

The Four-Day Work Week:

Would It Work for Your City?

by Mandy Stark



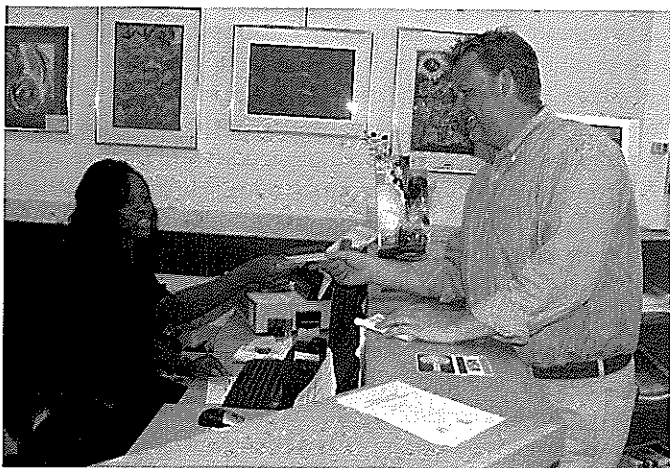
Record-breaking fuel and food prices. Environmental concerns. Tightened budgets. Economic woes. As the country realizes that things are not the same as they were before, and may never be again, ideas that once didn't seem feasible now are making a comeback.

One of those ideas is a four-day work week – a potential solution that could save money, energy and resources. Already adopted by some agencies of the State of Florida, a four-day work week is being considered or practiced across the country.

For example, the State of Utah recently became the first to institute a mandatory four-day work week for its employees. It is estimated that Utah can save \$3 million per year by shutting down 1,000 buildings every Friday.

Local governments in Florida also have implemented or are experimenting with the four-day work week. The City of Coconut Creek adopted a four-day, 10-hour work week in October 2005 as a way to provide better customer service to residents.

Coconut Creek City Manager David Rivera said that being open two extra hours allows residents to take care of business before or after work, which most likely wasn't possible with shorter hours five days a week.



Employees also have experienced the benefit of the four-day work week.

"What we found out is that we do have an 86-percent approval rate on the change, and it became a boon to employees as well as the city because employees are doing personal errands on Fridays as opposed to during the week," Rivera said.

"Our employees are only driving to work for four days instead of five," he said. "They're saving on gas and day care, and some of our employees are taking that extra day to go back to school."

Rivera said that it is important to see what works for a community when altering working hours.

"Right now we're happy with the situation," he said. "We're just trying to do the right thing for our community."

The City of Margate is scheduled to convert to a four-day, 10-hour work schedule on September 29. City Hall and all departmental administrative office hours will be from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The police, fire/rescue, water and wastewater treatment departments still will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

City leaders feel that the new schedule will be beneficial to the residents and city employees.

"With the economic times in such sad shape, giving our employees one day without having to use gas to get back and forth to work is a plus," Margate Mayor Pam Donovan said. "It allows for not having to take time off work for doctor appointments and such because they can do that on Friday and have an enjoyable weekend, so they are refreshed when they come back to work to serve the community."

Frank Porcella, Margate's city manager, said that the change will allow the city to save on fuel, utilities and uniform costs, and hopefully will boost employee morale.

Brenda Irvine assists Russ Wilson, a Coconut Creek resident, as he pays his water bill at 5:30 p.m. "It is extremely convenient for me to pay my bills during this time because it is on my way home," stated Wilson.

"Since raises don't seem to be in the future, hopefully having an extra day of the week will be a plus for our employees," he said. "If we see that this schedule isn't working out, we're flexible and could always go back to the way it was."

Small-business columnist Jerry Osteryoung, director of outreach for Florida State University's Jim Moran Institute for Global Entrepreneurship, likes the idea of a four-day work week because of the positive benefits all the way around.

"The workers I've talked to who are on the four-day work week love it," he said. "It's the way we need to go — it's today's world."

