

# Economic incentive proposed

## Commissioners in disagreement

BY DAVE BERMAN  
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TITUSVILLE — Brevard County Commission Chairman Robin Fisher wants to create a special economic development fund to be used within his North Brevard District 1, where thousands of residents are reeling from job losses resulting from the end of the space shuttle program.

Fisher's proposal would dedicate certain property taxes generated within his district toward financial incentives for companies seeking to add jobs in North Brevard.

But District 3 Commissioner Trudie Infantini is against the plan, saying it is unfair to taxpayers in other parts of Brevard County.

"It's not considering the thoughts of others, and it's inequitable," Infantini said. "It's an injustice."

Fisher proposes creating the North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone, encompassing most of his commission district, including Titusville and smaller communities to the north and south. Under his plan, county property tax revenue generated by new commercial and residential construction within that zone during the next five years would be used for economic development incentives to help attract jobs to that area. After that, funding would come from tax revenue tied to increases in property tax values within the zone.

See INCENTIVE, 2A

# Economic incentive on Tuesday's agenda

## Two county commissioners don't see eye to eye on plan

### INCENTIVE, from 1A

An ordinance to create the program will come up for discussion at the County Commission's meeting Tuesday. The commission will consider whether to schedule a public hearing on the plan. A final vote could come as early as May 24.

If approved, it would be the first program of its kind in Brevard County, Fisher said, calling it "out-of-the-box thinking."

"We have some very unique circumstances going on in District 1," said Fisher, who estimates the end of the shuttle program will directly or indirectly result in 5,700 people in his district losing their jobs. "My whole goal is to try to position North Brevard to be in a position to give incentives" to companies wanting to create jobs in North Brevard.

"It's all about jobs to me," Fisher said. "If North Brevard does well, the rest of the county does well. This is not a tax increase, and nobody will be paying any more taxes."

Titusville Economic Development Director Matt Chesnut calls Fisher's proposal "a tremendous step in the right direction."

"It looks like a viable plan," said Chesnut, adding that finding funding for economic development incentives traditionally has been a hurdle to attracting companies and jobs to the area.

But Infantini said she is concerned property tax revenue that otherwise would go into the county general fund to support a variety of programs instead would be used for a specific purpose within a section of the county under Fisher's proposal.

Assistant County Manager Stockton Whitten said that, while Fisher's program would be new to Brevard, the concept is not new.

"We have tax increment districts around the county," Whitten said, typically operated as redevelopment agencies.

Fisher noted there are two or more such agencies in each of the five Brevard County Commission districts.

During the current fiscal year, a total of \$4.1 million is designated for specific uses through 19 special redevelopment agency programs within the county, Fisher said. Of that total, he said, his District 1 gets the least benefit from those redevelopment agency funds — \$280,559, or about 7 percent.

Fisher added that a large portion of the property in his district is government land and tax-exempt, further putting North Brevard at a disadvantage.

Infantini, though, argues that if there are inequities in the redevelopment agency funding, she would support getting rid of them.

The key to economic development, Infantini said, is cutting taxes, not Fisher's plan.

District 2 Commissioner Chuck Nelson said creating jobs is important, and he would be willing to consider Fisher's proposal.

"I think it's an interesting concept," Nelson said. "I think it's worth listening to. We are in a difficult time. We need to look at diversification of industry in Brevard County."

District 5 Commissioner Andy Anderson said he would support scheduling a public hearing on the issue, but is undecided on whether he will support the proposal itself to create the North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone.

"I have to hear details of the proposal, and find out if there is a true benefit or a negative impact, and go from there," Anderson said.

Don Forward, who leads the Titusville Patriots Tea Party group, said he supports efforts to bring business to the area, but is concerned by Fisher's approach because he believes it puts too much government in the way of businesses.

The North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone would include the areas of Brevard County Commission District 1 north of State Road 528. It would exclude Cocoa and two community redevelopment agency districts within Titusville — one downtown, the other in the Miracle City Mall area. ■

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Fisher



Infantini

### District 1 construction

Assistant Brevard County Manager Stockton Whitten said initial estimates show that the taxable value of new construction in North Brevard's District 1 was about \$19.48 million in 2010.

If all this property paid the full county general fund tax rate for 2010 of a little more than \$4.27 per \$1,000 of assessed value, the total generated from this new construction in the district would have been about \$83,000.

### What's next

- The Brevard County Commission will discuss Tuesday whether to schedule a public hearing on Brevard County Commission Chairman Robin Fisher's proposal to create a North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone. The meeting starts at 9 a.m. at the Government Center Commission Room, Building C, 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera. Fisher's proposal is scheduled for discussion at 10 a.m. The public can comment when the item comes up Tuesday.
- A public hearing and final vote could occur as early as May 24.