

LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

August 6- August 10, 2012

JACKSON HEALTH SYSTEMS

On Friday, the board of JHS held a private session to discuss a strategic plan to invigorate a system that has lost \$419 million the past three years.

In the meantime, executives have held their own sessions with board members to discuss their budget plan for the next fiscal year, commencing October 1. The budget is subject to approval by the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners next month.

The private meeting comes as JHS executives seek to finalize a contentious annual operating agreement with the UM Miller School of Medicine, which Chief Executive Carlos Migoya promised to present to the board committee next Thursday.

Migoya indicated that the new agreement with UM would have a "blend of market-based prices for faculty services and present based lump-sum payments as a transition as Jackson works to completely redo its relationship with UM."

Additionally, the Miami Herald reported that Florida regulators examined Jackson Memorial's pediatric heart surgery program and granted a one-year authorization rather than the customary three years.

The July 20 letter from the Department of Health raised four concerns, including the departure of one surgeon that caused the annual number of surgeries to drop near the minimum of 150. Regulators require a minimum number of surgeries at a facility to meet quality standards. Miami Children's reports it performed 317 such surgeries last year and Joe Dimaggio Children's Hospital at Memorial Regional performed 227.

Jackson spokesman Edwin O'Dell said UM and Jackson were working to recruit another surgeon to do children's heart surgeries.

The DOH further expressed concerns about the "highly documented funding and staffing cuts" at Jackson and UM, which provides the pediatric physicians, and "loss of the leadership of Dr. Steven Lipshultz, an internationally renowned pediatric cardiologist," who recently lost his departmental position in a recent "shakeup" of UM leaders.

HIALEAH

Last week, City of Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez announced that he is proposing a lower property tax rate for the next fiscal year.

Hernandez is proposing a tax rate of \$6.30 per \$1,000 of taxable property. That amounts to a decrease of approximately 4 percent from the current rate of \$6.54. Hernandez claims it's the lowest tax rate since 1992.

The Hialeah City Council will vote on the tax rate in a series of public hearings scheduled for September 13 and September 27.

According to the county's property appraiser's office, property values in the city have experienced a decrease of just over 1 percent.

Hernandez has not disclosed any details about his budget proposal but indicated that department heads are working towards streamlining and maximizing efficiency.

MEDLEY

At a special meeting, Medley's Town Council adopted a proposed tax rate of 5.650 for every \$1,000 of assessed taxable value in a 5-0 vote, keeping the current rate.

Although, the tax rate will remain flat, some Medley homeowners may experience a slight decrease in their tax bills, since the town's property values declined by a half percent during the past year.

The town council will vote on the final tax rate, which goes into effect on October 1, after the city holds its two budget hearings scheduled at 5PM on Monday September 10 and September 24 at Medley Town Hall 7331 NW 74th St.

PORT OF MIAMI

The U.S. Department of Commerce approved PortMiami's bid to be a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ). A ceremony was held on Thursday, August 9th, where Assistant Commerce Secretary for Import Administration Paul Piquado announced the creation of Foreign Trade Zone No. 281. In attendance were Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Rebeca Sosa, who have taken an active role in advocating for the designation.

Following a new model for FTZ's, the port plans to establish satellite zones that will allow individual companies to have the benefits of an FTZ at their own secure warehouses.

Please click the link to read more:

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/08/09/2942930/miami-port-wins-foreign-trade.html>
<<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/08/09/2942930/miami-port-wins-foreign-trade.html>>

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

SAVE THE DATE:

Florida League of Cities 86th Annual Conference

When: Thursday, August 23 - Saturday, August 25

Where: Westin Diplomat Hotel / 3555 South Ocean Drive, Hollywood, Fl.

