

1 the capacity to act as a catalyst in the enhancement of rural
2 economies.

3 (b) It is also the intent of the Legislature to
4 encourage and facilitate the development in such rural
5 communities of high-wage and high-skill industrial clusters
6 that serve as catalysts in rural economies.

7 (c) It is further the intent of the Legislature that
8 Rural Economic Development Initiative agencies provide
9 additional support for catalyst projects that have undergone
10 the review required in subsection (6).

11 (2)(1) CREATION.--The Rural Economic Development
12 Initiative, known as "REDI," is created within the Office of
13 Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, and the
14 participation of state and regional agencies in this
15 initiative is authorized.

16 (3)(2) DEFINITIONS.-- As used in this section, the
17 term:

18 (a) "Economic distress" means conditions affecting the
19 fiscal and economic viability of a rural community, including
20 such factors as low per capita income, low per capita taxable
21 values, high unemployment, high underemployment, low weekly
22 earned wages compared to the state average, low housing values
23 compared to the state average, high percentages of the
24 population receiving public assistance, high poverty levels
25 compared to the state average, and a lack of year-round stable
26 employment opportunities.

27 (b) "Rural community" means:

- 28 1. A county with a population of 75,000 or less.
29 2. A county with a population of 100,000 or less that
30 is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less.
31

1 3. A municipality within a county described in
2 subparagraph 1. or subparagraph 2.

3 4. An unincorporated federal enterprise community or
4 an incorporated rural city with a population of 25,000 or less
5 and an employment base focused on traditional agricultural or
6 resource-based industries, located in a county not defined as
7 rural, which has at least three or more of the economic
8 distress factors identified in paragraph (a) and verified by
9 the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.

10
11 For purposes of this paragraph, population shall be determined
12 in accordance with the most recent official estimate pursuant
13 to s. 186.901.

14 ~~(4)(3)~~ RESPONSIBILITIES.--

15 (a) REDI shall be responsible for coordinating and
16 focusing the efforts and resources of state and regional
17 agencies on the problems which affect the fiscal, economic,
18 and community viability of Florida's economically distressed
19 rural communities, working with local governments,
20 community-based organizations, and private organizations that
21 have an interest in the growth and development of these
22 communities to find ways to balance environmental and growth
23 management issues with local needs.

24 ~~(b)(4)~~ REDI shall review and evaluate the impact of
25 statutes and rules on rural communities and shall work to
26 minimize any adverse impact.

27 ~~(c)(5)~~ REDI shall facilitate better access to state
28 resources by promoting direct access and referrals to
29 appropriate state and regional agencies and statewide
30 organizations. REDI may undertake outreach, capacity-building,
31 and other advocacy efforts to improve conditions in rural

1 communities. These activities may include sponsorship of
2 conferences and achievement awards.

3 ~~(5)(6)~~ AGENCY AND ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATION ON
4 REDI.--

5 (a) By August 1 of each year, the head of each of the
6 following agencies and organizations shall designate a
7 high-level staff person from within the agency or organization
8 to serve as the REDI representative for the agency or
9 organization:

- 10 1. The Department of Community Affairs.
- 11 2. The Department of Transportation.
- 12 3. The Department of Environmental Protection.
- 13 4. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer
14 Services.
- 15 5. The Department of State.
- 16 6. The Department of Health.
- 17 7. The Department of Children and Family Services.
- 18 8. The Department of Corrections.
- 19 9. The Agency for Workforce Innovation.
- 20 10. The Department of Education.
- 21 11. The Department of Juvenile Justice.
- 22 12. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- 23 13. Each water management district.
- 24 14. Enterprise Florida, Inc.
- 25 15. Workforce Florida, Inc.
- 26 16. The Florida Commission on Tourism or VISIT
27 Florida.
- 28 17. The Florida Regional Planning Council Association.
- 29 18. The Agency for Health Care Administration Florida
30 ~~State Rural Development Council.~~

1 19. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
2 (IFAS).

3
4 An alternate for each designee shall also be chosen, and the
5 names of the designees and alternates shall be sent to the
6 director of the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic
7 Development.

