

1565 COALITION / SPECIAL REPORT / 2026

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# Amendment 3

## Property Taxes, Public Services & the Future of St. Johns County

A nonpartisan examination of what would change, what qualifying homeowners would save, what the State projects for County revenue — and what the evidence still cannot tell us.

## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

# Facts first. Assumptions visible. Readers decide.

This report does not tell anyone how to vote. It explains what Amendment 3 would change, what qualifying homeowners would save, what official sources project for local revenue, what those projections do and do not prove, and which questions remain unresolved.

The standard is simple: a documented fact is presented as a fact. A calculation is reproducible from disclosed inputs. A projection is attributed to the institution that produced it. An estimate is labeled with its assumptions. A stakeholder argument is presented as a position, not adopted as the report's conclusion.

## Editorial standard

Primary sources come first: the Florida Constitution, enacted legislation and staff analyses, the Revenue Estimating Conference (EDR), St. Johns County, and the Property Appraiser. Advocacy and research organizations on both sides are used to document the strongest arguments stakeholders make. Every source in the register lists a web address.

**Disclosure of interests.** The research lead owns, directly and through business entities, commercial and investment real estate — including commercial property in St. Johns County — that would be subject to the proposed 5% non-homestead assessment cap. Readers should weigh the analysis with these interests in mind; every calculation can be checked against the cited sources.

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## RESEARCH LEAD

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Justin Tahilramani is a St. Johns County small-business owner, real-estate investor and developer, and founder of the 1565 Coalition. His background includes nearly two decades in the U.S. Army, Army acquisition and contracting work, and service as a St. Johns County Senior Procurement Coordinator in 2022–23. His local work has included land-use, regulatory and small-business issues, including development of The Outpost at Old Moultrie Road.

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## PUBLISHER

### The 1565 Coalition

The 1565 Coalition is an independent St. Johns County civic and small-business organization focused on how county policy, regulation and land-use decisions affect residents and local businesses. For this project the Coalition takes no position on Amendment 3. Its role is to research, disclose assumptions and make evidence understandable.

**Corrections policy.** Material factual errors will be corrected publicly.

READER GUIDE

# How to read this report

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**Reading level.** Technical terms are used when they are the correct terms, and defined the first time they appear. The goal is precision without requiring a background in tax law or public finance.

Evidence labels

|             |                                                              |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| FACT        | Directly supported by a reliable source or public record.    |
| CALCULATION | Math performed from disclosed factual inputs.                |
| PROJECTION  | A future result from an identified model or institution.     |
| ESTIMATE    | An approximation based on stated assumptions.                |
| ANALYSIS    | A conclusion drawn from facts rather than directly observed. |
| POSITION    | An argument attributed to a stakeholder.                     |
| UNKNOWN     | The available evidence does not answer the question yet.     |

Labels appear beside key claims throughout the report.

**Find your own numbers.** Your annual TRIM notice from the Property Appraiser lists your assessed value, exemptions and every millage rate that applies to your property. Page 10 shows how to use them to estimate your own savings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# A real tax cut for qualifying homeowners, and a real revenue gap for local government

Amendment 3 is broader than a larger homestead exemption. It would raise the non-school homestead exemption to as much as \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, cut the annual assessment-growth cap on most non-homestead property from 10% to 5%, phase in the larger exemption more slowly for newer Florida residents, limit what counties and cities may spend property-tax revenue on, and require future laws allowing local governments to expand exemptions further. <sup>[1,2]</sup>

Both sides of the ledger

|                                                                   | FY2028                     | FY2032   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| <b>PROJECTION</b> EDR: County Commission revenue reduction        | \$68.3M                    | \$191.6M |
| <b>CALCULATION</b> Same amount per homestead parcel (upper bound) | ~\$700                     | ~\$1,955 |
| <b>FACT</b> County example: one homestead's annual bill           | \$3,500 → ~\$2,100 in 2028 |          |

Per-parcel figure divides the EDR reduction by 98,009 homestead parcels. It overstates the homestead share because part of the reduction comes from the 5% cap on non-homestead property. <sup>[3,6,16]</sup>

What this report can establish

The amendment's legal mechanics; the official state model; the St. Johns County tax base and budget; savings for typical homesteads; the rules that would govern any County response; the strongest documented arguments on both sides; and the questions that remain open.

“A revenue projection is not a budget, and a tax cut is not a rounding error.”

The State estimates the tax-base effect. Homeowners receive real savings. Local elected officials still decide the response.

Five findings

- 1 CALCULATION** A qualifying homestead saves about \$99 per mill of non-school tax in 2027 and up to about \$199 per mill from 2028. The dollar benefit stops growing at \$250,000 of assessed value.
- 2 PROJECTION** EDR projects the County's reduction at roughly 15–16% of property-tax revenue in FY2028, rising to an estimated 32–39% by FY2032 depending on baseline growth.
- 3 FACT** About 12% of current County property-tax spending goes to purposes the amendment does not expressly list.
- 4 ANALYSIS** The County's preparation so far is mostly one-time money: it can bridge, not replace, a recurring gap.
- 5 UNKNOWN** Whether the gap is closed by cuts, other revenue, or higher millage on a smaller base is a future political choice, not a projection.