Please click the link for additional information:

<http://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/News.aspx?CNID=8629>
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MIAMI-DADE LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: MDCLC Board of Director's meeting

When: Thursday, September 6, 2012

Where: TBA

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY LEAGUE OF CITIES

What: Second Annual Best Practices Conference

Where: Sofitel Miami Hotel 5800 Blue Lagoon Drive, Miami, FL 33126

When: Friday, October 5, 2012

The cost to register is only \$55.00 and includes sessions and discussions featuring winning strategies for improving municipal services, entrance to the exhibition hall, a continental breakfast, luncheon with a guest speaker and a cocktail reception at the end of the conference.

LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

August 13– August 17, 2012

MUNICIPAL ELECTION NEWS

On Tuesday, Miami-Dade residents voted in a number of elections, including primary elections for Federal and State seats, County seats (mayoral and odd numbered district commission seats), as well as several municipal seats and charter amendment questions.

The municipal elections resulted as follows (the top candidates will be listed in each category). The winner will be marked as (W):

MIAMI GARDENS:

Mayor:

Oliver Gilbert: 63% (W) / Andre Williams: 14%/ Katrina Wilson: 12%

Councilmember District 1:

Lillie Q. Odom: 63% (W) / Sardebra Wright: 36%

Councilmember District 3: **Run off**

Rodney Harris: 36% / Ulysses “Buck” Harvard: 37%

Ballot Question:

Boundary Description:

Shall Section 2.3(C) of the City Charter be amended to replace the reference to 191st Street in the description of the Southern Boundary of Residential Seat One to 178th

Street and to replace the reference to 191st Street in the Northern Boundary description of Seat Four to 178th Street to reapportion seats as a result of the decennial census?

YES 46% / NO 54% (W)

MIAMI BEACH:

Ballot Questions:

Increase Room Rent Resort Tax: YES 67% (W) / NO 33%

The additional 1% bed tax collected on hotel rooms will be allocated for the improvement of the Miami Beach Convention Center. These funds will not be collected until the City Commission passes an ordinance and determines how to move forward with the convention center.

City Commissioners Call Special Meetings: YES: 76% (W) / NO: 24%

The amendment to the charter will allow a majority of Miami Beach Commissioners to convene a commission meeting.

MIAMI SPRINGS:

Council Member Terms: YES 37% / NO 63% (W)

Voters were asked whether or not to extend commissioner's terms from two to four years.

Staggered Member Terms: YES 43% / NO 57% (W)

Voters were asked whether commissioners should serve staggered terms. Currently, all four city commissioners and the mayor run for office every other odd numbered year.

NORTH MIAMI

Ballot Question:

Authorization of General Obligation Bonds for City of North Miami Museum of Contemporary Art:

Shall the City of North Miami issue General Obligation Bonds not exceeding Fifteen Million Dollars bearing interest not exceeding the maximum rate established by law, maturing no later

than twenty years from issuance, to finance the expansion and renovation of the City of North Miami Museum of Contemporary Art with any principal, interest and premium, being payable from ad valorem tax levied on taxable property without limit as to rate or amount?

FOR BONDS 48% / AGAINST BONDS 52% (W)

OPA-LOCKA

Ballot Question:

Commissioner Deferred Compensation:

Shall Article II Section 7 of the City of Opa-locka Charter be amended to provide for the Mayor and City Commissioners to receive deferred compensation of Seven Thousand Five Hundred (\$7,500.00) per year and health insurance for commissioners leaving office after serving eight (8) or more years for remainder of that fiscal year, and life insurance benefits for a period of five (5) years, thereafter?

YES 38% / NO 62% (W)

MIAMI- DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School Board Member District 5: **Susie Castillo 64% (W) / Daniel 'Dan' Espino 36%**

JACKSON HEALTH SYSTEM

On Thursday, Jackson Health System (JHS) projected a net surplus next fiscal year of \$35 million, which is desperately needed to pay off bills and make facility improvements.

Additionally, Jackson is set to receive funds from a county bond, which will facilitate \$63 million worth of capital improvements to the hospital, which had long been delayed because the system was losing money.

