

Editorial: Instability at top should concern Marco voters

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In the latest chapter of the “Tale of Three Cities” in Southwest Florida, one is still having a dickens of a time while two move to the next page in history without a hint of revolution.

A common denominator for **Naples**, Marco Island and Bonita Springs is that each is hiring a new city manager. As these city councils move to fill this critical job, each faces significant financial challenges. Each fronted millions of dollars for damages to government property and debris cleanup following Hurricane Irma. Each is finalizing a budget for public hearings in September.

Similarities end when the page turns to stability. Bonita Springs, which has had consistency in its top manager since the city incorporated in 1999, is looking now to fill its manager job after the retirement of Carl Schwing who replaced longtime manager Gary Price. **Naples City Manager Bill Moss has held the job since January 2008; council now has a stellar group of finalists for its next staff leader as Moss retires.**

In contrast, Marco Island has had a revolving door to the manager’s office with a dozen top administrators since the city incorporated 20 years ago. The currently configured council, elected in November 2016, quickly parted ways with its manager and has failed in two searches during its two years together. The next council election is a couple of months away.

Stability in Naples no doubt helped [**Colin Baenziger & Associates**] lure high-quality candidates to replace Moss. That reality was correctly noted by Marco Island Vice Mayor Charlette Roman at Monday night’s Marco council meeting.

Instability from not having a permanent city manager is one reason our editorial board recommends Marco voters reject an Aug. 28 ballot measure for the city to take over ambulance service from Collier Emergency Medical Services. Of the three cities, Marco is least positioned to take on a major new initiative, given the uncertainty at the top.

Managers

Here’s where the three cities stand:

- Marco Island: Unable to hire an executive recruiting firm after its failed searches, Marco turned to a professional managers’ association for help in hiring a temporary administrator. The association brought council a slate of candidates. Five finalists each got three votes for consideration Monday night. That’s concerning because it takes five votes for Marco’s council to hire anyone. One finalist is Don Stilwell, who nearly a decade ago lost his job as Lee County manager after a scandal involving raunchy photos and emails swapped on government

computers. Stilwell since was fired by Fort Myers Beach's council, which hired the city manager Marco parted ways with 18 months ago. Marco council interviews finalists in September.

• Naples: Kudos to Naples council for its search leading to six finalists to interview next month. Notably, most are currently employed administrators, not between jobs. Equally impressive is that most are experienced in Florida.

• Bonita Springs: Kudos to Bonita leaders who essentially had a succession plan in place, eliminating the need for a search. The city is finalizing details of a contract to promote top assistant Arleen Hunter to city manager with a three-year, \$152,000 annual pay deal. "She's ready. She's here. We know her. She knows the issues," Mayor Peter Simmons said.