Primary sources: [1] Florida Department of State; [2] CS/HJR 1-F and House staff analysis; [3] Florida EDR; [6] Property Appraiser; [16] County town hall, Sept. 29, 2026.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY / BY THE NUMBERS

\$426M

FY2027 County property-tax revenue baseline  
County-published figure [4]

\$63.1B

2026 preliminary taxable value  
Property Appraiser [6]

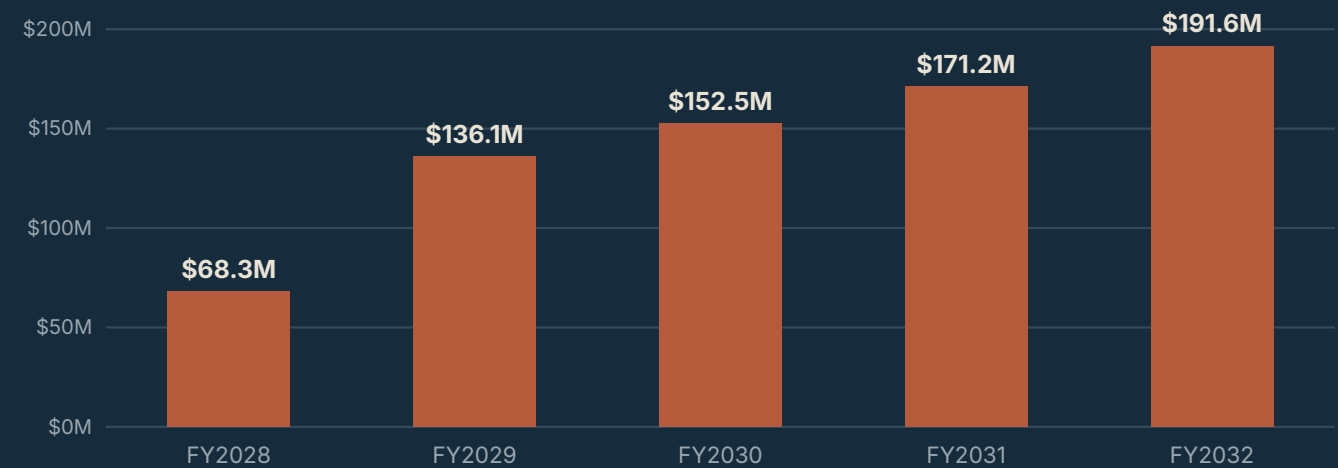
98,009

homesteaded residential parcels, out of 183,425 on the roll  
Property Appraiser [6]

\$199

maximum annual homestead savings per mill of non-school  
tax, from 2028  
Calculation from CS/HJR 1-F exemption schedule [2]

EDR-modeled County Commission property-tax reduction if  
Amendment 3 passes



**PROJECTION** EDR estimates, July 10, 2026 Revenue Estimating Conference. Exact values on page 14. Cumulative FY2028–FY2032: **\$719.6M** (calculation).

## 01 / THE DECISION

# What voters are being asked to decide

Florida voters will consider Amendment 3 at the November 3, 2026 General Election. Constitutional amendments require at least 60% approval from voters who vote on the amendment. <sup>[1,10]</sup>

## BALLOT TITLE (AS REVISED)

### Increased Homestead Exemption; Lower Cap on Increases in Non-Homestead Property Assessments

The Legislature placed the proposal on the ballot through CS/HJR 1-F in a June 2026 special session. If approved, the changes take effect January 1, 2027. <sup>[2]</sup>

**FACT** The ballot language was rewritten by court order. On August 4, 2026, a Leon County circuit judge ruled the original title, "Save Our Homes From Excessive Property Taxes," and parts of the summary were misleading, describing the title as "akin to a political slogan." The amendment stayed on the ballot; the Attorney General filed revised, neutral language on August 14. <sup>[17,18]</sup>

## Implementation timeline

- **2026**  
Voters decide the amendment.
- **Jan. 1, 2027**  
Non-school homestead exemption rises to as much as \$150,000. Non-homestead cap falls to 5%. Spending limits on property-tax revenue begin.
- **2028**  
Maximum non-school homestead exemption rises to \$250,000.
- **2029+**  
The \$250,000 maximum is indexed to inflation each year.
- **Newer residents**  
Owners who were not permanent Florida residents on Dec. 31, 2026 start at a \$50,000 exemption and receive the larger amount beginning in their fifth year.
- **Future law**  
The Legislature must create a uniform procedure letting counties and cities raise the exemption as high as full assessed value. EDR says the fiscal effect is unknown.

