

26 Section 2. Paragraph (c) of subsection (2) of section
 27 288.065, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

28 288.065 Rural Community Development Revolving Loan Fund.—

29 (2)

30 (c) All repayments of principal and interest shall be
 31 returned to the loan fund and made available for loans to other
 32 applicants. However, in a rural area of opportunity designated
 33 by the Governor, and upon approval by the department, repayments
 34 of principal and interest may be retained by the applicant if
 35 such repayments are dedicated ~~and matched~~ to fund regionally
 36 based economic development organizations representing the rural
 37 area of opportunity.

38 Section 3. Subsection (1), paragraphs (b), (c), and (e) of
 39 subsection (2), and subsection (3) of section 288.0655, Florida
 40 Statutes, are amended to read:

41 288.0655 Rural Infrastructure Fund.—

42 (1) There is created within the department the Rural
 43 Infrastructure Fund to facilitate the planning, preparing, and
 44 financing of infrastructure ~~projects~~ in rural communities which
 45 will encourage job creation, capital investment, and the
 46 strengthening and diversification of rural economies by
 47 promoting tourism, trade, and economic development.

48 (2)

49 (b) To facilitate access of rural communities and rural
 50 areas of opportunity as defined by the Rural Economic

51 Development Initiative to infrastructure funding programs of the
52 Federal Government, such as those offered by the United States
53 Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of
54 Commerce, and state programs, including those offered by Rural
55 Economic Development Initiative agencies, and to facilitate
56 local government or private infrastructure funding efforts, the
57 department may award grants for up to 75 ~~50~~ percent of the total
58 infrastructure ~~project~~ cost. ~~Eligible projects must be related~~
59 ~~to specific job-creation or job-retention opportunities.~~
60 Eligible uses of funds ~~projects~~ may also include improving any
61 inadequate infrastructure that has resulted in regulatory action
62 that prohibits economic or community growth, reducing the costs
63 to community users of proposed infrastructure improvements that
64 exceed such costs in comparable communities, and improving
65 access to and the availability of broadband Internet service.
66 Eligible uses of funds shall include improvements to public
67 infrastructure for industrial or commercial sites, upgrades to
68 or development of public tourism infrastructure, and
69 improvements to broadband Internet service and access in
70 unserved or underserved rural communities. Improvements to
71 broadband Internet service and access must be conducted through
72 a partnership or partnerships with one or more dealers, as
73 defined in s. 202.11(2), and the partnership or partnerships
74 must be established through a competitive selection process that
75 is publicly noticed. Authorized infrastructure may include the

76 following public or public-private partnership facilities: storm
 77 water systems; telecommunications facilities; broadband
 78 facilities; roads or other remedies to transportation
 79 impediments; nature-based tourism facilities; or other physical
 80 requirements necessary to facilitate tourism, trade, and
 81 economic development activities in the community. Authorized
 82 infrastructure may also include publicly or privately owned
 83 self-powered nature-based tourism facilities, publicly owned
 84 telecommunications facilities, and broadband facilities, and
 85 additions to the distribution facilities of the existing natural
 86 gas utility as defined in s. 366.04(3)(c), the existing electric
 87 utility as defined in s. 366.02, or the existing water or
 88 wastewater utility as defined in s. 367.021(12), or any other
 89 existing water or wastewater facility, which owns a gas or
 90 electric distribution system or a water or wastewater system in
 91 this state where:

92 1. A contribution-in-aid of construction is required to
 93 serve public or public-private partnership facilities under the
 94 tariffs of any natural gas, electric, water, or wastewater
 95 utility as defined herein; and

96 2. Such utilities as defined herein are willing and able
 97 to provide such service.

98 (c) ~~To facilitate timely response and induce the location~~
 99 ~~or expansion of specific job creating opportunities,~~ The
 100 department may award grants of up to \$300,000 for infrastructure

101 feasibility studies, design and engineering activities, or other
102 infrastructure planning and preparation activities. ~~Authorized~~
103 ~~grants shall be up to \$50,000 for an employment project with a~~
104 ~~business committed to create at least 100 jobs; up to \$150,000~~
105 ~~for an employment project with a business committed to create at~~
106 ~~least 300 jobs; and up to \$300,000 for a project in a rural area~~
107 ~~of opportunity.~~ Grants awarded under this paragraph may be used
108 in conjunction with grants awarded under paragraph (b), ~~provided~~
109 ~~that the total amount of both grants does not exceed 30 percent~~
110 ~~of the total project cost.~~ In evaluating applications under this
111 paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to which the
112 application seeks to minimize administrative and consultant
113 expenses.

114 (e) To enable local governments to access the resources
115 available pursuant to s. 403.973(18), the department may award
116 grants for surveys, feasibility studies, and other activities
117 related to the identification and preclearance review of land
118 which is suitable for preclearance review. Authorized grants
119 under this paragraph do not require a local match and may not
120 exceed \$75,000 each, except in the case of a project in a rural
121 area of opportunity, in which case the grant may not exceed
122 \$300,000. ~~Any funds awarded under this paragraph must be matched~~
123 ~~at a level of 50 percent with local funds, except that any funds~~
124 ~~awarded for a project in a rural area of opportunity must be~~
125 ~~matched at a level of 33 percent with local funds. If an~~

126 ~~application for funding is for a catalyst site, as defined in s.~~
127 ~~288.0656, the requirement for local match may be waived pursuant~~
128 ~~to the process in s. 288.06561.~~ In evaluating applications under
129 this paragraph, the department shall consider the extent to
130 which the application seeks to minimize administrative and
131 consultant expenses.

132 (3) The department, in consultation with Enterprise
133 Florida, Inc., the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing
134 Corporation, the Department of Environmental Protection, and the
135 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as
136 appropriate, shall review and certify applications pursuant to
137 s. 288.061. The review shall include an evaluation of the
138 economic benefit ~~of the projects and their~~ long-term viability.
139 The department shall have final approval for any grant under
140 this section.

141 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2022.