The proposed budget was based on projections that the system will receive about the same amount of patient revenue next year, a change from years of declining revenue. Chief Financial Officer Mark Knight indicated that JHS was looking at significant improvements to productivity. The proposed budget, which must be approved by the County Commission, projects cuts of \$110 million in expenses, including \$95 million in salaries and benefits as the system increases use of a flexible-staffing system of part-time workers (put in place following the Jackson layoffs in May).

Martha Baker, head of SEIU Local 1991 representing nurses and other healthcare employees, said that a union efficiency taskforce had identified \$15 million in efficiencies which if accepted, would trigger more compensation for workers.

In other business, the board unanimously approved an annual operating agreement with the University of Miami. The agreement uses the same numbers that were set out in a memorandum of understanding in May: A base payment of \$99.5 million to UM, plus monthly “transition payments” of \$3.6 million through November.

Chief Strategy Officer Jeffery Crudele called the 53 page agreement a “road map for change”. The agreement does not address Jackson’s main objective of a new relationship with UM: paying for services at market-based rates and leasing UM doctors, which is still under negotiation.

NORTH BAY VILLAGE

North Bay Village administrators have proposed a \$14.4 million budget for next year, a 14.3 percent decrease from this year. The decrease comes as a result of the completion of two major capital improvement projects, the JFK Causeway renovation and Dr. Paul Vogel Community Park, both which are slated for completion this budget cycle.

Nonetheless, the city is budgeting about \$1million for the reconstruction of their old city hall building, 7903 East Drive. The project is financed through a voter-approved bond.

The budget would take about \$300,000 from the city's reserve fund, which currently holds approximately \$2 million.

Under the proposal the property tax rate would remain flat at \$4.7772 for every \$1,000 of assessed value.

The city council will adopt its final budget after two budget hearings which have been set for September.

PINECREST

The village's proposed budget, which awaits approval by the Village's council, sets aside more money for new programs and expansions for the Gardens and Community Center.

According to Village Manager Yocelyn Galiano Gomez, the additions and projects would not be paid for by increased fees. She indicated that the village is bringing in more money through ticket sales and more residents taking advantage of community activities. Some examples include the farmer's market which has grown in popularity and Pinecrest Gardens, which has seen an increase in patrons. Pinecrest Gardens is expected to take in approximately \$670,000 in revenue this year, a 40 percent increase.

Another proposal included an expansion of the existing community center, which has attracted many residents. The community center is expected to close the year with \$267,000 in revenue, an increase of almost 30 percent.

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GREAT MIAMI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Greater Miami Chamber and JAX Chamber Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Drive Economic Development

MIAMI, FL, August 16, 2012 -- The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and JAX Chamber signed a Memorandum of Understanding to form a strategic alliance that will help develop and enhance economic development opportunities while strengthening economic partnerships between the two regions.

“Jacksonville and Miami are transportation and logistics powerhouses that can support tremendous economic opportunities for each other by working together,” said JAX Chamber President Wally Lee. “Coordinated, cohesive economic development strategies are crucial to competing in the global economy. This alliance will greatly enhance the economic well-being of both regions.”

The memorandum was signed August 14. As part of the agreement, the two chambers will work to develop and enhance economic development in the areas of transportation and logistics at both the state and federal level, encourage expanded development of both regions' ports, advance development of freight corridors, encourage joint advocacy between the two business communities for the mutual benefit of the regions and the state of Florida, and develop other joint collaborations.

“The memorandum sets the framework for our two Chambers to use their collaborative strengths to enhance partnerships, advocate for progress and foster economic opportunities in both regions,” said Barry E. Johnson, president/CEO of the Greater Miami Chamber. “By working together, we can leverage our combined assets to connect with business opportunities in Florida as well as the global economy.”

The relationship between the JAX Chamber and the Greater Miami Chamber began earlier this year through advocacy efforts regarding the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. Subsequent discussions and meetings led to the realization that the two regions and their chambers had much in common.

Miami is a major center of commerce, finance and boasts a strong international business community. The port of Miami is among the nation's busiest ports of entry, especially for cargo from South America and the

Caribbean. Jacksonville is the leading transportation and distribution hub in the state, and the port of Jacksonville is an economic driver for job creation and high-wage jobs in the community.

