

Incorporation Efforts and Zoning

Five attempts have been made to incorporate Fort Myers Beach. The first one, in the mid '40's, failed by just six or seven votes. A second try later in the '40's lost by a larger number, but not overwhelmingly so. Then an attempt in November, 1953 was so poorly handled that the proponents literally turned tail and ran even before the referendum date.

An entirely new charter was drawn up in 1957 which stipulated that not more than two mills could be assessed without special referendum, and incorporation came up for another vote. Again it was defeated, this time by a margin of 88 votes. The same charter was used in the winter of 1960 and lost by 50 votes. Feeling ran strong, naturally, and the voting was heavy. Those who worked for incorporation were tired of government by remote control and felt we were ready for home rule. They thought a two mill levy would not be a burden to anyone. The opposition feared that once enacted, incorporation would mean a continual raise in taxes. Now, whenever county officials over-rule the local majority, the incorporation rumble begins again.

Before the referendum in 1953, the county started, for the first time, a zoning program in unincorporated areas, and the Beach was the first to form a district. Two local men, Arthur Snodgrass and Barrett Brown, were the first to represent the Beach on the county zoning board. An over-all plan was laid out at this time, areas were zoned sensibly and to the satisfaction of most residents. After several years, this set-up was changed and zoning is now under more direct county rule and is administered from Fort Myers. There is still a local committee to advise the county board on Beach matters.

Over the years, zoning has been adhered to willingly by most Beach people. Most of the friction has been caused by absentee property owners who want zone changes that may be good for themselves but not for the islands as a whole. Perhaps the manner of handling zoning is due for a change, soon