8 (b) Each REDI representative must have comprehensive
9 knowledge of his or her agency's functions, both regulatory
10 and service in nature, and of the state's economic goals,
11 policies, and programs. This person shall be the primary point
12 of contact for his or her agency with REDI on issues and
13 projects relating to economically distressed rural communities
14 and with regard to expediting project review, shall ensure a
15 prompt effective response to problems arising with regard to
16 rural issues, and shall work closely with the other REDI
17 representatives in the identification of opportunities for
18 preferential awards of program funds and allowances and waiver
19 of program requirements when necessary to encourage and
20 facilitate long-term private capital investment and job
21 creation.

22 (c) The REDI representatives shall work with REDI in
23 the review and evaluation of statutes and rules for adverse
24 impact on rural communities and the development of alternative
25 proposals to mitigate that impact.

26 (d) Each REDI representative shall be responsible for
27 ensuring that each district office or facility of his or her
28 agency is informed about the Rural Economic Development
29 Initiative and for providing assistance throughout the agency
30 in the implementation of REDI activities.

31

1 ~~(6)(7)~~ RURAL AREAS OF CRITICAL ECONOMIC CONCERN;
2 CATALYST PROJECTS.--
3 (a) REDI may recommend to the Governor up to three
4 rural areas of critical economic concern. A rural area of
5 critical economic concern must be a rural community, or a
6 region composed of such, that has been adversely affected by
7 an extraordinary economic event, chronic and severe economic
8 distress, or a natural disaster or that presents a unique
9 economic development opportunity of regional impact that will
10 create more than 1,000 jobs over a 5-year period. The Governor
11 may by executive order designate up to three rural areas of
12 critical economic concern which will establish these areas as
13 priority assignments for REDI as well as to allow the
14 Governor, acting through REDI, to waive criteria,
15 requirements, or similar provisions of any economic
16 development incentive. Such incentives shall include, but not
17 be limited to: the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund
18 Program under s. 288.106, the Quick Response Training Program
19 under s. 288.047, ~~the Quick Response Training Program for~~
20 ~~participants in the welfare transition program under s.~~
21 ~~288.047(8)~~, transportation projects under s. 288.063, the
22 brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under s. 288.107, and
23 the rural job tax credit program under ss. 212.098 and
24 220.1895.
25 (b) Designation as a rural area of critical economic
26 concern under this subsection shall be contingent upon the
27 execution of a memorandum of agreement among the Office of
28 Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development; the governing body
29 of the county; and the governing bodies of any municipalities
30 to be included within a rural area of critical economic
31 concern. Such agreement shall specify the terms and conditions

1 of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties
2 and responsibilities of the county and any participating
3 municipalities to take actions designed to facilitate the
4 retention and expansion of existing businesses in the area, as
5 well as the recruitment of new businesses to the area.

6 (c) The Governor, acting through REDI, may also waive
7 criteria, requirements, or provisions of REDI agency programs,
8 including, but not limited to, those providing infrastructure,
9 technical assistance, and training, to facilitate the location
10 of a catalyst project in a rural area of critical economic
11 concern, provided that the project is specifically identified
12 as a catalyst project by Enterprise Florida, Inc., confirmed
13 as a catalyst project by the Office of Tourism, Trade, and
14 Economic Development, and recommended by REDI. No more than
15 one catalyst project may be recommended for a rural area of
16 critical economic concern consisting of eight counties or
17 fewer. No more than two catalyst projects may be recommended
18 for a rural area of critical economic concern consisting of
19 more than eight counties. Waivers may be granted pursuant to
20 this paragraph only through June 30, 2012.

21 (7)(8) ANNUAL REPORT.--Beginning with the fiscal year
22 ending June 30, 2007, REDI shall submit a report to the
23 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
24 House of Representatives each year on or before September 30
25 ~~February 1~~ on all REDI activities. This report shall include a
26 status report on all projects currently being coordinated
27 through REDI, the number of preferential awards and allowances
28 made pursuant to this section, the dollar amount of such
29 awards, and the names of the recipients. The report shall also
30 include a description of all waivers of program requirements
31

1 granted. The report shall also include information as to the
2 economic impact of the projects coordinated by REDI.