## 01 / THE DECISION

# Five changes that matter locally

## 01 Larger non-school homestead exemption

Replaces today's second \$25,000-band exemption (now \$26,411) with an exemption on the first \$150,000 of assessed value in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, indexed to inflation from 2029. The existing \$25,000 exemption still applies to school taxes. <sup>[2,15]</sup>

## 02 Lower non-homestead assessment cap

The annual cap on increases in assessed value falls from 10% to 5% for non-homestead residential and commercial property, for all levies except school taxes. This affects rentals, second homes and businesses when market values rise faster than 5%. <sup>[2]</sup>

## 03 Slower schedule for newer residents

Owners not permanently resident on Dec. 31, 2026 receive a \$50,000 non-school exemption (inflation-indexed from 2028) for four years and the full larger exemption beginning January 1 of the fifth year. <sup>[2,15]</sup>

## 04 Limits on what property-tax revenue may fund

Counties and cities could spend property-tax revenue only on public safety, education and schools, infrastructure, natural resources, bond debt service, employee retirement benefits, and operations and administration. <sup>[2,18]</sup>

## 05 Future local exemption authority

Future state law must let counties and cities raise the exemption as high as full assessed value; special districts could do so by referendum. EDR does not quantify this. <sup>[2,3]</sup>

**Why change 04 matters.** It shapes the County's options: services outside the list could no longer be funded with property tax, however much revenue remains.

**Plain English:** The amendment changes *exemptions*, an *assessment cap* and *how revenue may be used*. An exemption subtracts value before tax is calculated. An assessment cap limits how quickly the value used for tax purposes may rise. A use restriction limits what the money can pay for.

01 / THE DECISION

# Two provisions that deserve closer attention

## The spending limit

**FACT** The enumerated purposes are: public safety (including law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services), education and schools, infrastructure (roads, bridges, stormwater), natural resources and flood control, bond debt service, employee retirement obligations, and operations and administration, including county officers. <sup>[2]</sup>

**ANALYSIS** Most of what St. Johns County spends property tax on today fits that list. Three categories are not expressly named: parks and libraries (7%), health and human services (3%) and economic development (2%). Together that is about 12% of the County’s property-tax allocation, or roughly **\$51M** of the FY2027 baseline (calculation). <sup>[4]</sup>

**UNKNOWN** Whether “operations and administration” or “natural resources” would cover some of those services has not been decided by any court or implementing law.

## The newer-resident schedule

**FACT** A buyer who moves to Florida in 2027 would receive a \$50,000 non-school exemption for four years. A neighbor in an identical house who was a resident on Dec. 31, 2026 would receive \$150,000–\$250,000 immediately. <sup>[2,15]</sup>

| ASSESSED \$400K<br>HOMESTEAD        | EXEMPT (NON-SCHOOL) | TAXABLE    |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Resident on Dec.<br>31, 2026 (2028) | \$250,000           | \$150,000  |
| Moved in 2027<br>(years 1–4)        | ~\$50,000           | ~\$350,000 |

**POSITION** Florida TaxWatch argues the five-year wait raises equal-protection concerns and may conflict with prior Florida Supreme Court rulings on residency-based tax distinctions. <sup>[13]</sup>

**UNKNOWN** No court has ruled on this provision. A successful challenge could change who receives the larger exemption, and therefore the fiscal estimates.

**Why it matters locally.** St. Johns grew 26.7% from 2020 to 2025. <sup>[9]</sup> In a county where a large share of buyers come from out of state, the newer-resident rule affects many households, and EDR says its estimate of that group rests on assumptions, because there is no official forecast of in-migrants. <sup>[3]</sup>

02 / HOW PROPERTY TAXES WORK

# Five numbers build a property-tax bill

|                                                             |                                                                            |                                                 |                                                             |                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                                                           | 2                                                                          | 3                                               | 4                                                           | 5                                                             |
| <b>Market value</b>                                         | <b>Assessed value</b>                                                      | <b>Taxable value</b>                            | <b>Millage</b>                                              | <b>Tax bill</b>                                               |
| The Property Appraiser's estimate of value as of January 1. | Market value after limits such as Save Our Homes or the non-homestead cap. | Assessed value after exemptions are subtracted. | The tax rate. One mill is \$1 per \$1,000 of taxable value. | Taxable value × millage, plus any non-ad valorem assessments. |

Homestead exemptions: today vs. Amendment 3

| EXEMPTION                   | 2026     | 2027      | 2028      |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Applies to school taxes     | \$25,000 | \$25,000  | \$25,000  |
| Applies to non-school taxes | \$51,411 | \$150,000 | \$250,000 |

2026 non-school total is the first \$25,000 plus the second exemption (\$26,411), which applies to assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000. Under the amendment, the non-school exemption covers the first \$150,000 or \$250,000 of assessed value.<sup>[7,15]</sup>

Homesteaded property also keeps the Save Our Homes limit, which caps annual assessed-value growth at the lower of 3% or inflation.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Important distinction:** A larger exemption does not lower the tax rate. It lowers the amount of value to which the non-school rate is applied. If a government later raises its rate, every taxpayer's remaining taxable value is taxed at that higher rate.

