harm tax revenues and not run afoul of Jackson's mission.

"The last board reminded me of the three stooges," Mr. Lapciuc said about the 17-member board that was ousted last year. "They all meant well, but we lost millions in efficiency" and there was almost paralysis in decision-making.

Individual members of a permanent board should be chosen based on knowledge and competency, he said, and those "who would be in a position to make objective decisions. I lean more toward seven [board members]. Seven is my number of preference."

But Ms. Baker said the system's board does not belong in the charter. "This is not an issue that would go in charter reform," she told task force members.

She said she was not against a more permanent structure or operational independence, but the changes could be made through the Public Health Trust versus the charter. "When you get a competent CEO, they educate the board," she said. "This is a big issue that needs a lot of discussion and transparency from the public."

Attorney and former county commissioner Jimmy L. Morales also cautioned the task force about including Jackson in charter reform.

"I don't agree with governing by referendum," he said, adding that he supported keeping politics out of any Jackson system board and having good people in place. "But I just caution you when you talk about a charter amendment."

Task force vice chairman Evelyn Greer said the Financial Recovery Board is in place because Jackson was going broke. She said the board has stable management and is working, so "the creation of a board similar to the FRP is a governance structure we want to perpetuate."

Others on the task force agreed. "I don't see an issue taking it to the public," said Carlos A. Manrique. "It will make this county a lot healthier."

Mr. Sacco said Jackson would benefit from the kind of structure outlined by Mr. Lapciuc.

Mr. Sacco said that historically the public health governing model in Miami-Dade has been broken.

"Keep politics out of the hospital," said Mr. Sacco, who has been overseeing the Broward County system for nearly 30 years. "If you can accomplish that, you can have a successful county health system."

He also urged the task force to etch the board in the charter and create "a self-perpetuating board."

Task force member Luis Gonzalez said his colleagues should act. "We have the opportunity to tweak the board," he said. "We need to do something about this."

The task force asked the county attorney's office to come with language for a possible amendment based on Mr. Lapciuc's comments. The task force would have two more opportunities to consider a move on the Jackson board, when they meet June 20 and June 26.

In May, Mr. Lapciuc told Miami Today that his board is working to ensure that Jackson breaks even this year despite monetary setbacks, which would signify an $85 million turnaround. But cash on hand continued to be a concern.

According to Jackson's latest financial report, while admissions have remained below budget, they appear to have improved in recent months.

About 5,224 patients walked through Jackson's doors in March, slightly below the budgeted 5,722. This is up from February, when 4,896 people used Jackson, and down from March 2011, when 5,423 did so.

The members of the county task force were chosen by different entities in Miami-Dade. The county board appointed 13, one by each commissioner. The mayor also made an appointment along with one each by the mayors of the four largest cities in the county. The Miami-Dade League of Cities appointed two members.

The task force has until July 17 to present its recommendations to county commissioners.