

## Guest column: Economic engine

A few months ago, an old friend of mine from high school contacted me out of the blue. After high school, he joined the 82nd Airborne Division, did quite a few tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and saw combat. He wanted to know if I or anyone I knew had any job openings, and unfortunately, I didn't.

He then said he was weighing his options and seriously considering returning to Afghanistan because the job situation here was so bad.

The gravity of this statement floored me. Here was this combat veteran returning from war to Brevard County to find his home devoid of employment opportunities. With a 9 percent unemployment rate in Brevard, my friend was thinking about relocating to Afghanistan in search of a decent paycheck.

All Brevard residents, especially our veterans, deserve better. I believe the Brevard County Commission can play a big part in bringing better opportunities to our community.

In light of the recent attention the County Commission has gotten due to some controversy that occurred during a debate of the merits of CRAs — Community Reinvestment Agencies — I think it's important to have a public discussion about

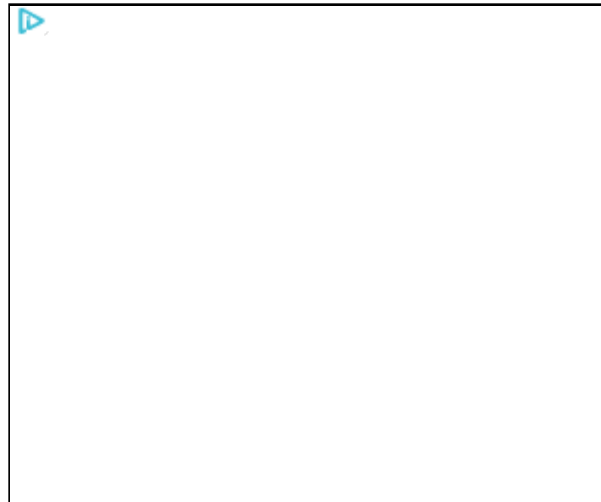
what a CRA actually is and how it can help improve the economy in Brevard.

Property is taxed based on its value. The tax goes to the county to fund essential services that we all rely on, like sheriff's deputies and fire-rescue. CRAs are funded with the tax revenue difference between what the property's value is, and what it improves to. That difference goes toward funding improvements in the zone in which it is collected and is invested to improve curb appeal, repave roads and to beautify the area. The invested funds simply make the area nicer.

CRAs do not depend on any increase in tax rates. They draw upon increased funds that occur naturally despite consistent tax rates, as properties naturally fluctuate in value.

CRAs are great because the money they generate goes back into improving the economic health of the region. They serve as an economic engine to increase business, jobs, tourism and property value,

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and they do it in a self-sustaining way.

These agencies are becoming incredibly popular with local governments because of how well they work. But don't take my word for it — look at the resurgence of Cocoa Village and its businesses, or take a drive down Barton Boulevard in Rockledge and check out the fantastic new growth.

CRA's are a tool Brevard can't afford to ignore. The County Commission owes it to our citizens, especially our veterans, to use tools like these to improve our local economy.



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