

The George Carlin Rule

Written by John Ise, BT Contributor
March 2019

Meet the candidates for Miami Shores council



Arguably the greatest philosopher on American Democracy isn't Alexis de Tocqueville, William Penn, or even Mark Twain, but the late, great comedian George Carlin.

One of my all-time favorite riffs of his exposed who really is to blame for the state of our politics.

"Everybody complains about politicians," he said. "Everybody says they suck. Well, where do people think these politicians come from? They don't fall out of the sky. They don't pass through a membrane from another reality. They come from American families, American homes, American schools, American churches, American businesses, and American universities, and they are elected by American citizens.

"*This* is the best we can do folks," he continued. "This is what we have to offer. It's what our system produces: Garbage in, garbage out. If you have selfish, ignorant citizens, you're going to get selfish, ignorant leaders....So maybe, maybe, maybe it's not the politicians who suck. Maybe something else sucks around here -- like, the public."

Keeping up with the antics of Donald Trump...or even the soap opera over in North Bay Village, can anyone really disagree? But that's them, not our beloved Village of Miami Shores, right? The apex of enlightenment in the known universe, where voters are typically engaged, serious, and -- outside of social media -- civil? Well, on April 9, villagers will elect four members to what

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is typically a stable, harmonious council...so don't muck it up, voters, or the Carlin rule will apply to us as well.

To lend a helping hand, here's a primer on prospective candidates as of the *BT*'s deadline:

- Alice Burch, on the cusp of completing her four-year term on the council, two years of which she served as mayor, only recently decided to run for re-election. Spurred to seek an additional term due to Mayor Mac Glinn's impending retirement from the council, she says, and the sense that the council needs an experienced hand to lend some continuity on recent accomplishments, *and* having time to devote to the council, Burch starts the race as arguably the most well-known candidate.

Her emphasis would be on having frank discussions, planning, and action on the long-term challenges of climate change. She notes that the village, being one of seven Miami-Dade cities without residential sewers, will have to have the proverbial "come-to-Jesus" moment if the water table rises alongside projected sea levels.

- Stephen Loffredo, a local attorney, touts his 18-years of elected service as a councilman. Like other aspiring candidates, Loffredo emphasizes the need to maintain our small-town charm by emphasizing zoning and code to buttress the village's single-family character. Along with Burch, Loffredo points to Glinn's departure as his impetus to rejoin the council he departed in 2013.

He advocates an incremental approach to downtown revitalization, opposes any variance from existing height restrictions, and says he believes that, given time, revitalization will naturally come. Perhaps most interesting, he seeks to explore ways the village can increase recycling to become a nearly zero-landfill community.

- Julio Martinez, who did not respond to request for comment, has in two previous runs come close to joining the council. Originally from the Dominican Republic, where he earned a law degree, Martinez is a 30-year resident who heads Hightower Property Management, which manages the 9999 building on NE 2nd Avenue, among other properties.

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- Jonathan Meltz, also an attorney steeped in local involvement, is the second incumbent seeking re-election. Deliberate and measured on the council, Meltz notes that he decided to seek an additional term because two years is too brief of time to accomplish anything sustainable. He has a laundry list of priorities, including three broad areas of public safety, the environment, and quality of life. He would also focus on “traffic enforcement to reduce speeding and make our streets safer; reduce litter, pesticide use, and plastic consumption; address sea level rise; increase space and recreational activities for residents, and encourage the use of solar and other forms of green energy.”
- Marlenis Hernandez Novoa, a self-employed medical professional, was pulling an application for Village Council with the clerk at the time of this writing, and remains undecided as to whether she will run. She declined further comment on her prospective candidacy.
- Miryam Rojas, a resident since 2004, is a member of the Fine Arts Commission. Encouraged to run by local mover-and-shaker Susan Ackley, Rojas says she was also inspired by the untapped potential within the village, particularly as it relates to the “maddening,” slow pace of downtown development. Saying she abides by the philosophy of being a “doer, not a complainer,” Rojas says she’ll be an aggressive advocate for NE 2nd Avenue’s revitalization and build the village’s green credentials. She has an energetic optimism that some may find appealing.
- Christian Ulvert, a political campaign consultant by trade, has a close association with Mayor Glinn and was intimately involved with his previous campaigns. Ulvert has a history of activism in Democratic campaigns, the LGBTQ rights group SAVE Dade, and the state legislature. He emphasizes aggressive downtown development, public safety, and developing a closer cooperative relationship with local schools. Don’t be surprised if Ulvert becomes the best-financed of all the council candidates in this race.
- Crystal Wagar, the sole African-American candidate, brings arguably the most impressive civic résumé. An attorney and 15-year Shores resident who has worked as a legislative aide and chief of staff for former county Commissioner Jimmy Morales (now Miami Beach city manager), she served for a period as El Portal’s interim village manager. Additionally, she’s served on various nonprofit and civic boards, such as the county’s Citizen Transportation Advisory Board and Camillus House (a homeless service provider), and the South Florida Everglades Park Trust.

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Wagar's priorities are broadly constructed in promoting sustainability and inclusion.

Corresponding with the candidates, it can be hard to decipher strong policy fault-lines between them. All say they seek to protect and maintain the "small-town charm" of the village. They all talk about the importance of highlighting public safety, though they didn't dwell on specific issues; and they all are promoting...well...something to happen downtown.

They're not offering any big, ambitious ideas and positions, aside from an aspirational discussion on future sewers. Perhaps these candidates wisely recall the 2017 crash-and-burn defeat of the proposed \$20 million bond for a new community center.

And maybe that's all well and good. Villagers are generally content with municipal services; and by Miami standards, our Miami Shores government remains relatively scandal-free. Incrementalism over many years just may be the ticket.

As the great South African Desmond Tutu once stated, "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

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