

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 2022

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AMID COST CONCERNS, BONDING OK TO RESTORE MIAMI MARINE STADIUM DELAYED, PG. 16



DADE'S CYBERSECURITY: County commissioners just approved a "Cybersecurity and Information Technology Procurement and Protection Program," which would impose requirements in Miami-Dade to buy cybersecurity products produced in the US for contracts that are subject to approval by commissioners. The legislation by Jose "Pepe" Diaz requires that all software, hardware, technologies, processes and practices to protect information technology networks, devices and programs be bought by a company that develops and produces them in the US. Also, to buy only products that are not prohibited in the list of companies in the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019. "Purchasing cybersecurity products provides a social benefit via the improvement of security to the county's information technology infrastructure, which is critical to providing life, health and safety services to county residents and visitors by heightening the review of county vendors who have access to county cybersecurity systems," Chief Financial Officer Edward Marquez wrote in a memorandum.

COUNTY BOUNDARIES: Legislation sought by Miami-Dade Commissioner Raquel Regalado would require that public votes on annexations and incorporation of municipalities coincide with a general election. The proposal faces a hearing and final commission action. Currently, for municipal boundary changes, an election is required under some circumstances, such as when over 250 electors live in an annexation area. Nonetheless, neither the county's charter nor code requires those elections to come in a general election, her proposal says. "Holding an election in conjunction with a general election should also reduce the cost of holding such election," it says. "For all of these reasons, in the event that this board calls for an election related to a proposed municipal boundary change or incorporation, it is desired that all such elections be held in conjunction with a general election." A recent report by Mayor Daniella Levine Cava outlining potential impacts on county departments due to municipal annexations says 13 proposed annexations face county review.

MUNICIPAL NOTIFICATION: New legislation by Sally Heyman in the pipeline to be approved by county commissioners would require the county to issue additional notification to municipalities when a piece of legislation is to affect them. The ordinance still needs to go through a public hearing and final approval. Miami-Dade already notifies municipalities when legislation is to directly affect them; nonetheless, as legislative debate continues, there is no requirement for an additional notification detailing changes. "In furtherance of transparency and cooperation with the municipalities within Miami-Dade County, this board wishes to amend its rules of procedure to provide for additional municipal notification under certain circumstances as ordinances move through the legislative process," the document.

THE ACHIEVER



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

David Wagner
Leads Florida Blue fight against rising health care cost
The profile is on Page 4

Wage level, employment gains hailed

Miami-Dade County led the nation's 10 largest counties in year-over-year increases in both employment numbers and wage levels, a report issued last week by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics shows.

Taking in an even larger swath of counties, Miami-Dade ranked 10th among the 343 largest counties in percentage of wage gains and 10th in that group of 343 in percentage of added jobs.

The newly released statistics show that Miami-Dade employment totals grew 7.6% at the end of September compared to the end of September 2020, rising to 1,129,100 jobs, while average wages jumped 10.4% in that period.

The federal report notes that the county's largest area of job gains was leisure and hospitality employment, with 32,934 jobs added in 12 months, adding 35.4% workers as tourism and dining rebounded from the depths of the covid shutdown.

In the growth of weekly wages in Miami-Dade, the report cited the largest impact on trade, transportation and utilities, where average weekly wages soared \$129, a highly unusual 13.4% leap year over year.

More current figures for the end of 2021, available separately from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and not in last week's report, show Miami Dade employment at 1,299,479 on Dec. 31, which would mean an employment growth of 8.5% for calendar year 2021, surpassing the 7.6% for Sept. 30. The annual leisure and hospitality jobs gain countywide was 17% on Dec. 31.

Nationally, the top three of the 343 counties in average weekly wage gains through Sept. 30 were San Mateo, CA, San Francisco and Broome, NY. The top three of those 343 counties in percentage employment growth in that period were Honolulu; Clark, NV, and Calasieu, LA.

The federal report also lists total business establishments in the county at the end of the year. Miami-Dade reported 115,600, by far the most in Florida. Broward was second with 79,300 establishments, followed by Palm Beach at 65,500, Orange County at 51,300, Hillsborough at 51,200 and Pinellas with 38,200 establishments.

Commission moves ahead to expand county seat

By GABRIELA HENRIQUEZ STOIKOW

County commissioners on Tuesday approved in a first hearing a resolution by Joe A. Martinez to expand the boundaries of the county seat beyond the City of Miami.

If adopted after a final hearing, five constitutional officers to be elected in 2024 – the sheriff, tax collector, property appraiser, supervisor of elections and clerk of court – could move their offices to other incorporated and unincorporated areas of Miami-Dade.

