

Effort to drop single-member districts must be rebuffed

The proposed charter amendment, which has largely been pushed and willed onto the March 8 ballot by current members of the Sarasota County Commission, deserves an ignominious defeat because it is as misguided as it is unseemly.

Occasionally there is a proposal on an election ballot that is so poorly conceived that it not only warrants being defeated by voters – it deserves to be rejected in such a forceful way that the result discourages any future attempts to raise the issue again.

That perfectly describes the proposed charter amendment on the March 8 ballot that asks Sarasota County voters to approve allowing all five county commissioners to be elected on a countywide basis – and to drop the existing '**single-member**' system that limits citizens to only electing a commissioner for their specific district.

Sarasota County voters should vote 'No' to the proposed charter amendment – and with extreme gusto.

The proposed charter amendment, which has largely been pushed and willed onto the March 8 ballot by current members of the Sarasota County Commission, deserves an ignominious defeat because it is as misguided as it is unseemly.

How so?

- **It blatantly seeks to undermines the stated will of Sarasota County voters .**

In 2018, 60% of the county's voters approved a measure calling for their commissioners to be elected through **single-member districts** rather than by countywide voting.

In the years since that clear verdict, there has been no groundswell movement among residents to revisit the 2018 vote – or to scrap the **single-member** system. In fact, whenever Sarasota County citizens have been surveyed on **single-member districts**, they have expressed their satisfaction with the current model.

- **It would make it harder for citizens to demand direct accountability from their commissioners .**

The **single-member** district system compels commissioners to acknowledge the concerns of the residents in their specific **districts** – and if those commissioners fail to do so, they can be held directly accountable by voters.

If all five commissioners are elected on a countywide basis, however, it's much more likely that some residents and areas across Sarasota County will be ignored or overlooked.

Let's be frank here:

There is a good reason why the voter advocacy group Nonprofit VOTE calls attempts to push countywide voting 'the oldest trick' in the book used by local governments that want to weaken the ability of citizens to hold elected officials to account.

• **It will make it extremely difficult for credible candidates who lack extensive political funding to run competitive campaigns for the county commission.**

Sarasota County is a fast-growing area that covers an imposing 725 square miles, according to the county's data. If the **single-member** district system for commissioners is dumped for countywide seats, it will be effectively impossible for promising but lightly funded candidates to conduct adequate campaigns.

These are just some of the glaring flaws in the proposed charter amendment.

Now add in several more – including leading ballot language that all but encourages voters to cast a 'Yes' vote and a mystery-shrouded campaign that's devoting big bucks to pushing its approval – and it should be obvious how citizens should vote on the proposed charter amendment.

They should not merely vote 'No' on March 8.

They should do so in such numbers that it will reverberate as a deafening 'NO!!!' in the ears of the cynical lot that has foisted this needless proposal on the citizens of Sarasota County.

EDITORIAL herald-Tribune

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