

**Statement of Michael J. Ryan, Sunrise Resident  
December 15, 2009  
City of Sunrise Charter Review Board Meeting**

Good Evening. My name is Michael Ryan and I live in Sunrise with my wife and 2 children.

I have had the pleasure and honor of being before the City Commission on a number of different issues. I am involved in our community. I am proud to serve as a volunteer coach for many years here in Sunrise, as a member of an Advisory Board, as a PTA President at Sawgrass Elementary and working at the county level on the Public Education issues.

I am here tonight in my capacity as a resident of Sunrise to offer comments regarding a proposal being considered by this Board regarding the creation of distinct districts for the respective City Commissioners.

Simply put, I am opposed to any plan which alters the decision making process of any Commissioner from what is good for our entire City to that of an “us versus them” mentality which would naturally be generated by districting further dividing our City.

Rather than building unity, inherently and by its very design, districting in Sunrise would generate an electoral process that rewards division.

As a back drop, City of Sunrise is a city of great diversity and determination, bountiful resources and resolve, soaring vision and volunteerism.

Members of Our Sunrise Family are young and young at heart, multi-cultural and multi-racial, wealthy and struggling.

In spite of the many challenges we face, we recognize that a successful community is defined by a vibrant and responsible business community throughout the City, motivated and well-tooled police and fire services for the benefit of all Citizens, quality schools and neighborhoods that are safe, and an intricate network of city staff and elected officials working together seamlessly to help our citizens to reach the very best in themselves.

This is not a time for acrimony and divisiveness in our government or amongst our communities. Our collective challenges are too great, the road ahead too arduous and our time too precious to be distracted by the pettiness of the politics.

As a city and a community, we are facing the most daunting tasks of a generation.

Our businesses are facing economic challenges not seen in recent memory while trying to access quality workers, seek affordable city amenities, and plug into a beneficial financial infrastructure necessary to thrive and expand.

Our police and fire rescue services are being asked each year to find imaginative methods for financing and expanding their services.

Our schools are under budgetary assault and, as a result, our Sunrise Families are facing significant challenges in seeking quality public education in safe schools.

Our young-at-heart and those who need the helpful assistance of government continue to deserve and need the watchful eye of city protection in a time of budgetary pressures.

The destiny of Sunrise is inextricably tied to success of all regions of our City and decisions being made by each member of our elected Official body for the collective good.

Districting invites and indeed rewards the folly of petty politics, horse-trading on votes, and a divisive mentality amongst the electorate. In contrast, the current form of city government demands that every decision of every commissioner be beneficial and benevolent for every citizen of sunrise.

Districting alters the discussions from the merits of a particular controversy for the entire city and for each citizen to the balkanized horse-trading infecting other forms of government. We need look no further than the school board, where some areas of the county are perceived to or in fact do receive disproportionate resource allocations where as cities like ours appear to benefit little from the district representative.

In contrast, districting rewards political gamesmanship and Machiavellian tactics where the benchmark for success is how much more one commissioner got for his or her respective District. Horse trading of votes -- I'll vote for your issue in your district if you vote for the issue impacting my district -- results decisions NOT predicted on the merits but deals being cut to support bad decisions for some in the city over others.

Of concern, rather than encouraging more participation in the democratic process from all areas of our City, districting creates a natural incentive to minimize participation – where certain district voting patterns will be sought to be kept to the minimum so as to achieve an election victory or entrench a Commissioner. There is no incentive for a candidate to understand or appreciate the full tapestry of the City of Sunrise, but only to maintain the most myopic view – what is good for my few square miles. Decisions predicated on such myopic views will be ill-informed and generate dangerous implications for our municipality.

And, districting invites the folly of re-districting for purely political gains by one group or another at the expense of greater good. One can not have a districting discussion without an eventual and predictable re-districting discussion.

Districting is an inefficient form of government where city services are unitary in application and shifting based on the needs of the city. Meritorious decisions regarding resource allocation will be met with the skepticism of nefarious horse-trading or power plays on the dais. Moreover, building base of power without regard to effect on the entire city will generate fear on the part of city employees and staff -- cautious to avoid the singular power of a commissioner in a particular area due to their perceived entrenchment.

And, from a philosophical point of view, districting transfers the repulsive divisiveness we have seen on the dais in recent weeks from the unique character issues of particularly individuals on the dais to a generated persona for the constituents for those areas represented by the particular commissioners acting divisively. When one speaks out inappropriately or with personal animosity, naturally, it will be perceived as the views of the district. Moreover, eliminating the ability of 4/5ths of the City to use the

power of the vote to remove such ill-behaved Commissioners is anti-democratic and bad for our City.

This insidious dynamic will infect the views of the electorate and create the very cancer we seek to avoid in modern municipality politics – us vs them, East vs. West, North vs south, Young vs. not-as-young and other potential invidious mechanisms for discrimination.

Fundamentally, while there may be those who support districting for their own political goals or out of fear of needing to generate a base of support across an entire the city, unless the current system is so broken and the proposals for districting would cure or ameliorate the root causes of the actual ills of government, there is no rational basis for such a dramatic change in our current system of government.

To be sure there are alterations to the charter that could improve democracy.

However, districting, once unleashed, is not easy to undo thus inviting folly and failures in our City Government and City for generations to come.