"This is not moving the county seat, it's an expansion," Mr. Martinez said. Commissioner Raquel Regalado, one of the two 'no' votes, argued that commissioners should discuss the constitutional officers' functions and powers before allowing them to relocate their offices.

"I don't see why we would take this action right now without first determining what is really important, which is the creation of the constitutional officers," Ms. Regalado said. Mr. Martinez argued that commissioners aren't going to give any powers to the officers since the powers are already established in the constitution.

"The only one that's really being questioned here is [the] sheriff's office," he said. He also argued that the sheriff's office would

have negotiations with the Mayor's Office after the elections. "This is giving these people an option," he said.

"I acknowledge Commissioner Martinez's point that this doesn't necessarily change it [the county seat] but in a way expanding it is changing it," said Vice Chairman Oliver Gilbert. "While I appreciate the nuance, I don't know that it's necessarily applicable in this instance."

Mr. Gilbert said he was unclear why Mr. Martinez was offering the resolution now if there will be negotiations and this could be an asset in bargaining. Ms. Regalado agreed and said, "the mayor is going to negotiate, and if we take away everything that she has to negotiate with, there's not much to do but roll over."

Chairman Jose "Pepe" Diaz said he did not see a problem in adopting the resolution now. "All I see, this is to expand to give more ability for those constitutional seats." Commissioner Eileen Higgins, voting in favor of the item, said she was "very open-minded about having these constitutional officers decide where in the county they want to locate and to give the mayor the maximum flexibility about negotiating with our downtown assets."

Ms. Higgins, who is working on a project to redevelop over 25 county-owned acres

in downtown that is to include housing and affordable housing, said she was open to use county property to benefit residents instead of housing an office. Sen. Rene Garcia also supported the resolution and said Miami-Dade is large, so it is important to be able to expand the county seat area.

Ms. Regalado insisted the resolution was premature. "I think it takes power away from the Office of the Mayor, it limits what we can do, it puts in jeopardy a lot of the investments that we've already made in certain parts of the City of Miami," she said. "This has a fiscal impact. We just don't know what that fiscal impact is because we haven't created the offices yet, which is why this should be done afterward and not before the creation of the offices."

Right before the vote Commissioners Martinez and Regalado engaged in direct discussions. Mr. Martinez asked Ms. Regalado when it was that he denied a request for a Sunshine Meeting to talk about the sheriff's office and allegedly said "it was never going to happen," as Ms. Regalado stated in the Feb. 9 Chairman's Council of Policy Committee.

Ms. Regalado said she would look for the exact date and get back to his staff. At that point Mr. Diaz cut off discussion and the item was adopted.

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Business-oriented political committee eyes county election

By MONICA CORREA

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's non-partisan political action committee, inaugurated last June, is in final stages of organizing itself, fundraising and outlining the process in which it would screen county commission candidates for a pro-business agenda to support.

On June 21, 2021, the chamber (GMCC) announced a political action committee (PAC) that would work to support pro-business candidates in county commission and other local races through a "voluntary, nonprofit, incorporated organization designed to advocate on a local and state level for issues that reflect the legislative priorities adopted by the GMCC Board of Directors," according to the inaugural press release.

"We are working right now on [coming up with] the process of screening, amongst our board members," said Manny Reyes, PAC vice chair and president of Pereira Reyes Consulting. "We also have Freddy Balsera on the PAC board, who is also assisting

with the drafting of what would be the criteria, the questions that we would ask [candidates]."

The questions, he explained, would be tailored to satisfy needs and interests of the county's business community.

"What we're doing here is continuing to represent and tout the business community agenda," said Tony Argiz, PAC chair and BDO USA South Florida Managing Partner. "We will be interviewing, along with our PAC members, the members for the Dade County commission. We have a bi-partisan board, and it's all going to be pro-businesses: what's going to be best for the business members of the GMCC? Which of the candidates for the Dade County commission are going to serve our business interests?"

The PAC was created to operate separately from the GMCC, focusing on areas such as economic development, transportation, education and workforce development, resiliency and healthcare, said GMCC Vice President of Government Affairs Spencer Pylant. "Those are Miami issues."

PAC board members are re-



Tony Argiz: will vet candidates.

quired to first be GMCC members for at least two years. The inaugural board members, appointed by the chamber's executive committee, are, aside from Mr. Argiz, Mr. Reyes and Mr. Pylant, chamber President and CEO Alfred Sanchez; chamber Chair Rick Beasley, executive director of CareerSource South Florida; chamber First Vice Chair Roberto Muñoz, president and CEO of The Global Financial Group; Myles Pistorias, senior vice president and general counsel of the Miami Dolphins; Mr. Balsera, CEO of Balsera communications; and Javi

Correoso, head of public policy and communications, US South, at Uber Technologies.

