

By the Committee on Community Affairs; and Senator McClain

578-01917-26

2026354c1

A bill to be entitled
An act relating to blue ribbon projects; creating s. 163.3249, F.S.; providing a purpose and legislative intent; defining terms; requiring that a development project meet certain requirements to qualify as a blue ribbon project; specifying maximum residential density and nonresidential intensity permitted within the development area of a blue ribbon project; requiring that a specified percentage of the project's residential units meet certain requirements; authorizing the development of the development area in phases for a specified purpose; providing that development rights and mitigation of project impacts shall be vested for at least a certain period, which may be extended under certain circumstances; requiring that a blue ribbon project have a blue ribbon plan; providing requirements for such plan; specifying that a plan is not required to demonstrate certain need; requiring that a project receive dollar-for-dollar credits from a local government under certain circumstances; specifying that a project may be located on land with any future land use designation or zoning designation; prohibiting the required amendment of a comprehensive plan or a required rezoning for approval of a project; authorizing a landowner to apply to the local government for approval of a project; requiring that a project that meets certain requirements receive administrative approval; limiting local government review of a

578-01917-26

2026354c1

30 project; providing for the automatic approval of a
31 project under certain circumstances; authorizing
32 applicants to hire private companies to conduct plan
33 reviews and building inspections; requiring an
34 applicant to publish notice of an approved project in
35 a specified manner; requiring an applicant to record
36 the plan for an approved project in the public records
37 of the county in which the project property is
38 located; prohibiting an applicant from amending a
39 recorded plan without undergoing a specified review;
40 authorizing an applicant to appeal the denial of a
41 project application to the Department of Commerce in a
42 specified manner; authorizing a person whose
43 substantial interests are or may be affected by
44 approval of a project to file a petition with the
45 department requesting an administrative hearing in a
46 specified manner; providing requirements for such
47 petition; requiring the department to hold certain
48 hearings before issuing certain orders; requiring the
49 department to determine whether a project meets
50 certain requirements and issue a final order;
51 providing applicability; providing an effective date.
52

53 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

54
55 Section 1. Section 163.3249, Florida Statutes, is created
56 to read:

57 163.3249 Blue ribbon projects.—

58 (1) PURPOSE AND INTENT.—The purpose of this section is to

578-01917-26

2026354c1

59 ensure the appropriate use of important state resources and
60 facilities. It is the intent of the Legislature to accomplish
61 this goal by incentivizing large landowners in this state to be
62 good stewards of the natural environment while at the same time
63 promoting a more sustainable pattern of development. The
64 Legislature intends to create blue ribbon projects, and to
65 provide a mechanism by which local governments shall implement
66 those projects within their boundaries, in order to promote the
67 goals of preserving natural areas, encouraging agricultural land
68 uses and rural land stewardship, protecting critical ecological
69 systems, expanding wildlife corridors, and providing more
70 compact mixed-use developments designed for long-term viability.

71 (2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

72 (a) "Applicant" means the owner of land on which a blue
73 ribbon project is proposed.

74 (b) "Blue ribbon plan" or "plan" means the plan required by
75 subsection (5).

76 (c) "Blue ribbon project" or "project" means a project that
77 meets the requirements of subsection (3).

78 (d) "Development area" means land that may be developed
79 with residential, commercial, industrial, or other uses.

80 (e) "Missing middle housing" means a range of for-sale and
81 for-rent housing types, including, but not limited to, duplexes,
82 triplexes, townhomes, small multifamily buildings, and small
83 detached single-family homes, that fill the gap between larger
84 single-family homes and larger apartment buildings. Such housing
85 may be vertically and horizontally integrated.

86 (f) "New urban design" means a development design that
87 creates walkable, mixed-use, human-centered places.

578-01917-26

2026354c1

88 (g) "Reserve area" means land that is set aside for
89 environmental conservation, wildlife corridors, wetland and
90 wildlife mitigation, productive agriculture and silviculture,
91 uses consistent with the public purposes described under s.
92 570.71(1), parks, recreational activities, utility sites,
93 reservoirs and lakes, or other uses that support such
94 activities.

95 (3) MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS.—A development project must meet
96 all of the following requirements to qualify as a blue ribbon
97 project:

98 (a) The project must contain a minimum of 10,000 acres of
99 land which are contiguous, as defined in s. 163.3163(3)(a), and
100 which are owned by the same person or by entities owned or
101 controlled by the same person.

102 (b) At least 60 percent of the land contained in the
103 project must be reserve area. If any project boundary is
104 contiguous to state-owned environmental preservation land or the
105 Florida wildlife corridor, a portion of the project's reserve
106 area must be located adjacent to the state-owned land or the
107 Florida wildlife corridor, as applicable.

108 (c) Up to 40 percent of the land contained in the project
109 may be development area. The development area must meet all of
110 the following requirements:

111 1. Individual development areas within the project must be
112 designed to enhance walkability and mobility and must include a
113 mixture of land uses.