**School taxes are unchanged.** The larger exemption and the 5% cap both exclude school-district levies. A homestead's school tax bill would be calculated the same way it is today.<sup>[2]</sup>

02 / WHAT A HOMESTEAD WOULD SAVE

# What a qualifying homeowner would actually save

**CALCULATION** Savings depend on assessed value (not market value) and on the combined non-school millage that applies to the property. Because millage differs by location, the clearest way to show savings is **per mill**: multiply by the total non-school millage on your bill.

| ASSESSED VALUE | NON-SCHOOL TAXABLE TODAY | 2027      | 2028      |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| \$200,000      | \$148,589                | \$50,000  | \$0       |
| \$350,000      | \$298,589                | \$200,000 | \$100,000 |
| \$600,000      | \$548,589                | \$450,000 | \$350,000 |

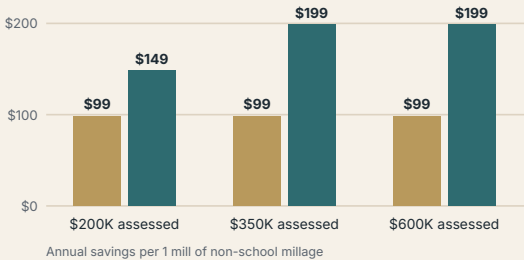
Holds assessed value constant for comparison. In practice Save Our Homes lets it rise up to 3% a year.

### Worked example

**CALCULATION** A homestead assessed at \$350,000, in an area with 6 mills of combined non-school tax, would save about **\$592 in 2027** ( $98,589 \times 6 \div 1,000$ ) and **\$1,192 a year from 2028**, if millage stayed the same.

### The County's own examples

**FACT** At its Sept. 29 town hall, the County Administrator said a homeowner paying \$3,400 a year could pay about \$2,700 in 2027, and one paying \$3,500 could pay about \$2,100 in 2028.<sup>[16]</sup>



- 2027 (\$150K exemption)
- 2028 (\$250K exemption)

**ANALYSIS** **The dollar benefit is capped.** Every homestead assessed at \$250,000 or more saves the same dollar amount per mill from 2028. A \$600,000 home and a \$1.2M home save the same. Lower-value homesteads save less in dollars but can see their non-school tax eliminated entirely.

**ANALYSIS** **The key condition: "if millage stays the same."** These savings assume local rates do not rise to offset lost revenue. If a government raises its rate, part of each homestead's savings is given back, and non-homestead owners pay more. Page 18 explains the rules that would govern a rate increase.

Calculations use the exemption schedule in CS/HJR 1-F [2] and the 2026 St. Johns homestead exemption of \$51,411 [7]. Statewide, Florida TaxWatch estimates average homeowner savings of \$1,035 in 2027 and \$2,085 in 2028 [13].

## 03 / ST. JOHNS COUNTY

# A fast-growing county with a large property-tax base

346,328

July 2025 population estimate

+26.7%

growth from the April 2020 estimates base

22.5%

population age 65 or older

Growth works in both directions. New construction and rising values can expand the tax base. The same growth increases demand for roads, public safety, utilities, parks, libraries, drainage and public facilities.

That is why a local Amendment 3 analysis cannot stop at a static “revenue loss” number. A serious model also tracks new taxable value, population growth, service demand, capital commitments, restricted revenues and future policy choices.

**ANALYSIS** The 22.5% of residents who are 65 or older matter to both sides: many are long-time homesteaders on fixed incomes who would benefit from the larger exemption, and many rely heavily on public safety and emergency medical services.

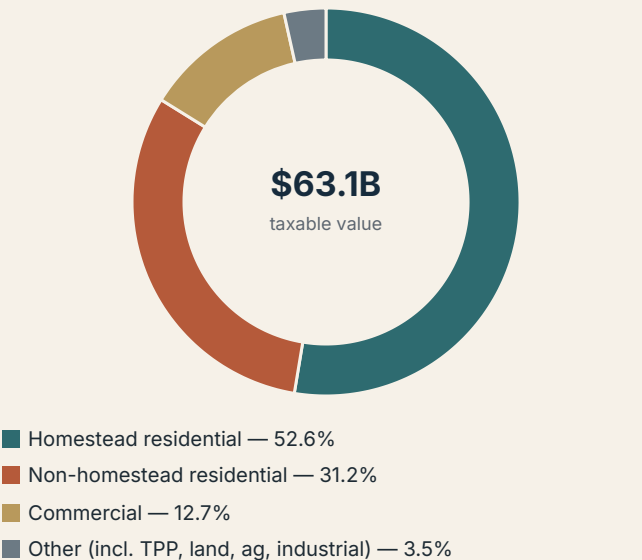
## “The denominator matters.”