3 Section 2. Paragraphs (c) and (o) of subsection (1) of
4 section 163.3187, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

5 163.3187 Amendment of adopted comprehensive plan.--

6 (1) Amendments to comprehensive plans adopted pursuant
7 to this part may be made not more than two times during any
8 calendar year, except:

9 (c) Any local government comprehensive plan amendments
10 directly related to proposed small scale development
11 activities may be approved without regard to statutory limits
12 on the frequency of consideration of amendments to the local
13 comprehensive plan. A small scale development amendment may be
14 adopted only under the following conditions:

15 1. The proposed amendment involves a use of 10 acres
16 or fewer and:

17 a. The cumulative annual effect of the acreage for all
18 small scale development amendments adopted by the local
19 government shall not exceed:

20 (I) A maximum of 120 acres in a local government that
21 contains areas specifically designated in the local
22 comprehensive plan for urban infill, urban redevelopment, or
23 downtown revitalization as defined in s. 163.3164, urban
24 infill and redevelopment areas designated under s. 163.2517,
25 transportation concurrency exception areas approved pursuant
26 to s. 163.3180(5), or regional activity centers and urban
27 central business districts approved pursuant to s.
28 380.06(2)(e); however, amendments under this paragraph may be
29 applied to no more than 60 acres annually of property outside
30 the designated areas listed in this sub-sub-subparagraph.
31 Amendments adopted pursuant to paragraph (k) shall not be

1 counted toward the acreage limitations for small scale
2 amendments under this paragraph.

3 (II) A maximum of 80 acres in a local government that
4 does not contain any of the designated areas set forth in
5 sub-sub-subparagraph (I).

6 (III) A maximum of 120 acres in a county established
7 pursuant to s. 9, Art. VIII of the State Constitution.

8 b. The proposed amendment does not involve the same
9 property granted a change within the prior 12 months.

10 c. The proposed amendment does not involve the same
11 owner's property within 200 feet of property granted a change
12 within the prior 12 months.

13 d. The proposed amendment does not involve a text
14 change to the goals, policies, and objectives of the local
15 government's comprehensive plan, but only proposes a land use
16 change to the future land use map for a site-specific small
17 scale development activity.

18 e. The property that is the subject of the proposed
19 amendment is not located within an area of critical state
20 concern, unless the project subject to the proposed amendment
21 involves the construction of affordable housing units meeting
22 the criteria of s. 420.0004(3), and is located within an area
23 of critical state concern designated by s. 380.0552 or by the
24 Administration Commission pursuant to s. 380.05(1). Such
25 amendment is not subject to the density limitations of
26 sub-subparagraph f., and shall be reviewed by the state land
27 planning agency for consistency with the principles for
28 guiding development applicable to the area of critical state
29 concern where the amendment is located and shall not become
30 effective until a final order is issued under s. 380.05(6).

31

1 f. If the proposed amendment involves a residential
2 land use, the residential land use has a density of 10 units
3 or less per acre or the proposed future land use category
4 allows a maximum residential density of the same or less than
5 the maximum residential density allowable under the existing
6 future land use category, except that this limitation does not
7 apply to small scale amendments involving the construction of
8 affordable housing units meeting the criteria of s.
9 420.0004(3) on property which will be the subject of a land
10 use restriction agreement, or small scale amendments described
11 in sub-sub-subparagraph a.(I) that are designated in the local
12 comprehensive plan for urban infill, urban redevelopment, or
13 downtown revitalization as defined in s. 163.3164, urban
14 infill and redevelopment areas designated under s. 163.2517,
15 transportation concurrency exception areas approved pursuant
16 to s. 163.3180(5), or regional activity centers and urban
17 central business districts approved pursuant to s.
18 380.06(2)(e).

