

## Vote to boost local economy

While the referendum on modernizing Hillsborough's transportation system has drawn the most attention, there will be other local initiatives on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Of particular importance is a measure that would allow the Hillsborough County Commission to grant property tax breaks for up to 10 years to businesses that relocate here or existing businesses that expand. Plant City is offering its residents the same proposal. Both deserve support.

The initiative would give local officials an effective tool that 25 other Florida counties already possess. Until it also has the power to give property tax incentives, Hillsborough will be at a competitive disadvantage.

The county commission voted unanimously to place the measure on the ballot. Commissioner Ken Hagan, who proposed the idea, says it could make the difference in whether executives decide to invest in Hillsborough. The incentive could help the county lure retailers — including a Bass Pro Shop, which is considering a Hillsborough location — manufacturers and other enterprises that will create jobs.

This would not be a reckless giveaway. The break would be given on a case-by-case basis after public hearings and a thorough review of the business plans. The return would come in more local economic activity and jobs.

A project could be exempted from county government — or Plant City — property taxes for the entire 10 years. But elected officials could decide not to give the maximum benefit or limit the number of years of the exemption. One consideration should be how the incentive will affect competing companies that were not given the break.

The measures would not affect millage collected by the school board, water district or other taxing authorities.

Elected officials would have the ability to ensure the break went only to companies that would commit to staying here and that would provide decent paying jobs.

On both the Hillsborough and Plant City "Economic Development Property Tax Exemptions for New Business and Expansions of Existing Businesses," The Tampa Tribune recommends a yes vote.

### County auditor

The county auditor position has been a wasteful distraction since it was put into the charter by referendum in 2002.

The office, equal in rank to the county administrator has



Staff file photo by INDIRA LEVINE remained on the ballot.

created more friction than efficiency, with the auditor frequently feuding with the administrator and others.

Independent audits of county operations are essential, but they could be easily handled by the clerk of the circuit court's office.

After commissioners fired the embattled auditor earlier this year, there was talk of asking voters to eliminate the position altogether.

But neither the county commission nor the Charter Review Commission voted to put such a proposal before voters.

Instead, the commission supported a mild measure that would beef up qualifications for the position and require the commission to give annual direction to the auditor, based on the recommendation of an audit committee. It also would prohibit the auditor from being involved in political activity.

We would rather see the position eliminated, but these are improvements. On "A Proposal to Amend the Hillsborough County Charter Provisions Pertaining to the Internal Performance Auditor" the Tribune suggests a yes vote.

### Veto power

An odd initiative from the Charter Review Commission asks county voters to eliminate the veto powers of an elected county mayor — a position that doesn't exist.

This is a reaction to the ongoing effort to have Hillsborough adopt a county mayor form of government.

In 2008 a citizen initiative to create the position was knocked off the ballot after a lengthy court challenge. But voters endorsed the companion measure that granted the county mayor veto powers, which

Most commissioners oppose the mayor idea, and their appointees on the Charter Review Commission want voters to jettison the language which they call confusing.

But the measure is causing no problems. The real goal here is to handicap county mayor supporters, who would not only have to get enough signatures to put the county mayor plan before voters, but also enough to get the veto measure back on the ballot.

The county mayor campaign is very much alive. Local attorney Mary Ann Stiles, the driving force behind the effort, hopes to have it on the ballot in two years.

There is no reason to remove the veto language now.

On the initiative that "Amends the Charter to Eliminate the Veto Powers Provision of an Elected County Mayor," the Tribune urges a no vote.

### Public hearing

The Charter Review Commission offers an important public safeguard by proposing that there be an additional public hearing if the county commission adopts significant changes in district boundaries.

In 2001 the commission adopted new boundaries for the commission's four single-member districts that were far different than what had been advertised and presented to the public.

This requirement would ensure citizens have a chance to review and comment on any such changes.

On "A Proposal to Amend the Reapportionment Provision to Require an Additional Public Meeting," The Tampa Tribune recommends a yes vote.

*Submitted into the Charter Review Board Record 9/27/2010 by Gerald L. White, Sr., (Board Member)*

Our  
88th  
Year

# LA GACETA

AÑO 88-NUMERO 39

VIERNES, 24 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 2010

PRECIO: 50 CENTAVOS

## AS WE HEARD IT

by PATRICK  
MANTEIGA

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Here are some of our endorsements for the Referenda and Charter amendments that you'll find at the end of the ballot.

### Nonbinding Statewide Advisory Referendum

This is just an opinion poll of whether you support the federal government being required by the constitution to have a balanced budget, which is similar to the way Florida operates. They would have my vote except for the three words at the end "without raising taxes". Florida must have a balanced budget, but it can do it by increasing revenues, shrinking spending, or a combination of the two. This would theoretically lock in our revenue at today's level. How would we pay back our massive debt? In case of war, what would we do? How about a natural disaster? Balanced budget, yes. Hands tied behind the back, no.

We endorse a "No" vote.

### Eliminate Veto Powers of County Mayor

Two years ago we gave a non-existent County Mayor veto power. We say take them away and give veto powers to unicorns.

We endorse a "Yes" vote.

### Economic Development Property Tax Exemptions

This would trigger an economic development tool offer to the counties by the state. It allows property tax breaks to manufacturers, offices and the service industry if they expand or if a new business comes here. The tax break only applies to the increase in the property value directly attributed by the expansion, either new construction or new machinery.

A manufacturer moving into an existing but empty industrial plant would not get a tax break on the land or the building, only the new equipment would be eligible. If a company had 100,000-square-foot plant and doubled it to 200,000 square feet, only the 100,000-square-foot new construction would be eligible. The types of companies eligible for the tax breaks are very limited. The tax break is not available for projects built before the referendum passes. Even if a company is qualified and applies for the break, the county commission must approve by vote each request. So the process has many checks and balances and will always be in the sunshine.

We endorse a "Yes" vote.

### A Proposal to Amend the Reapportionment Provision

This is to address the odd shape of county commission District 1, and the process that created it.

A decade ago, when the commission districts needed to be adjusted, public meetings were held to get feedback on several different versions of new district lines.

Everyone thought the county commission would pick one of those versions, instead it came up with a very different map. The public had no opportunity to study it or make comment. The odd-shaped District 1 includes South Tampa and stretches in a narrow strip of land miles south along the coast to Ruskin. People in that strip were up in arms over being in a district dominated by a group with quite different needs and wants.

This amendment provides for another public meeting if substantial changes are made to district boundaries after the last public meeting.

We endorse a "Yes" vote.

### Amend Charter Provision to the Internal Performance Auditor

The most significant and positive change created by this amendment is to require the county commission to provide annual direction to the internal performance auditor and for an audit committee to provide a scope of work for each audit and expected goals. This should prevent the problems of the past. Additional changes are provided such as a new name for the position, a change of qualifications and other housekeeping measures.

We endorse a "Yes" vote.

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9-27-2010

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Charter Review Board Record  
by Gerald L. White, Sr., Board Member*