About JAX Chamber

The [JAX Chamber](#) is the business membership organization dedicated to driving quality economic growth in Northeast Florida to make this region the best place to work, live and play. Membership provides the opportunity to connect with and buy from other Chamber members. The connections result in business growth and a more prosperous economy.

About Greater Miami Chamber

The [Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce](#) is the voice of business in South Florida, representing more than 400,000 employees of member companies. To carry out its mission, the Chamber involves the private sector in community leadership. For more than a century, the Chamber has been widely recognized and respected for its extraordinary record of economic development and community improvement. The Greater Miami Chamber is a proactive chamber, regularly getting engaged in issues important to its member companies and individuals. Its program of work is organized in six areas: Community Growth, Governmental Affairs, Industry Growth, International Business, Leadership Programs, and Marketing & Member Services. The Chamber is nationally recognized as one of the Top 10 Executive Speaking Forums in America.

LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

August 20– August 24, 2012

SWEETWATER

On Wednesday, the Swedish furnishings retailer, IKEA announced that it is submitting plans to the city of Sweetwater for a 417,000-square foot store. The store plans on locating just north of Dolphin Mall, facing the east side of the turnpike. Once approved it would become the largest of IKEA's four Florida locations. Construction could commence as soon as spring 2013 and debuting 2014.

The IKEA development plan, on the 14.6 acre site, calls for the store to be built on top of a two-level parking garage with 1,500 spaces. The store will include about 10,000 of IKEA's exclusive products, 50 room settings, three model home interiors, a supervised children's play area and a 500 seat restaurant serving Swedish specialties.

Pending approval from the City of Sweetwater, IKEA will close on the land purchase from Procacci Development Corp of Boca. The city facilitated the deal, when it rezoned the land to allow retail use, a couple of months ago. The land had been part of the Dolphin Commerce Center.

IKEA expects the new store to create more than 500 construction jobs during construction, which is expected to last about 18 months. After opening, IKEA would employ about 400 people.

DORAL

Doral's Parks and Recreation Department is positioned to receive nearly \$16.6 million in the proposed 2012-2013 city budget to build and improve the city's current parks, compared to the \$4.5 million it got for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

According to Park and Recreation Director Barbara Hernandez, the significant increase to the department's budget is attributed to three projects:

- The expansion of Downtown Doral Park with the purchase of a 1.2 acre plot of land.
- Installation of five to seven cameras at Trails & Tails Park, a dog friendly park that open last month, at a cost of about \$50,000.

- The development of a nearly 20-acre park between Northwest 80 Street and Northwest 82 Street along Northwest 114 Avenue. Funding for the two phase project includes \$10 million in the proposed budget. Total cost is currently estimated at \$20 million but may change once the conceptual plans are completed.

In addition to the development and expansion of parks, the department also plans to continue to provide sports and activities to city residents and plan to expand some of its programs in the upcoming fiscal year.

In other business:

For the first time in four years, Doral employees may receive a cost of living pay increase in the upcoming fiscal year, if the budget is approved.

The 2 percent cost of living increase applied to all employees, including police. The cost of the increase is approximately \$237,000 that will come from the general fund.

BAL HARBOUR

The Village of Bal Harbour has decided to share the cost with other northeast Miami-Dade cities to buy special cameras that recognize and record license-plate numbers on vehicles passing through.

The Village had looked into cameras several years ago, but involvement in a consortium with the other cities commenced about six months ago.

The License Plate Recognition System cameras will look for cars reported stolen or driven by people wanted by authorities, and alert police when such a vehicle is sighted.

The Village Council agreed to the purchase, using criminal forfeiture money, and will contribute approximately \$100,000 to \$125,000.

According to Bal Harbour Police Captain Mike Daddario, the plan calls for the cameras to be installed at all entrances and exits which will create a virtual fence around Golden Beach, Sunny Isles, Surfside and Bal Harbour.

Bal Harbour and its neighboring cities will not be the first to use the system. Lighthouse Point in Broward has been using the system and Miami-Dade's City of Doral is about to get started.