19 2.a. A local government that proposes to consider a
20 plan amendment pursuant to this paragraph is not required to
21 comply with the procedures and public notice requirements of
22 s. 163.3184(15)(c) for such plan amendments if the local
23 government complies with the provisions in s. 125.66(4)(a) for
24 a county or in s. 166.041(3)(c) for a municipality. If a
25 request for a plan amendment under this paragraph is initiated
26 by other than the local government, public notice is required.

27 b. The local government shall send copies of the
28 notice and amendment to the state land planning agency, the
29 regional planning council, and any other person or entity
30 requesting a copy. This information shall also include a
31 statement identifying any property subject to the amendment

1 that is located within a coastal high-hazard area as
2 identified in the local comprehensive plan.

3 3. Small scale development amendments adopted pursuant
4 to this paragraph require only one public hearing before the
5 governing board, which shall be an adoption hearing as
6 described in s. 163.3184(7), and are not subject to the
7 requirements of s. 163.3184(3)-(6) unless the local government
8 elects to have them subject to those requirements.

9 4. If the small scale development amendment involves a
10 site within an area that is designated by the Governor as a
11 rural area of critical economic concern under s.
12 288.0656(6)(~~7~~) for the duration of such designation, the
13 10-acre limit listed in subparagraph 1. shall be increased by
14 100 percent to 20 acres. The local government approving the
15 small scale plan amendment shall certify to the Office of
16 Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development that the plan
17 amendment furthers the economic objectives set forth in the
18 executive order issued under s. 288.0656(6)(~~7~~), and the
19 property subject to the plan amendment shall undergo public
20 review to ensure that all concurrency requirements and
21 federal, state, and local environmental permit requirements
22 are met.

23 (o) A comprehensive plan amendment that is submitted
24 by an area designated by the Governor as a rural area of
25 critical economic concern under s. 288.0656(6)(~~7~~) and that
26 meets the economic development objectives may be approved
27 without regard to the statutory limits on the frequency of
28 adoption of amendments to the comprehensive plan.

29 Section 3. Subsection (2) of section 257.193, Florida
30 Statutes, is amended to read:

31 257.193 Community Libraries in Caring Program.--

1 (2) The purpose of the Community Libraries in Caring
2 Program is to assist libraries in rural communities, as
3 defined in s. 288.0656(3)(~~2~~)(b) and subject to the provisions
4 of s. 288.06561, to strengthen their collections and services,
5 improve literacy in their communities, and improve the
6 economic viability of their communities.

7 Section 4. Section 288.019, Florida Statutes, is
8 amended to read:

9 288.019 Rural considerations in grant review and
10 evaluation processes.--Notwithstanding any other law, and to
11 the fullest extent possible, the member agencies and
12 organizations of the Rural Economic Development Initiative
13 (REDI) as defined in s. 288.0656(5)(~~6~~)(a) shall review all
14 grant and loan application evaluation criteria to ensure the
15 fullest access for rural counties as defined in s.
16 288.0656(3)(~~2~~)(b) to resources available throughout the state.

17 (1) Each REDI agency and organization shall review all
18 evaluation and scoring procedures and develop modifications to
19 those procedures which minimize the impact of a project within
20 a rural area.

21 (2) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
22 provide for an appropriate ranking based on the proportionate
23 impact that projects have on a rural area when compared with
24 similar project impacts on an urban area.

25 (3) Evaluation criteria and scoring procedures must
26 recognize the disparity of available fiscal resources for an
27 equal level of financial support from an urban county and a
28 rural county.

29 (a) The evaluation criteria should weight contribution
30 in proportion to the amount of funding available at the local
31 level.

1 (b) In-kind match should be allowed and applied as
2 financial match when a county is experiencing financial
3 distress through elevated unemployment at a rate in excess of
4 the state's average by 5 percentage points or because of the
5 loss of its ad valorem base.

6 (4) For existing programs, the modified evaluation
7 criteria and scoring procedure must be delivered to the Office
8 of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development for distribution
9 to the REDI agencies and organizations. The REDI agencies and
10 organizations shall review and make comments. Future rules,
11 programs, evaluation criteria, and scoring processes must be
12 brought before a REDI meeting for review, discussion, and
13 recommendation to allow rural counties fuller access to the
14 state's resources.