**CALCULATION** A \$68.3M reduction is about 16% of the County's FY2027 property-tax revenue (\$426M), about 5% of the \$1.46B operating budget, and about 3.5% of the \$1.94B total budget including carryforward. Only the first comparison reflects money that is actually flexible. <sup>[4,5,22]</sup>

**Budget structure.** The County's FY2027 budget totals \$1.94B, including more than \$482M of capital carryforward (money tied to projects approved in earlier years). The operating budget, excluding carryforward, is about \$1.46B. <sup>[5,22]</sup>

03 / ST. JOHNS COUNTY

# What the 2026 preliminary property roll looks like



2026 preliminary taxable value. "Other" is the remainder needed to reconcile the three named categories to the \$63.1B total. <sup>[6]</sup>

| CATEGORY                  | PARCELS | TAXABLE VALUE | SHARE |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| All property              | 183,425 | \$63.1B       | 100%  |
| Homesteaded residential   | 98,009  | \$33.2B       | 52.6% |
| Non-homestead residential | 54,360  | \$19.7B       | 31.2% |
| Commercial                | 12,844  | \$8.0B        | 12.7% |

### Why the mix matters

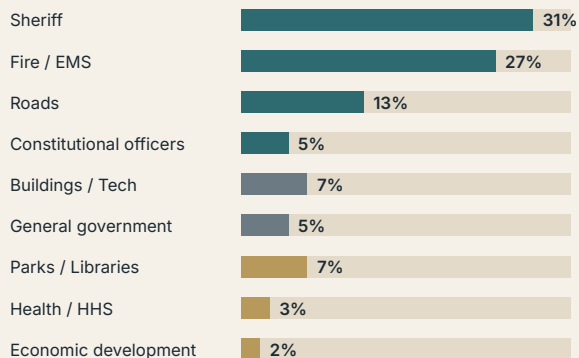
**ANALYSIS** About 53% of taxable value is homestead, which receives the larger exemption. About 44% is non-homestead residential or commercial, which receives only the 5% cap. If local governments raise millage to replace lost revenue, that 44% would pay the higher rate on value that was not exempted.

**Who pays today vs. tomorrow.** Homestead property is 53% of taxable value now. Under a \$250,000 exemption, a much larger share of homestead value would leave the non-school base, so non-homestead owners would carry a larger share of whatever non-school levy remains. That is the mechanism behind the "tax shift" argument on page 17.

Source: [6] St. Johns County Property Appraiser, 2026 Preliminary DOR Submission Fact Sheet. Shares are calculations.

## 03 / ST. JOHNS COUNTY

# Where the County says property-tax dollars go



- Expressly listed in the amendment
- Likely covered by "operations and administration"
- Not expressly listed — about 12% (~\$51M)

County-published FY2027 allocation of property-tax dollars. <sup>[4]</sup>  
 Classification against the amendment's list is this report's analysis.

Public safety is the largest published use: 31% for the Sheriff's Office and 27% for Fire Rescue & Emergency Services — 58% combined.

**These are not projected cuts.** The allocation describes today's use of property-tax dollars. EDR's model does not determine which services, if any, would be reduced.

## Restricted money is not the same as unrestricted money

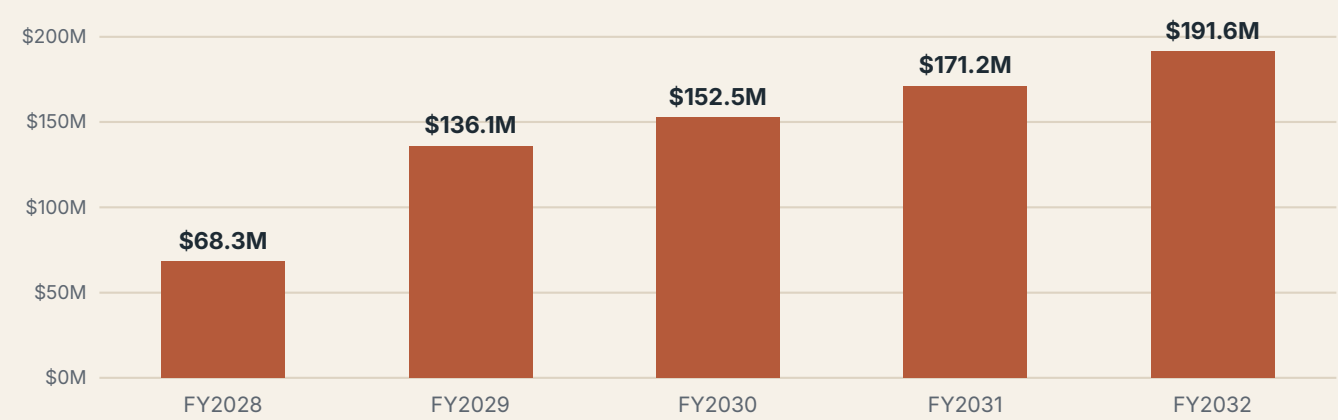
Florida local governments have many revenue streams that may be spent only on certain purposes — transportation, tourism, utilities, impact-fee projects, assessments or debt service. A new \$10M transportation source does not automatically become \$10M for the Sheriff's Office.

