

Ferdinand offers support of

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Fulton County Tax Commissioner Arthur Ferdinand said he would support the county commissioners if they approved a policy to protect senior citizens from tax lien sales on their homes.

"The rising values in the city is making it very, very difficult [for senior citizens to pay taxes], and anything the commissioners do to support seniors, I support them," said Ferdinand in a March 19 press conference about the status of county tax collections.

A resolution authored by Ful-

ton County District 5

Commissioner Emma Darnell provides for some exemptions to tax lien sales to protect certain residents in hardship situations from the sale of tax liens on their properties to third parties.

If approved, the policy would define the desires of the board, but would not be binding on the tax commissioner until he officially recommends the exemp-



Arthur Ferdinand

tions, according to county officials. Commissioners are scheduled to consider the measure following a public hearing on the issue on April 3.

A tax lien is placed on a property if property tax is overdue. By law, the tax commissioner can sell tax liens to third parties such as investors to shift the burden of delinquent tax collection from the public sector to the private sector.

Lien purchasers are allowed to charge the property owner interest and fees. When the liens are not satisfied the lien holder can foreclose on the property. State law allows the sale of tax liens of the elderly.

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board action on tax lien sales

"I will point out to you that in Fulton County, seniors pay their taxes early and at a higher rate than the rest of the population," said Ferdinand.

In 2001 Fulton County billed \$1 billion in taxes and only \$50,000 of that was billed to low income senior citizens, said Ferdinand, who added most of the delinquent taxes are owed by investors.

Ms. Darnell's resolution was drafted after DeKalb County passed a resolution to no longer sell liens of certain delinquent taxpayers to third parties for collection.

District 39 state Sen. Vincent Fort, D-Atlanta, in February

urged the Fulton County Commissioners to adopt a similar policy to protect the elderly and low income taxpayers from potential loss of their homes.

A bill pending in the state senate would lower the cap on fees that can be charged and provide penalties for charging illegal fees.

At the press conference, Ferdinand announced the delinquent county property tax roll is now \$45 million, down from \$208 million when he was first appointed as tax commissioner in 1997.

The list of delinquent taxpayers, referred to by Ferdinand as the "scofflaw list," has shifted from recognizable names in the Atlanta business community on

the 1997 list to primarily investors in 2001.

Four repeats on the 2001 list from 1997 are the estate of Thomas B. West, James B. Cummings, K & I Inc. and Summerhill Neighborhood Development. District 48 state Rep. Douglas Dean, D-Atlanta, is the president and CEO of Summerhill, a non-profit inner-city housing redevelopment organization.

Dean authored a bill that would make the Fulton County tax commissioner an elected official rather than appointed to encourage a commissioner who is more sympathetic to the property owners and who can be held accountable to the taxpayers.