

To Be or Not to Be Born

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer
December 2017

Will West Aventura be county's newest city?



or more than a decade, residents of a 3.1-square-mile area west of Aventura have passionately debated forming their own city.

That debate may finally be heading to the ballot box.

On September 26, the Miami-Dade County Planning Advisory Board recommended that the Miami-Dade County Commission allow voters living between Aventura, North Miami Beach, I-95, and the county's border with Broward to decide whether or not to incorporate. It's the furthest this issue has gotten since 2003, when the first Northeast Miami-Dade "municipal advisory committee" was formed.

The county commission itself could vote as early as next month on whether to place the item on the ballot. "We're shooting for January or February," says Jorge Fernandez, coordinator of the county's Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The name of this future city, which includes Highland Lakes, Enchanted Lake, Skylake, and several other neighborhoods, has yet to be determined, although the U.S. Census designates

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the area as the Ojus Census Designated Place (CDP), after a town that existed there between 1926 and 1936. Locals, though, reserve the name Ojus for the W. Dixie Highway corridor between a winding canal and Biscayne Boulevard.

Kenneth Friedman, a Highland Oaks resident who has sought cityhood for the past 14 years, says it would be fun to hold a contest to “see what most people think we should be called.”

One suggestion for a name Friedman often hears is West Aventura, after the municipality renowned for its high-end condos and efficient government. In fact, neighborhood activists in the Ojus CDP pleaded with Aventura to annex them in 2004, 2008, and 2012, and each time Aventura, which measures just 3.5 square miles, rejected the notion.

“I have no problem with it,” Friedman says, referring to the name West Aventura, “but I think Aventura might have a problem with it.”



Aventura officials did threaten legal action 21 years ago, when pro-incorporation activists in Sunny Isles toyed with the idea of calling their future city Aventura Beach. It’s unclear if Aventura officials have become less protective of their name, especially with several businesses and development projects outside city limits using the “Aventura” moniker. Enid Weisman, Aventura’s mayor, did not return phone calls for comment.

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Whatever its name, Friedman is sure this future city will have enough tax base to become a viable municipality at its current millage rate of 1.9283, or \$1.93 for every \$1000 of assessed property value. This is possible, he adds, thanks to recent development along the West Dixie Highway corridor. “The developers, giving their estimates, based on projections, think we could have a \$600,000 budget surplus to up to a \$4 million surplus,” he beams.

But Alicia Rook, a homeowner in the Greyknoll Lake neighborhood, fears that cityhood will mean more taxes for services the area already receives from the county at a bargain. “It’s expensive to have a city,” says Rook, who along with her husband Brian has been fighting incorporation for as long as Friedman has been advocating it.

But it isn’t just taxes that opponents fear. Manny Ashton, president of the Moorings in Skylake, points out that when Sunny Isles Beach became a city in 1996, it began enacting zoning codes that encouraged developers to demolish low-rise motels and replace them with towering high-rises. If such a thing happened to Skylake’s condos, Ashton says, the area’s senior citizens would have a hard time finding new homes. “Where are we going to go?” he asks. “Are they going to put us in box cars and ship us to the Everglades?”

Marc Hurwitz, president of the Skylake-Highland Lakes Homeowners Association, is sure the officials of a future city won’t enact legislation that will force out residents.

“Any government entity can’t just kick people out,” Hurwitz says. “Zoning is part of a political stance. They [Skylake residents] have to vote for people who’ll have their back. And if they don’t like them, vote them out.”

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