"It's easier for a city or local government to change to that schedule than businesses . . . there's not a competition for city services," Osteryoung said. "You can't go anywhere else. Mayors should think of it that way — they have an advantage."

"Cities can be ahead of the curve by demonstrating that this is the way we need to move," he said.

One suggestion Osteryoung proposed is being proactive when facing challenges such as parents being stuck with finding early and late child care.

"Maybe the city could call child-care facilities to ask them to consider opening early and/or offering late pick-up," he said. "There are ways to smooth this transition and to overcome obstacles."

The City of Bradenton considers the four-day work week a way to save energy and even benefit residents because on Fridays, city employees will not be on the roads during peak traffic times.

Bradenton Public Information Officer Tim McCann said that in the midst of a hiring freeze and tightened budgets, the four-day work week is a perk for all.

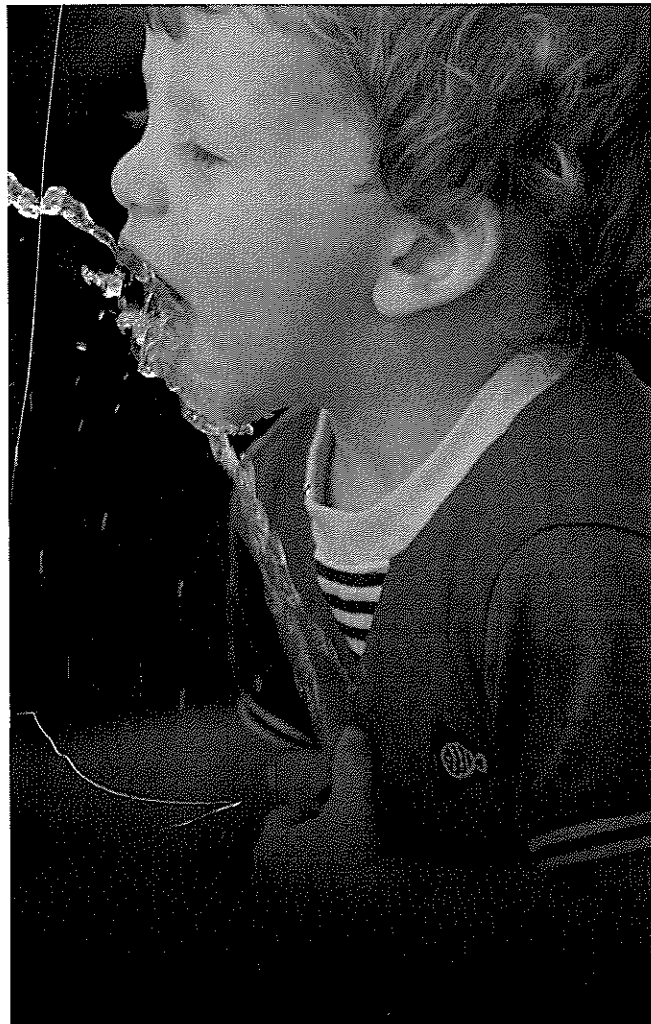
"Most employees were very much in favor, and I know the people here in City Hall are pleased," he said. "I've heard no complaints from the public."

The North Miami City Council also has approved a four-day, 10-hour work week. The city's administrative offices will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and will be closed on Fridays. In addition to anticipated cost savings, the new schedule is part of the city's "Green North Miami" initiatives, which aim to reduce North Miami's carbon emissions and the level of energy consumption incrementally over the next decade.

North Miami Mayor Kevin A. Burns is looking forward to positive results from the new hours.

"We are working to make North Miami's government services more accessible and more efficient, with less of an impact on our environment," he said. "We anticipate saving money in operational costs, but this is also part of our long-term plan to reduce fuel consumption and carbon emissions and increase energy-efficiency in our city operations."

Mandy Stark is an advertising and publications specialist for the Florida League of Cities.



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