Multiple county maladies will linger after charter review

A team exploring county ills is to report next week, having proposed a governor-friendly bill but leaving multiple maladies festering. But for the present charter, the next probe isn’t due for five years, due to only inertia or refusal to weigh major upgrades prevents the county commission from ordering a new look far sooner.

We’ve been detailing key recommendations of this county charter task force for several weeks. More are due this week.

Some of its proposals are welcome, none awful. The commission should put all — even those we reject — on the ballot unaltered to give citizens the final say, as is倡导 charter reviews.

Next, the charter — sort of a county constitution — should get much deeper study and further revision from commission influence. Commissioners this time appointed 13 of the 20-member team, churning any dive into pressing issues that could best serve the public.

Issues unlikely to make the final cut, or the next round, of the current task force include:

- Why don’t we elect county commissioners at large, to limit parochialism and improve the quality of representation?
- Isn’t 13 commissioners too unkindly?
- Why is the county still handling intercepts, even those it doesn’t want to keep?
- Why are we negligent in public transportation, which should be the purview of cities and towns? That would free the county to focus on big economic upgrades.
- Knowing that many elected leaders don’t happen to be top-level administrators, should we split our present set-up with a single person handling the political function of mayor and the administrative job of manager?
- Why are commissioners still influencing contracts that should be decided by professional administrators who will not be seeking campaign contributions?
- Shouldn’t we limit campaign spending as the ante for electing county officials, additional out-of-control?
- Should we end individual commissioner control of hundreds of thousands of dollars of county capital projects, to incorporate in a single fund that has become political jackpots?
- Should we limit recall of officials to specified reasons to prevent willy-nilly blackmail threats over voter decisions?
- Should the charter specify a formula for revising it and the conditions under which they operate to prevent commissioners from stacking the deck to exclude issues they don’t want touched?
- The current task force, which received far too little time to deliberate broadly, nonetheless has attacked impositions the county manager feels is in the public interest.
- Its call for commission term limits would be a major — if not helpful — change.
- Florida legislative term limits left no long-standing expertise in either chamber and set legislators from day one struggling for leadership posts rather than leadership in the state.
- Still, popular support favors term limits to rid the county of long-term commissioners who, barring structural change, can win the votes of their narrow constituents groups forever.
- But countywide election from individual districts could get far better results, retaining local representation but forcing wiser thinking — and yielding broader thinkers.
- The task force plan to build into the county charter process to incorporate in the future is not nearly enough.
- The Charter Haar is associate dean and director of the Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center at FIU’s College of Business Administration.

Support innovation, technology, venture capital to add jobs

Does Miami need jobs? Does Iranian President "I'm-A-Dinner-Jacket" need a frontal lobotomy? The answers are seemingly obvious.

While there is little danger of the two forces to force a medical procedure on the ferret-face puppet of the mad mullahs, we in South Florida can and must address and help solve our serious employment problem.

The recent recession — yes, it has not yet ended — has elevated South Florida’s unemployment rate to levels to 9.6%, above the national average of over 8% — and double digits among blacks, Hispanics and teenagers. Since 2008, we have lost more jobs than any major city except Phoenix.

Yes, we desperately need jobs — and we need them now. But we also need to ask: What kind of jobs?

The basic structure of jobs in South Florida is roughly categorized as follows: County — housekeepers, day laborers, janitors; OK — retail salesperson, receptionist, bookkeeper; Pretty Good — all business owner, insurance agent, IT specialist; Professional — teacher, attorney, accountant, physician; and Big Time — real estate developer, fund manager, professional athlete.

Within that structure, the three-legged stool of the private sector employment in the county consists of international trade, tourism and hospitality; and retail sales. The three things these have in common are low skills, low wages and high turnover.

What are we to do? It is common knowledge and highlighted in the Beacon Council’s One Community, One Goal Report that while our current economic composition and labor structure will allow us to get by, it will not enable us to get ahead.

To be sure, our climate and geography lend themselves to tremendous asset sets, but they are also liabilities. We are “type cast” by the rest of the country — make that the world — as a fun-in-the-sun destination with little else.

At the same time we will always attract lesser-skilled population segments (both foreign due to family reunification, ethnic affinity groups) and domestically (weather and opportunities in the low end service industries).

To break out of this mold is difficult. One cannot transform an unskilled worker on the burrito assembly line at Taco Bell into a software programmer. And despite the noblest efforts of public school Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, the foundation of workforce development — education — is poor. (As reported last month, 9,000 Florida third-graders flunked the FSA reading exam.)

On the other end of the spectrum, many of our best and brightest high school and college graduates leave, and they do not return to our shores. Our economic stimulation and lucrative opportunities elsewhere, with a critical mass of like-minded people and networks. Bleak though the situation appears, there are many bright rays shining through the clouds. South Florida is making progress in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship and helping to attract (and retain) the very knowledge and industries that we need to improve our economic fortunes and create degrees; a high concentration of regional medical workers; a strong expansion of higher education R&D; and highly rated university programs in science, technology and related fields.

Knowledge-based communities like the Research Triangle, Austin and the Bay Area did not pop up over night. Moreover, their prime focus was on economic and talent development, not jobs. The jobs in large numbers come later, only after a critical mass of enterprises in the same sector is established.

In the meantime, the most prudent course for our community is to pursue a dual approach to the infrastructure, including education, workforce and transportation; and cultivating an ecosystem to support innovation, technology, venture capital and all knowledge-based industries.

This strategy is not only a winning one — it’s the only one.

The Writer

Jerry Haar is associate dean and director of the Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center at FIU’s College of Business Administration.

High-value jobs are our local economic development and business organizations, county mayor’s office, companies such as IBM, universities, foundations (Knight in particular), and groups such as the South Florida Technology Alliance, MIT Enterprise Forum and Lean Start Up Machine are creating an economic vibe in Greater Miami that will yield huge dividends in years to come.

Our unique connection to Latin America and the Caribbean is an enormous asset in attracting innovative firms and harnessing venture capital. Florida International University’s America’s Venture Capital Conference, now in its third year, is a highly visible, high-impact catalyst that embodies the potential South Florida has as a knowledge-based enclave for innovation, with the good jobs and positive spillover effects that our economy so sorely needs.

The Avalanche Consulting report commissioned by the Beacon Council for One Community, One Goal provides reasons for optimism, a more challenging calling for community leaders engaged with the business community; a significant number of technical

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