15 Section 5. Section 288.06561, Florida Statutes, is
16 amended to read:

17 288.06561 Reduction or waiver of financial match
18 requirements.--Notwithstanding any other law, the member
19 agencies and organizations of the Rural Economic Development
20 Initiative (REDI), as defined in s. 288.0656~~(5)~~~~(6)~~(a), shall
21 review the financial match requirements for projects in rural
22 areas as defined in s. 288.0656~~(3)~~~~(2)~~(b).

23 (1) Each agency and organization shall develop a
24 proposal to waive or reduce the match requirement for rural
25 areas.

26 (2) Agencies and organizations shall ensure that all
27 proposals are submitted to the Office of Tourism, Trade, and
28 Economic Development for review by the REDI agencies.

29 (3) These proposals shall be delivered to the Office
30 of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development for distribution
31 to the REDI agencies and organizations. A meeting of REDI

1 agencies and organizations must be called within 30 days after
2 receipt of such proposals for REDI comment and recommendations
3 on each proposal.

4 (4) Waivers and reductions must be requested by the
5 county or community, and such county or community must have
6 three or more of the factors identified in s.
7 288.0656~~(3)~~(2)(a).

8 (5) Any other funds available to the project may be
9 used for financial match of federal programs when there is
10 fiscal hardship, and the match requirements may not be waived
11 or reduced.

12 (6) When match requirements are not reduced or
13 eliminated, donations of land, though usually not recognized
14 as an in-kind match, may be permitted.

15 (7) To the fullest extent possible, agencies and
16 organizations shall expedite the rule adoption and amendment
17 process if necessary to incorporate the reduction in match by
18 rural areas in fiscal distress.

19 (8) REDI shall include in its annual report an
20 evaluation on the status of changes to rules, number of awards
21 made with waivers, and recommendations for future changes.

22 Section 6. Paragraph (b) of subsection (4) of section
23 339.2819, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

24 339.2819 Transportation Regional Incentive Program.--

25 (4)

26 (b) In allocating Transportation Regional Incentive
27 Program funds, priority shall be given to projects that:

28 1. Provide connectivity to the Strategic Intermodal
29 System developed under s. 339.64.

30
31

1 2. Support economic development and the movement of
2 goods in rural areas of critical economic concern designated
3 under s. 288.0656~~(6)~~~~(7)~~.

4 3. Are subject to a local ordinance that establishes
5 corridor management techniques, including access management
6 strategies, right-of-way acquisition and protection measures,
7 appropriate land use strategies, zoning, and setback
8 requirements for adjacent land uses.

9 4. Improve connectivity between military installations
10 and the Strategic Highway Network or the Strategic Rail
11 Corridor Network.

12 Section 7. Paragraph (d) of subsection (15) of section
13 627.6699, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

14 627.6699 Employee Health Care Access Act.--

15 (15) SMALL EMPLOYERS ACCESS PROGRAM.--

16 (d) Eligibility.--

17 1. Any small employer that is actively engaged in
18 business, has its principal place of business in this state,
19 employs up to 25 eligible employees on business days during
20 the preceding calendar year, employs at least 2 employees on
21 the first day of the plan year, and has had no prior coverage
22 for the last 6 months may participate.

23 2. Any municipality, county, school district, or
24 hospital employer located in a rural community as defined in
25 s. 288.0656~~(3)~~~~(2)~~(b) may participate.

26 3. Nursing home employers may participate.

27 4. Each dependent of a person eligible for coverage is
28 also eligible to participate.

29
30 Any employer participating in the program must do so until the
31 end of the term for which the carrier providing the coverage

1 is obligated to provide such coverage to the program. Coverage
2 for a small employer group that ceases to meet the eligibility
3 requirements of this section may be terminated at the end of
4 the policy period for which the necessary premiums have been
5 paid.

6 Section 8. This act shall take effect July 1, 2007.
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