



## HOUSING AND URBAN ISSUES

## Could Florida Really Eliminate Property Taxes?

A new proposal from Gov. Ron DeSantis would shift billions in local government revenue and reshape how cities and counties fund core services.

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is asking the legislature to add an amendment to the November ballot that would eventually eliminate property taxes for 92 percent of Floridians.  
(Matias J. Ochner/Miami Herald/TNS)

Gov. Ron DeSantis' property tax plan for the November ballot would raise the homestead exemption to \$250,000 and require the Legislature to enact a plan to eliminate property taxes entirely for the vast majority of Floridians who own the homes they live in, he announced Wednesday.

DeSantis said he was calling the Legislature back to Tallahassee on Monday to add an amendment to the ballot that would eventually eliminate property taxes for 92% of those Floridians by raising the homestead exemption to \$500,000.

“I think a lot of people need relief,” DeSantis said during a news conference in Tampa. “I think a lot of people have been wondering, where can we get it? We’re showing a pathway to be able to get that done that I think is going to be transformational for people.”

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The plan falls short of eliminating property taxes entirely, which DeSantis has been talking about for more than a year.

Local governments are likely to lose tens of billions of dollars in revenue, and local officials have warned that residents could face cuts to schools, fire and other services — even possibly charges to use public parks.

The proposed amendment, DeSantis said, would require local governments to spend remaining property tax revenue only on “the core services that we all agree on,” such as schools, police and firefighters.

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“It’s not going to be allowed to be used on some of the other things that I know are a little bit more divisive,” he said.

The amendment would also reduce local governments’ property tax assessments on small businesses from 10% to 5%, he said.

To help with the transition, DeSantis said he is proposing a multibillion-dollar state fund to provide grants to local governments.

The plan, which was not released in writing Wednesday, is far from a done deal. It would have to pass the Legislature by 60% and be approved by the same percentage of Florida voters in November.

To sell the idea, DeSantis said the state was launching a website where Floridians could see how much they'd save on their homes.

And the amendment would include another provision to make it more palatable to longtime Floridians who have bristled under an explosion in growth — and costs — in recent years. New residents could have to pay up to five years of taxes under the current system before being eligible for property tax relief.

“I don't want Floridians to go and see this on the ballot and say, ‘Oh man, I really would like the property tax relief, but I don't want the entire state of Illinois to empty out into Florida or wherever because of this,’” DeSantis said.

## **Reaction Mixed**

Republicans have two-thirds supermajorities in both the House and Senate, making DeSantis' proposal likely to pass. But both chambers in recent months took umbrage with the idea of using state coffers to prop up rural counties decimated by a loss in property tax revenue.

Senate President Ben Albritton, from small-town Wauchula, previously said he didn't like the idea of counties having to come to Tallahassee to “essentially argue for their existence.” But he quickly wrote to senators Wednesday that he was in favor of DeSantis' amendment.

He said tax relief would be a fitting way to celebrate the country's 250th anniversary.

House Speaker Daniel Perez's chamber passed a proposed amendment in February that would have eliminated all property taxes except those that go to schools, a far more sweeping idea than what DeSantis is proposing. (The Senate refused to take it  
his session.)

“We are pleased the Governor has finally gotten around to share an actual proposal,” Perez said in a statement. “We look forward to reviewing it once we have received the language.”

When DeSantis rolled out his proposed 2026-27 budget last year, he included \$300 million to cover a potential loss in property tax revenue for 32 small counties. The House didn’t agree to it, and the Legislature’s finalized budget did not include that provision when it was released Tuesday.

The announcement generated swift warnings from local officials and organizations. Tampa Mayor Jane Castor said at a news conference that “everything could be at risk if there are dramatic changes to property taxes.”

“What we need to fund our police and fire is more than we bring in in property tax,” Castor said.

Both the Florida Association of Counties and Florida League of Cities said they couldn’t take formal positions on DeSantis’ idea because it wasn’t released, but spokespeople said the groups had serious concerns.

An independent study modeling a \$250,000 homestead exemption found that 85 cities would see their tax base so hollowed out that essential services such as police, road maintenance and flood infrastructure would be at risk, Florida League of Cities spokesperson Kelli Roerk said. Those cities included New Port Richey, Largo, Gulfport, Coral Springs, Davie and Key West.

Cragin Mosteller, a spokesperson for the Florida Association of Counties, also said the organization didn’t yet have a formal position on it, but leaders are concerned.

The costs counties shoulder to provide solid infrastructure, public safety, quality water, health services and more don’t go away just because property taxes do, she said.

“Those costs don’t disappear, it just means they shift somewhere else,” Mosteller said.

proposal would impact counties differently depending on their sizes. Some

small counties don't have any homes valued more than \$250,000, she said. And while DeSantis has floated requiring counties to maintain core services, it's not clear what would fall under that umbrella.

"I think one of the things that is easy to overlook sometimes is that we move to a community not only because it's safe but because it's wonderful, because it has a great quality of life," Mosteller said.

DeSantis' proposal is "more of a plan to have a plan than it is a policy proposal," said Jeff Brandes, a former Republican state senator who now leads the Florida Policy Project think tank.

He said the proposal would place enormous responsibility on the Legislature to manage the phaseout of property taxes. If lawmakers create uncertainty about how local governments will replace that revenue, he warned, cities and counties could face pressure on their bond and credit ratings.

"Today, cities and counties control their own destiny," Brandes said. "This would put that destiny in the hands of the Legislature."

Brandes also predicted local governments across Florida would likely raise millage rates or pursue other revenue increases to offset lost property tax dollars. Renters — who make up about **one-third of Florida residents** — could end up absorbing those higher costs through increased rents while receiving little direct benefit from property tax relief, he said.

## **Voter Approval Could Be Tougher Sell**

Whether the proposal would pass muster with 60% of voters is the bigger question.

In the last decade, two far more modest proposals both failed with about 58% support. A **2018 proposal** would have raised the maximum homestead exemption to \$75,000. A **2022 initiative** would have given an additional \$50,000 exemption to certain public sector workers, including police, teachers and active duty military members.

neither of the prior proposals had the political backing of the governor, who

has spent more than a year generating headlines and conservative media coverage over the idea of eliminating property taxes — a concept that could be a launch point for another presidential run.

DeSantis said Wednesday that the political realities of reaching 60% affected his final proposal.

“A lot of my friends, you know, they’re going to say, ‘Who cares? Just eliminate, they’ll figure it out, all this other stuff,’” DeSantis said. “But I think ... that argument will get 50%.”

He said a lot of voters might like the idea of cutting property taxes but “want to make sure that it’s doable.”

“The fact that we’re doing the phase-in, the fact that we have this fund, the fact that we’re limiting the remaining property tax of the core services, I think it answers those concerns in a really, really thoughtful way,” he said.

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