SURFSIDE

On Thursday evening, former Miami–Dade Circuit Judge David Young (also a former television judge) moderated a Surfside candidate forum, which was held at the town’s commission chambers.

The candidates are competing to fill the commission seat vacated by Sheldon Lisbon, who resigned in May to run for the newly created state representative District 100 seat. He lost the race on August 14.

The three candidates running for the open commission seat are Eli Tourgeman, Joseph “Joe” Graubart and Meredith Beattie.

The candidates answered questions submitted by the residents prior to the start of the forum. The debate was also televised on Channel 77.

NORTH MIAM BEACH

On Tuesday, the City of North Miami Beach’s Council decided not to renew City Manager Lyndon Bonner’s contract. Mayor George Vallejo indicated the city needed to head in a new direction because it hadn’t showed any growth in decades.

Bonner has been with the city for about 15 months. He will serve out his term as manager until September 30, when his contract expires.

Plans to hire a new manager have not been made by the council; although, it was suggested that Assistant City Manager Roslyn Weisblum take over the position.

For the upcoming fiscal year North Miami Beach’s budget calls for the city manager salary of about \$165,000, not including benefits. Additionally, the budget would remove one of the two assistant city managers, which is estimated to save the city about \$120,000, plus benefit payments.

The council also voted to extend both City Clerk Pamela Latimore and City Attorney Darcee Siegal tenure in their positions while the terms of the contracts are being worked out.

PINECREST

Pinecrest Mayor Cindy Lerner is publicly opposing the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority’s plans to replace the South Miami-Dade Busway with a toll road from Dadeland Mall South to Florida City.

The goal of the proposal is to alleviate traffic congestion on US1 but Pinecrest and Falls area residents are objecting, voicing concerns about the project diminishing property values and harming the business district.

MDX officials indicated that the project is merely in the planning stages and will require more public input. Additionally, Miami-Dade County Commissioners would also have to approve the plans.

State and local transportation departments are studying whether they can create enough revenue with tolls to build express lanes for cars on the busway. They are expecting that changes to the busway will ease traffic.

Nevertheless, Mayor Lerner indicated that MDX's plans for the busway are not just preliminary. She claims that it's more than a study and MDX is trying to distract residents from paying attention to the project.

Lerner said she hopes that Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay will join her in opposing the plans to the county commissioners whenever they're approached with concrete plans. Lerner hopes to preserve the suburban look of the Pinecrest/Falls area. She further stated that "If this passes, instead of living in a suburb, we are going to be living by I-95."

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

FLC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This year as the FLC holds its 86th annual conference, President Patricia Bate, Mayor, Altamonte Springs will make way for incoming President Manuel Marono, Mayor Sweetwater.

The Florida League of Cities annual conference is held each August in various locations throughout the state. Approximately 1,000 city officials from across Florida attend this meeting to share ideas, attend educational workshops and sessions, discuss strategies for Florida's future, determine League policies, and visit the Municipal Marketplace.

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LOCAL WEEKLY REPORT

August 27– August 31, 2012

MIAMI

On Wednesday, Moody's Investors Service indicated that it had enough "fundamental concerns about Miami's finances to begin a broad review of the city's budget and its "long-term financial stability."

Moody's announcement comes on the heels of its warning to the city that it may downgrade its credit rating because of a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission probe into city bond issues. Moody's indicated that it will widen its review and look at how Miami's rising pension and healthcare costs will impact the city's financial health.

In a report, Moody's further indicated that these issues would cause annual recurring problems that will be difficult to solve given the limited expected growth.

The report also cited the following concern: That Miami has just five weeks to close a \$40 million revenue gap in an operating budget of \$485 million. Additionally, the report mentioned that a Miami-Dade circuit judge had quelled City Manager Johnny Martinez's attempt to declare financial urgency, which would have allowed the city to force employee concessions.

The agency also noted that pension and healthcare costs make up 23 percent of the budget. Those costs could end up taking one out of every \$3 the city spends by 2017.

