

Strategy: Entice talent to stay put

County weighs post-shuttle enterprise zones near KSC

BY RICK NEALE
FLORIDA TODAY

05-11-11

VIERA — A future economic-development tax zone across North Brevard may focus on commercial corridors like U.S. 1 and State Road 50, rather than rural residential areas.

That strategic shift emerged during Tuesday's Brevard County Commission meeting. Chairman Robin Fisher is championing creation of an enterprise zone across his District 1 to try to prevent a job exodus after the shuttle program retires.

Fisher said county unemployment stands at 11.1 percent, and the majority of Kennedy Space Center layoffs still loom — which could drain \$100 million from North Brevard's struggling economy.

"We need jobs in the northern area of the county in a very, very bad way. And we all know that the way you get the jobs is you've got to create incentives," he said.

After more than two hours of discussion, commissioners decided to schedule a public hearing on the tax-zone proposal.

This meeting may occur May 24, County Manager Howard Tipton said, but no date has been set. The vote was 4-1, with Commissioner Trudie Infantini voting no.



"We need jobs in the northern area of the county in a very, very bad way."

— Robin Fisher,
chairman,
Brevard County
Commission

As proposed, the zone would capture 90 percent of incremental property-tax increases from new construction for five years to promote economic development. From October 2016 onward, the zone would capture 90 percent of incremental increases from all eligible properties in the zone.

Today, Fisher said more than 50 percent of the District 1 landmass is exempt from property taxes.

"A bedroom community without an industrial base to help support the population is always going to be on the edge of failure," said Commissioner Chuck Nelson, referring to Titusville. "And it's always going to be based on how well—

See ENTERPRISE, 3A

County weighs enterprise zones

ENTERPRISE, from 1A

or how bad — the space center is doing."

Nelson and Commissioner Mary Bolin said they prefer designating the enterprise zone along commercial corridors. Tuesday's proposal earmarked most lands north of State Road 528.

Fisher said target corridors could include U.S. 1; State Roads 46, 50 and 407; Garden Street; and the Interstate 95 Exit 5A vicinity.

Infantini said South Brevard taxpayers oppose the plan, and they would be forced to subsidize infrastructure within the tax zone. She also criticized the

Merritt Island Redevelopment Agency's acquisition of Blue Crab Cove as a poor example that might be repeated.

Officials from the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast and Parrish Medical Center testified in favor of the enterprise zone, joining city leaders from Cocoa, West Melbourne and Titusville.

"On top of a historically bad economy, we're facing thousands of layoffs. Many of whom are residents of North Brevard," Titusville Vice Mayor Walt Johnson said.

However, other residents denounced the tax zone as a big-government slush fund that could cannibalize companies from elsewhere along the Space Coast.

Palm Bay resident Keith Rigler said the county already has an EDC and 19 community redevelopment agencies — and he likened the North Brevard zone with "Taxachusetts."

And Melbourne Beach resident Pat Pasley questioned whether Fisher would personally benefit because of his real-estate holdings.

Commissioner Andy Anderson said he wants to hear more public-hearing testimony before making a decision. ■

Contact Neale at 321-242-3638
or meale@floridatoday.com.