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Government 'gone?'

Meanwhile, new tax data released Wednesday show the tax base plunging sharper than previously thought. In other words, commissioners could raise rates and still cut taxes substantially.

Property Appraiser Jim Ford has been told by the Department of Revenue that his staff must consider bank "short sales" of distressed homes and buildings in determining other properties' taxable value, records show. Previously, those were considered "anomaly transactions" and didn't count, even though they represent a quarter of all sales this year.

Commissioner Robin Fisher of Titusville, the most business-savvy of the five, asked Ford to model county tax revenue through 2015 assuming no change in its aggregate tax rate.

The projections show tax cuts so deep that the costs of Brevard's "constitutional offices" — including the sheriff's office, tag offices and the court system — would consume all county property-tax revenue within two years if their spending stayed the same.

One obvious solution to maintain safety and responsiveness to the public: Raise rates, if only high enough to keep the average tax bill flat or slightly lower.

"The only thing I want is to stay revenue neutral," said Fisher, a longtime insurance agent and real estate investor. ■

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