"We've all been in the community for a long time," said Mr. Reyes. "We all have acquaintances in the political process. With that, it is important for us to have a very transparent, detailed process for screening candidates."

The PAC has not yet identified a candidate it wants to support, said Mr. Pylant, but it has been observing the process by which new candidates are starting their campaigns and the current state issues affecting local communities, such as redistricting.

"This is going to be a very busy political year statewide, primarily in Miami-Dade County because of our term limits in the county commission," said Mr. Reyes about two-term commission limits that will vacate multiple seats this year, representing a massive change in political thought and action to follow, "but also because of redistricting [of county lines]," he added. "It's going to open up some seats. It's going to pit some current sitting legislators against each other as district lines at the

state level move."

Miami Today previously reported that the PAC would begin operation with \$250,000 of accumulated contributions and \$10,000 from each PAC board member. Mr. Sanchez said last June that more potential donors did step forward when the PAC was first considered.

"The business landscape is completely different today than it was 10 years ago," said Mr. Reyes, "and surely completely different than it was pre-pandemic, just three years ago. It has evolved and the chamber's priorities have evolved together with it, and that's the purpose of the PAC, to make sure that, as those positions evolve – as those needs for business evolve and as the priorities of businesses evolve – the chamber has a voice to those elected officials saying, this is what the business community is asking to be successful and to be fruitful in Miami-Dade County. The GMCC together with our PAC will stand together in that voice to advance the business community's interest so that everybody in Miami-Dade County benefits."

As municipalities take in more, county probes repercussions

By GABRIELA HENRIQUEZ STOIKOW

Mayor Daniella Levine Cava just outlined for Miami-Dade commissioners potential impacts of efforts for municipal annexations and future municipal incorporations on the county's services, with the county's police department hit most severely.

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department and the Building and Permitting Section of the Regulatory and Economic Resources Department would also be affected. All public works functions for local roads could eventually be turned over to new municipalities, her report said.

Other county services would be discontinued, such as code enforcement and local zoning, and overhead cost currently shared with the unincorporated areas' budget would move to the countywide budget.

Nonetheless, there would be no impact to the Miami Dade Fire Rescue Department, as all municipalities are obliged to be served by them, with certain cities as exceptions.

Currently, one Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) and 13 proposed annexations are under various stages of county review.

The report says that if the MAC succeeds in forming a new municipality, "it will be challenging for MDPD [the Miami Dade Police Department] to staff the new municipality without compromising the existing services provided to UMSA [Unincorporated Municipal Service Area] residents and the rest of county."

Residents of an area use a series of municipal advisory committee meetings to gather and discuss whether to create a municipality or remain part of the county's vast unincorporated area. In December, commissioners approved a MAC for Westchester at the request of Commissioner Javier Souto, representative of the area, whose tenure on the commission must end in the fall.

"Should the board decide that the county should focus on countywide issues requiring the incorporation or annexation of all UMSA areas, I believe that educating and communicating with the residents of UMSA should be paramount," Mayor Levine Cava wrote in the document.

Annexations may raise tax rates that residents pay, as the unincorporated areas tend to have the lowest millage rate in the county. She recommends that the process

of incorporation and annexations should follow the MAC or a similar process where public meetings share information with residents so they can make informed decisions when voting on annexations or incorporations.

Also, facilities with countywide significance, such as the Miami-Opa Locka Executive, Miami Executive and Miami International Airports, and the seaport would remain under the police purview of the county.

Commissioner Rebeca Sosa requested the report in November 2019. Commissioner Joe A. Martinez has expressed concerns about the consequences of incorporations and annexations, especially in police services, as described in the report.

A November 2012 report notes that as more areas incorporate, the services given to unincorporated areas may need to be adjusted and services provided to the area may cost more, as "there may not be economies of scale of which to take advantage."

If municipalities transition to their own police departments, Miami-Dade Police would require fewer officers as there would be less service area, fewer residents and less revenue. In the case of a future full

incorporation of the entire county, the department could provide just specialized police services to certain cities and sheriff services for the entire county.

The Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department, nonetheless, would not feel any impact if incorporations continue, as the department serves the unincorporated areas and 29 of the 34 municipalities. The county's code requires that any new municipality contract with the police department for at least three years and remain within the Dade Fire Rescue District permanently.

In a total incorporation, the Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department would shift to support only regional parks, and municipalities would handle all local parks. The Building and Permitting Section of the Regulatory and Economic Resources Department would close, as its functions would be transferred to the cities.

"While new municipalities are required to remain with the Department of Solid Waste Management for the disposal of waste, all public work type functions for local roads would be turned over to the new municipality," the report says. Services of code enforcement, local zoning, and Neat Street teams would also be discontinued.



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Print circulation: 26,705 and reaches more than 61,000 high income readers every week.