

OPINIONS

Our Views

Going after jobs

Fisher's economic development zone for North Brevard makes good sense

The waves of layoffs keep coming at Kennedy Space Center as the shuttle program nears its end with an impact rumbling like a temblor through the Space Coast.

No place is getting shaken harder than Titusville because so many shuttle workers call the community home and so many businesses in and around the city rely on NASA paychecks to survive.

The need to grow jobs there is particularly acute and why a new proposal aimed at boosting employment by County Commissioner Robin Fisher, who represents the city and North Brevard, makes sense.

Fisher wants to create a North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone that would include Titusville and communities north and south of the city.

The entity would collect 90 percent of county property tax revenue generated by new commercial and residential construction within that zone during the next five years, and keep it in the zone to create incentive packages to help attract jobs.

The same would happen starting in October 2016, with 90 percent of incremental tax increases from all eligible properties in the zone collected and retained there for economic development.

Fisher calls it "out-of-the-box thinking" necessitated by the dire predicament, citing estimates post-shuttle layoffs still to come could drain \$100 million from North Brevard's already battered economy.

He also has doused one potential political fire in correctly noting the plan would not be a tax increase.

Meanwhile, Titusville economic development director Matt Chesnut sees it as a step in the right direction, saying a lack of incentive funds has been a roadblock to attracting new firms.

Fisher's fellow commissioners appear to be warming to the idea too, with the board voting 4-1 Tuesday to move forward with a public hearing, giving citizens a chance to offer their thoughts.

Sound ideas were offered during the commission's discussion



Fisher

as U.S. 1 and State Roads 46, 50 and 407.

Others who spoke in favor of the proposal were city leaders from Titusville, Cocoa and West Melbourne, Parrish Medical Center and the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast. That shows growing support.

The zone would be new to the county, but similar ventures have been operating successfully in local cities for years, paying dividends and proving their worth.

They are known as Community Redevelopment Agencies, which use tax-increment financing deals to pay for such things as downtown revitalization.

CRAs are critical to redevelopment of economically depressed areas on the Space Coast.

Melbourne alone has three CRAs while Palm Bay, Rockledge, Cocoa, Merritt Island, Satellite Beach and Titusville, among others, have them as well.

Fisher's idea comes as Titusville officials are expected today to approve a "brownfield designation" for areas at Space Coast Regional Airport.

Brownfields are property that may have real or perceived environmental contamination, and the designation provides assistance and incentives for cleanup and reuse.

It's another smart move because it would allow the city to take advantage of the Florida Redevelopment Act and use tax credits up to \$2,500 for jobs created within the area.

It also cuts further to the truth of Fisher's statement Tuesday that, "We need jobs in the northern area of the county in a very, very, very bad way. And we all know that the way you get the jobs is you've got to create incentives."

Yes, you do, and a North Brevard Economic Development Enterprise Zone has the potential to help do it.

Tuesday, with Commissioners Chuck Nelson and Mary Bolin suggesting the zone be focused along commercial corridors such