The review is linked to approximately \$740 million worth of bonds the city has sold on Wall Street. Moody's said that it was adding to its review \$71 million worth of bonds tied to off-street parking revenue as part of its broader inquiry.

Additionally, in January, the city must pay off \$45 million on a short-term loan that helped fund the PortMiami tunnel dig.

The Omni Community Redevelopment Agency, a city board that assumed the debt, is working to secure private financing to pay off the loan, according to executive director Pieter Bockweg. But if the CRA comes up short, the city will be on the hook.

The city has limited options moving forward, mostly because last month, the commission voted to lower taxes. The new rate, \$8.47 for every \$1,000 of taxable assessed property value, has already been advertised to property owners as required by law.

Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones wants to try to reverse that decision.

City Attorney Julie O. Bru said the commission could have raised the tax rate earlier this month, but the window outlined in state law has now closed.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/08/30/v-fullstory/2977507/45-million-port-of-miami-tunnel.html#storylink=cpy>

SWEETWATER

The City of Sweetwater will soon be adding two new large trolleys capable of seating 32 passengers. The new trolleys will resemble those of the neighboring City of Doral. Each trolley costs about \$159,000.

Mayor Manny Marono indicated that the Citizens Transportation Trust, funded by a half-cent county-wide tax, will pay for the bulk of the trolleys. The CITT funds will additionally cover fuel for the trolleys, the salaries and benefit packages of the drivers and other city-wide transportation needs.

According to the CITT maintenance of effort mandate, the city is required to pay \$219,000 annually toward transportation cost. The trolleys will complement the county transit buses as well as a jitney-style bus seating about 22 people, which transports passengers throughout Sweetwater.

The Trolleys are expected to arrive in the city by the end of September.

PALMETTO BAY

Palmetto Bay is in the midst of planning an Anniversary Gala to celebrate 10 years since its incorporation. The Gala was not part of the Village's budget and is seeking donations to fund it. Nevertheless, controversy erupted when the Village rejected accepting a check from a political action committee seeking to recall Village Mayor Shelley Stanczyk, Councilmember Joan Lindsay and working against the reelection of Vice Mayor Brian Praiser (the recall effort is largely due to what was perceived to be a frivolous lawsuit against Palmer Trinity School, which was working towards the schools expansion). The PAC wanted advertising that comes with a sponsorship.

Since the village refused the money, the committee is suing the village to force it to accept the money and provide the accompanying ads. According to the suit filed, refusing, in effect, to sell advertising to a political committee because of its message violates the members' First Amendment right to free speech. The suit asks the judge to order the village to sell the sponsorship to the committee.

According to village spokesman Bill Kress, the village was within its rights to decline the committee's offer. Kress indicated that they wanted to remove the "political flavor from the event". He further stated that they have the right to accept or refuse donations from any organization, saying that they would refuse donations from a porn or gun shop. "We are trying to control the image we want to portray during this milestone event and the recall effort doesn't meet that test."

The village extended the PAC's director David Singer, a copy of a Florida statute that prevents a municipal government from spending money on political campaigns.

On Friday of last week, the PAC filed its lawsuit with the Miami-Dade Circuit Court seeking an emergency temporary and permanent injunction and declaratory relief against the village. The PAC's attorney, J.B. Harris, who filed the suit, said the statute cited by the village refers solely to local governments and its employees, not public entities like the PAC.

The Gala is scheduled to take place on September 14th.

FLORIDA CITY

In its quest to grow the economy and create jobs, Florida City is prepared to embrace parimutuel gambling. The initiative could bring quarter horse racing, jai-alai or both to a location adjacent to the Florida Keys Outlet Center. Either would carry a license which would allow for its main objective of a poker room and slot machines.

If the Florida City effort succeeds, it will be accompanied by Miami-Dade and Broward counties who already have several parimutual facilities that operate slots and card rooms in addition to wagering on parimutual sports.