But restricted revenue can still matter. If it lawfully pays costs that otherwise would have used flexible property-tax revenue, it frees flexible capacity. That must be shown from actual fund accounting to avoid double counting.

**ANALYSIS** The amendment would reverse the question for parks, libraries and similar services: they may need non-property-tax funding sources even if total property-tax revenue were fully replaced.

04 / THE STATE MODEL

# EDR projects a growing reduction in the County’s non-school property-tax revenue



How large is the reduction, relative to revenue?

| BASELINE GROWTH ASSUMED  | FY2028 | FY2030 | FY2032 |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| 3% a year                | 15.6%  | 32.8%  | 38.8%  |
| 5% a year                | 15.3%  | 30.9%  | 35.2%  |
| 7% a year                | 15.0%  | 29.2%  | 32.1%  |
| Fixed at FY2027 (\$426M) | 16.0%  | 35.8%  | 45.0%  |

**ESTIMATE** Each year’s EDR reduction ÷ the \$426M FY2027 baseline grown at the stated rate. A fixed baseline (last row) overstates later-year shares because the tax base keeps growing.

What EDR models

EDR grows property values using state forecasts, applies Save Our Homes to homesteads, substitutes the amendment’s exemption schedule, compares a 10% vs. 5% cap for non-homestead property, and applies relevant non-school millage rates to the resulting taxable-value differences.<sup>[3]</sup>

What EDR does not decide

Future County millage, spending, fees, reserve use, capital deferrals, service redesign, dedicated revenues or state aid. Those are separate policy and budget decisions.

Exact BOCC EDR estimates, FY2028–FY2032: \$68,265,055; \$136,081,441; \$152,492,701; \$171,151,761; \$191,611,200. Cumulative: \$719,602,158 (calculation). [3]

## 04 / THE STATE MODEL

# The model is detailed — and still has important limits

## Four limitations to keep in view

- 1 **UNKNOWN** The future procedure allowing counties and cities to raise the exemption as high as full assessed value depends on later legislation. EDR labels that effect **unknown**.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 2 **ESTIMATE** The model must assume how many new Florida residents receive the lower exemption first. EDR notes there is no official forecast of in-migrants.<sup>[3]</sup>
- 3 **UNKNOWN** The model applies current millage. It does not model how local governments respond, which is the largest driver of what taxpayers actually pay.
- 4 The estimates are conditional. If the amendment fails, the modeled impact is zero. If it passes, actual values, millage, growth, legal challenges and implementation can differ from the model.

## Other governments inside St. Johns County

EDR separately estimates effects for independent special districts and the two cities. They are distinct legal entities; their numbers are not the County Commission's budget impact.

|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Special districts     | \$3.85M |
| City of St. Augustine | \$3.19M |
| St. Augustine Beach   | \$0.70M |

**PROJECTION** FY2028 modeled reductions.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Good practice:** distinguish the County *geography* from the County *government*. School, city and special-district finances are separate. The School District is outside the new exemption and the 5% cap entirely.

**Statewide context.** The Revenue Estimating Conference puts the statewide local revenue reduction at about \$4.96B in FY2027–28 and \$8.78B in FY2028–29, about \$11.9B a year once fully in effect.<sup>[20]</sup>

## 05 / SUPPORTERS' STRONGEST CASE

# The argument for larger property-tax relief

## POSITION

Supporters argue that local property-tax collections have grown far faster than homeowners' ability to pay, that the existing system lets local spending ratchet upward with home values, and that permanent constitutional relief is the only reliable check.

### The case, in its strongest form

**Collections have outrun the need.** The Governor notes statewide property-tax revenue nearly doubled in seven years, from about \$32B to \$60B, and is projected to reach \$83B by 2032.<sup>[11]</sup>

**Homeowners pay tax on gains they have not realized.** Rising values raise bills even when income does not. Relief matters most to long-time owners and retirees on fixed incomes — 22.5% of St. Johns residents are 65 or older.<sup>[9]</sup>

**Relief is not limited to homesteads.** The 5% cap slows assessment growth for rentals, second homes and businesses — which can help small businesses and, depending on market conditions, tenants.<sup>[2]</sup>

**A revenue loss is not a service cut.** Governments can reprioritize, use restricted revenues, reserves and fees, and grow into the gap as the tax base expands.

## “Tax relief is a real benefit to the taxpayer receiving it.”

For a typical St. Johns homestead, the benefit is roughly \$600–\$1,400 a year, according to the County's own examples and this report's calculations.<sup>[16]</sup>

### What the evidence supports

**FACT** Qualifying homeowners receive direct non-school tax relief. At constant millage, savings are substantial and permanent, and indexed to inflation from 2029.<sup>[2]</sup>

**ANALYSIS** The dollar benefit is capped at \$250,000 of assessed value, so the largest homes do not receive proportionally larger dollar savings (page 10).

