

Tell us the pros and cons of county charters

By Dale White, Staff Writer

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We want to hear from you.

MANATEE COUNTY – The issue of whether Manatee County should become a charter government will be analyzed at an upcoming League of Women Voters forum and possibly the subject of a petition drive to put the question on the ballot for voters.

The Herald-Tribune wants to share the opinions of readers in Manatee County, which has never held a referendum about adopting a charter, and Sarasota County, which became a charter government in 1971. What, in the minds of the electorates, could be the pros and cons of county charters?

Send your comments to manateecountycharter@gmail.com. Please mention in which county or municipality you reside.

All municipalities are established by charters that define how the local governments function, such as how the city council is elected and what is the role of the mayor.

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Florida counties were not allowed to have charters until 1968, when voters statewide approved the measure. So far, just 20 of the 67 counties have chosen that route toward stronger local government.

Unless its voters enact a charter, which only they can amend, a county is governed by state statutes. For example, state law dictates that Manatee County officials are elected in partisan races and even how much those officials are paid.

Charters, however, allow counties more flexibility – more of what supporters consider “home rule.”

Interested?

WHAT: The League of Women Voters of Manatee County forum about the pros and cons of charter county government

WHEN: March 13, noon (a lunch buffet will be served at 11:30 a.m. for a \$5 donation)

WHERE: Bradenton Woman's Club, 1705 Manatee Ave. W., Bradenton

For example, Duval County's charter merged it into the city of Jacksonville and created a 19-member City Council. Miami-Dade made a similar consolidation forming a 13-member County Commission and added an elected county mayor.

Several counties prefer to have an elected instead of an appointed administrator. Some make the supervisor of elections a non-partisan position. Some impose deadlines on petitions to amend or repeal county ordinances.

In 1984, Sarasota County voters decided to no longer elect the sheriff and instead have the County Commission appoint the chief law enforcement officer. In a special election three months later, they rescinded that decision.

A few questions to consider:

- Would a charter create, or re-create, government by needlessly frequent referenda in Manatee?
- Would voters feel empowered to overrule their elected officials by passing charter amendments – and should they?
- How has being a charter government worked out for Sarasota County overall?
- If you are a Manatee resident, would you be among the 35,000 voters needed to sign a petition to compel the County Commission to appoint a committee to write a charter and put it on the 2018 ballot? Former Bradenton Beach Mayor Katie Pierola hopes to get a petition drive organized after the League of Women Voters of Manatee County studies the issue and perhaps weighs in.

To read more about this topic, go to <http://bit.ly/2k37cJU>.