

Florida Legislature seeks property tax cuts, incentives

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Florida lawmakers have proposed tax cuts and incentives this year for a handful of property owners.

Many are being sold as economic generators aimed at taking empty houses off the market or keeping small businesses open.

Potential beneficiaries include green builders, married couples, disabled veterans, marina masters and rural property owners.

On the losing side: local governments that face new limits on raising tax dollars to fund services. The projected tax loss is at least \$61 million each year statewide.

That's not a crippling amount of money, but every little bit adds up, said Tim Stanfield, assistant general counsel for the Florida League of Cities.

“We definitely watch every one of them,” he said.

Those who stand to gain the most:

- o Owners of marinas, docks and piers, who could see those properties assessed according to current use instead of the most valuable use.
- o First-time homebuyers could enjoy exemptions of up to \$500,000 for five years.
- o Disabled veterans who were not residents of Florida at the time of entering military service could qualify for a property tax discount.
- o Couples who add a spouse to the title of a homestead property would no longer be vulnerable to automatic increased property assessments in the few

counties where they face such a penalty.

- o Green homeowners would see additional tax incentives for adding solar or wind energy equipment. Wind protections and improvements would also not be counted toward a home's value.

- o Rural landowners could earn additional conservation credits.

Lawmakers need to be careful that the measures aren't too broad, said David Johnson, president of the Florida Association of Property Appraisers and the property appraiser in Seminole County.

“The more you open that up, the more that affects revenues for local governments and schools, too,” Johnson said.

But Rep. Julio Robaina, R-Miami, said local governments could lose more dollars if property owners can't afford to pay their taxes.

“It is very simple,” said Robaina, who is pushing for tax breaks for waterfront properties in the House. “Do you want something or nothing at all? These businesses, if they remain open, they will provide jobs, they will provide sales taxes and other fees and taxes that these cities live off of.”

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