**FACT** The 2026 law (CS/SB 4-F) tightens the vote needed to raise millage, making it harder to undo relief through rate increases.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Questions the supporting case still has to answer

Which services would be funded differently, and by whom? Is the newer-resident schedule fair, and will it survive a court challenge? Does relief for current homeowners shift cost to renters, businesses and future buyers?

## 05 / OPPONENTS' STRONGEST CASE

# The argument that relief becomes a tax or service shift

## POSITION

Opponents argue that cutting one major local revenue source does not remove the cost of public services. If services continue, the burden moves to other taxes, fees, renters, businesses and newer residents — or services shrink.

### The case, in its strongest form

**It is a shift, not a cut.** Florida TaxWatch — which agrees that “significant relief is warranted” — recommends a no vote, arguing that exemptions benefiting only some properties “are not really tax cuts as much as tax shifts.”<sup>[13]</sup> The Florida League of Cities, which opposes the amendment, makes the same “tax shift” argument.<sup>[12]</sup>

**It widens existing inequities.** Save Our Homes already favors long-time owners over newer buyers. A larger exemption plus a five-year wait for newcomers widens that gap.<sup>[13,14]</sup>

**No replacement funding.** The amendment gives local governments no state funding or direction for closing the gap.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Distortion.** The Tax Foundation warns non-homestead property could see large increases if rates rise, and recommends a levy-growth limit instead.<sup>[14]</sup>

## “A projected revenue loss is not automatically a service cut.”

But it is also not automatically painless. The outcome depends on the policy response.

### What the evidence supports

**PROJECTION** The modeled County revenue reduction is substantial: \$68.3M in FY2028 rising to \$191.6M in FY2032, an estimated 32–39% of revenue by then.<sup>[3]</sup>

**FACT** Property taxes fund high-cost services: 58% of County property-tax dollars go to the Sheriff and Fire Rescue.<sup>[4]</sup>

**FACT** About 12% of the County’s current property-tax spending is not on the amendment’s list of permitted purposes.<sup>[2,4]</sup>

### Questions the opposing case still has to answer

Which services are truly exposed? How much spending can be redesigned or moved lawfully to dedicated sources? How much can growth, reserves or capital timing absorb? Which alternative charges would actually be adopted, rather than merely discussed?

06 / HOW THE COUNTY COULD RESPOND

# The rules that would govern a millage response

**FACT** In June 2026 the Legislature passed CS/SB 4-F (Chapter 2026-240), which applies whether or not Amendment 3 passes. It changes the starting point for local millage limits from a formula based on per-capita personal income growth to the **rolled-back rate**.<sup>[8]</sup>

| VOTE OF THE COUNTY COMMISSION            | MAXIMUM MILLAGE                                    |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Simple majority                          | Rolled-back rate (or prior year's rate, if higher) |
| Two-thirds                               | Up to 110% of the rolled-back rate                 |
| Unanimous (5-member board) or referendum | Above 110%                                         |

The rolled-back rate is the rate that would raise the same property-tax revenue as the prior year, excluding new construction.<sup>[8,23]</sup>

**FACT** The Florida Constitution separately caps county millage at 10 mills for county purposes. The County's FY2026 general-fund rate was proposed at 4.565 mills and adopted slightly lower, so the constitutional cap is not the binding constraint.<sup>[10,24]</sup>

## The open question that matters most

**ANALYSIS** Under the statutory definition, the rolled-back rate is recalculated each year from the prior year's revenue and the current year's taxable value. If an exemption increase shrinks taxable value, the rolled-back rate would rise mechanically — meaning a simple majority could adopt a rate that restores much of the prior year's revenue.<sup>[23]</sup>

**UNKNOWN** Whether exemption-driven value loss is treated this way in practice, and how the Department of Revenue would apply it in 2027, should be confirmed with the County's budget office. It is the single most important open question in this report.

## What full replacement by millage would require

**CALCULATION** Replacing a 15–16% revenue reduction entirely through millage would require a rate about **18–19% higher** ( $1 \div 0.84$ ). Replacing a 32–39% reduction would require a rate about **47–64% higher**, paid on the smaller remaining base.

**ANALYSIS** **Who pays a higher rate.** Every dollar of revenue restored through millage reduces homestead savings and raises bills on non-homestead property.

Sources: [8] CS/SB 4-F and Senate staff analysis; [10] Florida Constitution, Art. VII, s. 9; [23] Fla. Stat. s. 200.065; [24] St. Johns County FY2026 proposed budget release.

