

OPINIONS

Our Views

Tax-rate wrangling

Commissioners argue, we rule on whether proposal's a tax increase

Q uick, what's a 15 percent tip on a \$10 lunch tab?

If you said \$1.50, then congratulations — you also know how to calculate a property tax bill by multiplying the rate times the value. There could be a seat for you on the Brevard County Commission.

Unfortunately, in a political fight over the county's proposed tax rates, neither side has considered both factors or shown their math to prove claims that tax bills will go up or down overall if commissioners raise tax rates.

Their proposed rate increase of 16.5 percent is meant to stabilize revenue for cops, roads, parks and libraries when applied to a 16 percent drop in property values, records show.

We knew you'd want a ruling on this. So we reviewed the arguments and tracked down the data.

On the attack, County Commissioner Trudie Infantini of Melbourne Beach emailed a letter to residents Aug. 2 warning that their property tax rate will rise by 14.5 percent or (elsewhere in the letter) 17.5 percent or 16.6 percent.

"This increase violates the will of the people," Infantini writes.

But that's like saying a 20 percent tip on Wednesday always costs more than a 15 percent tip on Tuesday, regardless of what you order or where.

Infantini acknowledges, at least, that "some with lower property values will actually be paying less." Commissioner Andy Anderson of Palm Bay also refuses to vote for rate increases.

In response, Commission Chairman Robin Fisher of Titusville argues that falling values mean tax cuts for most.

In an Aug. 18 rebuttal letter emailed to residents, Fisher assails Infantini's claims, saying "it is a fact that 88.4 percent of commercial properties and 76.2 percent of residential properties will see a decrease in their property values."

But that's like saying the final tab for a hamburger always costs



Fisher



Infantini

Coming up

The Brevard County Commission's next public budget workshop is at 5:30 p.m. Sept. 13 at the Government Center in Viera.

less than one for a grouper sandwich, whether you tip 10 percent or 30 percent.

What about tax bills overall? Should we hold the majority of commissioners who approved the rate — Fisher, Mary Bolin of Satellite Beach and Chuck Nelson of Merritt Island — accountable for a tax increase or tax decrease?

County data we requested show:

■ Taxes for 2 out of 3 homeowners will drop or stay the same. Taxes for the other one-third will go up.

■ Taxes for 4 out of 5 business properties will drop or stay the same. Taxes for the other one-fifth will go up.

■ Most of those who will pay tax increases, including businesses, won't suffer badly. For just more than half of them, county taxes would cost an additional \$2 or \$3 per month. New construction accounts for 1 out of every 15 properties with higher bills.

Based on legal definitions, county government has proposed a tax decrease because its tax revenue would drop from about \$181 million this year to \$179 million next year.

But for the sake of accountability, we'd characterize the changes this way:

Fisher, Bolin and Nelson passed a tax increase worth complaining about on 12 percent of properties, while the other 88 percent come away with a fair deal, if not a business-friendly tax cut.