Florida City began making way for gambling over the summer, when the city commission agreed to rezone nearly 25 acres at the Southwest corner of Southwest 172nd Avenue and Southwest 336th Street. The commission created a new land-use category for gambling. The rezoning came as a request of property owner Fort Myers Real Estate Holdings, which purchased two parcels of land in 2010 and 2011 for \$6.5 million.

According to Mayor Otis Wallace, Florida City officials were told that the project would create between 150 and 200 jobs during construction. The card room and jai-alai would yield between 75 and 100 jobs, with another 30 jobs in a video game arcade.

To read more please click the link:

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/08/24/2971208/florida-city-could-get-jai-alai.html>

MEDLEY

In November two candidates will vie for the Medley's mayoral seat. After eight years of serving as mayor, Ramon Rodriguez announced that he would not seek another term in office. Councilman Roberto Martell, who filed to run early on, was unopposed until the August 7th (the filing deadline), when Councilman Gerardo Silva Jr., joined the race.

Martell entered the Medley political scene in August 2007 when he ran in a special election for a vacated seat but was just edged (by 8 votes) by Griselia Digiacomio.

he returned the following April to run for one of the two open seats in the town's regular election and got the second spot, edging longtime council member Margarita DeJesus.

Silva was elected to the council in November 2010 and his seat was not up until November 2014. But despite being in the allegations for wrong doing last March and having butted heads numerous times with his fellow council members over the course of his tenure, Silva did not change his decision.

Even though it was determined no laws had been broken, his fellow council members quickly put an item on the town's agenda instituting a new policy requiring advance approval for council members' expenses and it quickly passed by a 4-1 vote, Silva voting no. The council members also canceled their own credit cards, as well as his.

With a four day window (Aug. 13-16) for candidates to apply to fill the vacated Medley council seat in a special election, a total of six names appeared at Town Clerk Herlina Taboada's office when deadline to enter the race arrived on Thursday, Aug. 16.

Two of the names were known, as both Carlos Benedetto and Margarita DeJesus, who previously served on the council for multiple terms, have decided to run for office again.

The seat opened the previous week when council member Gerardo Silva Jr. became a last-minute entry into the mayor's race. By running for mayor, Silva had to give up his current seat, which was not up for election until November 2014.

The Town of Medley called an emergency meeting to try to get a special amendment passed to the town charter, allowing it to waive the "60-day rule," where a special election must take place

not before 30 days and not after 60 days of the seat being vacated. The amendment passed, and now the special election will be held in conjunction with the national election on Nov. 6.

The other four entries for Silva's seat are Olga Quinn, Fidel Ugarte, Dale Blank and Edgar Ayala.

MIAMI LAKES

The Town of Miami Lakes is among the municipalities, which will hold their general election on November 6th. The following is a list of the candidates who have filed to run for the town's elected positions:

Mayor: Michael Pizzi (incumbent) will face Wayne Slaton (former mayor)

Councilmember Seat 1: David Bennett will face Nelson Rodriguez

Councilmember Seat 3: Richard Pulido (incumbent) will face Tony Lama

Councilmember Seat 5: Manny Cid will challenge Mary Collins (incumbent)

On Monday, the town council agreed to pay for the postage on absentee ballots sent to Miami Lakes residents in all elections. The rationale for the measure is a belief that if they pay for the stamps on the envelopes, it will send a message to voters that they have no need to hand their ballot over to a "*boletero*". Mayor Michael Pizzi, who is running for re-election proposed the plan.

Pizzi also wants to lobby the Legislature to prohibit the use of campaign funds to hire workers to collect absentee ballots from voters' homes.

Councilman Nelson Hernández presented resolution on Tuesday to ask county commissioners to consider no longer sending sample ballots to voters and use those savings to pay the postage costs for voters who get absentee ballots.

As part of his proposal, Hernandez wants to encourage state lawmakers to bring back a witness signature requirement on absentee ballots. He also wants the state to make it a crime for

individuals to possess or collect more than two ballots; currently, this is only prohibited under a Miami-Dade County ordinance that went into effect last month.

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