## 06 / HOW THE COUNTY COULD RESPOND

# St. Johns County is already preparing for either outcome

The County says it began preparing in May 2026, reviewed services, staffing, contracts, capital projects, fees, reserves and alternative funding, and that the purpose is preparation, not advocacy.<sup>[4]</sup>

## County-reported actions

- About \$100M of capital projects placed on hold, including a planned Beachwalk fire station<sup>[4,19]</sup>
- About \$8.6M in positions and vacant-position funding identified for reassessment: \$4.0M vacant positions, \$2.0M unfunded FY2027 positions, \$2.6M paused positions<sup>[4]</sup>
- An additional \$30M in General Fund reserves designated for financial resiliency, plus \$31.2M emergency reserves for disasters<sup>[4]</sup>
- 380 services and 1,137 fees reviewed across 18 departments; MSBU and revenue-diversification study<sup>[4]</sup>

**MSBU:** a Municipal Service Benefit Unit — a defined area where the County can fund certain services through assessments on the properties that benefit.

## Measures under review, not a funding plan

**FACT** The County's words: positions and funding **identified for reassessment**, projects **placed on hold**, reserves **designated for financial resiliency**.<sup>[4]</sup>

**CALCULATION** The FY2028 gap beside the staffing figure under review:



**ANALYSIS** None of the three is yet a confirmed recurring saving. The \$8.6M is under reassessment, not cut. The held projects are paused, not canceled, and their funding sources are not public; impact fees, sales-tax surtax and bond proceeds generally cannot pay operating costs. Until the County says which projects and how much, this report does not count the \$100M or the \$30M as an offset to the operating gap. The \$31.2M emergency reserve is for disasters and is left out.

Deferring a capital project protects cash but can raise future construction costs or delay needed capacity, such as a fire station.

## 06 / HOW THE COUNTY COULD RESPOND

# The real choice is not simply “raise taxes or cut services”

## 1 / Recurring revenue

Use only where state law authorizes the mechanism, after accounting for voter approval, revenue sharing, restrictions and collection cost.

## 3 / Restricted-fund displacement

Transportation, tourism, utility or assessment revenue can help when it lawfully replaces an eligible cost now paid from flexible funds.

## 5 / Asset and enterprise income

County real estate, leases, concessions and utility capacity, tested for market value, legal restrictions and net recurring yield.

## 2 / Expense redesign

Vacancies, contracts, procurement, service levels, alternative delivery and operating costs, tested against actual outcomes rather than across-the-board percentages.

## 4 / Capital timing

Deferring a project protects cash short-term but can raise future cost or delay capacity. One-time deferral is not recurring revenue.

## 6 / Millage within the new rules

Any rate increase is subject to the CS/SB 4-F vote thresholds and reduces homestead savings while raising non-homestead bills (page 18).

### The research standard for any proposed offset

No proposed offset should enter a headline total until its legal authority, realistic net collections, spending restrictions, implementation timing, payer mix and interaction with other mechanisms are verified. One-time proceeds should never be presented as recurring budget replacement.

Growth-related tools such as impact fees can recover legally attributable capital costs of new development, but they cannot lawfully substitute for general operating taxes.

## 07 / WHERE THE EVIDENCE LEADS

# Facts, unknowns and value judgments should not be mixed together

## Established

Amendment 3 changes exemptions, an assessment cap and permitted uses of property-tax revenue.

The larger exemption applies only to non-school taxes.

A qualifying homestead saves ~\$99/mill in 2027 and up to ~\$199/mill from 2028, at constant millage.

EDR projects lower County revenue: \$68.3M in FY2028, \$191.6M in FY2032.

Millage increases now require the CS/SB 4-F vote thresholds.

No official source lists predetermined County service cuts.

## Not yet known

The realized FY2028–FY2032 impact.

How the rolled-back rate will be calculated after an exemption increase.

Whether parks, libraries and similar services fit any permitted category.

Whether the newer-resident schedule survives a court challenge.

The effect of future laws allowing further local exemptions.

How much business and rental tax savings pass through to prices and rents.

## Value-dependent

How much weight to give homeowner relief vs. local-government revenue stability.

Whether long-time residents should be favored over newer arrivals.

Which payer groups should bear more or less of the cost of local services.

What service levels are worth maintaining and how they should be funded.

Two voters can agree on every number in this report and still reach different conclusions, because they weigh tax relief, public services, growth, local control and fairness differently.

**Questions residents can ask the County before November 3:** How would the rolled-back rate be calculated in 2027? Which services fall outside the amendment's permitted uses, and how would they be funded? What recurring savings have been identified beyond position holds? What would a typical homestead and a typical small business pay under each response the County is considering?

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## Research status

This report covers legal mechanics, the state fiscal model, the St. Johns property roll and budget, homestead savings, millage rules, stakeholder arguments and a framework for testing County responses. A department-by-department budget reconstruction, full fee-cost study, County asset audit and parcel-level distribution analysis remain separate workstreams.

## No electoral verdict

The report’s purpose is to inform a decision, not make it. The 1565 Coalition does not endorse approval or rejection of Amendment 3.