114 2. At least 10 percent of the development area must be
115 allocated to nonresidential land use.

116 3. A portion of the development area must be allocated to

578-01917-26

2026354c1

117 uses intended to provide economic development and create high-
118 wage jobs. The development area so allocated must be in a
119 location that is accessible to an interstate interchange, a
120 state road, a rail line, or an airport or other transportation
121 facility.

122 4. The development area must have a dense, walkable, mixed-
123 use, human-centered development pattern that includes new urban
124 design, including, but not limited to, towns, villages, and
125 hamlets that have reserve area between them.

126 5. Types of residential units within the development area
127 must be varied and include single-family, multifamily, and
128 attached and detached residential units.

129 (4) DEVELOPMENT AREA DENSITIES AND INTENSITIES.—

130 (a) A maximum residential density of 12 units per gross
131 acre, and a maximum nonresidential intensity of 85 percent
132 impervious surface ratio per gross acre, is permitted within the
133 development area, as measured in combination throughout all
134 phases of the project.

135 (b) At least 20 percent of residential units within the
136 development area in each phase of the project must be a
137 combination of the following:

138 1. Affordable housing, with initial sale prices and ongoing
139 rents at or below 80 percent of adjusted gross income, as
140 defined in s. 420.602, for the county in which the development
141 area is located.

142 2. Missing middle housing.

143 3. Housing for people eligible for the Florida Hometown
144 Hero Program under s. 420.5096.

145 (c) The development area may be developed in phases to

578-01917-26

2026354c1

146 accommodate growth projections in the geographical area in which
147 the project is located. Development rights and mitigation of
148 project impacts shall be vested for at least 50 years. If the
149 applicant achieves development as defined in s. 380.04 of at
150 least 50 percent of the development area within 50 years after
151 the project's date of initial public dedication of
152 infrastructure, the vested period must be extended for an
153 additional 25 years.

154 (5) BLUE RIBBON PLANS.—A blue ribbon project must have a
155 blue ribbon plan, which is the master development plan for the
156 project. Blue ribbon plans must include a document that
157 addresses the requirements of this section and exhibits,
158 including maps, illustrations, and text supported by data and
159 analysis, that demonstrate compliance therewith. The plan must
160 include all of the following:

161 (a) A long-term master development map that, at a minimum,
162 generally depicts the locations of reserve area and development
163 area throughout the project area.

164 (b) Identification and analysis of necessary water supplies
165 and available sources of water, including water resource
166 development and water supply development projects, and water
167 conservation measures required to meet the projected demand from
168 each phase of the project. Water and wastewater facilities must
169 be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such facilities may
170 be provided by the applicant, a local unit of special purpose
171 government, a special district, a local government, or the
172 state. Local governments are encouraged to enter into public-
173 private partnerships to accomplish water storage and other water
174 quality and capacity improvements within the boundaries of blue

578-01917-26

2026354c1

175 ribbon projects pursuant to s. 373.4591.

176 (c) Identification and analysis of the transportation
177 facilities and future transportation corridors necessary to
178 serve development area land uses in the master development plan,
179 including guidelines to be used to establish each modal
180 component intended to optimize mobility. Transportation
181 facilities must be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such
182 facilities may be provided by the applicant, a local unit of
183 special purpose government, a special district, a local
184 government, or the state. Internal roads must be designed in
185 accordance with the Department of Transportation's traditional
186 neighborhood development guidelines provided in chapter 19 of
187 the Manual of Uniform Minimum Standards for Design, Construction
188 and Maintenance for Streets and Highways, 2023 Edition.

189 (d) Identification of other regionally significant public
190 facilities necessary to support the project's permitted density
191 as provided in paragraph (4)(a) for each phase of the project,
192 which facilities must include utilities, parks, and schools, and
193 policies providing the procedures to mitigate the impacts of the
194 project's permitted density on public facilities. Public
195 facilities must be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such
196 facilities may be provided by the applicant, a local unit of
197 special purpose government, a special district, a local
198 government, or the state. Local governments are encouraged to
199 enter into public-private partnerships pursuant to s. 255.065 to
200 provide qualifying public facilities within the boundaries of
201 blue ribbon projects.

202 (e) Identification of regionally significant natural
203 resources within the reserve area based on the best available

578-01917-26

2026354c1

204 data and policies, and provision of mechanisms to ensure the
205 perpetual protection or conservation of specific resources,
206 consistent with the overall conservation and development
207 strategy for the project area.

208 (f) General principles and guidelines that do all of the
209 following:

210 1. Address the land uses within the development area and
211 reserve area, and the interrelationships between such areas.
212 2. Address the protection and, as appropriate, restoration
213 and management of reserve areas identified in the recorded blue
214 ribbon plan for permanent conservation and public use, which
215 must be phased in coordination with the phased development
216 within the development area as specified in the master
217 development plan.

218 3. Achieve a cleaner, healthier environment.
219 4. Limit urban sprawl.
220 5. Provide a range of housing types.
221 6. Protect wildlife and natural areas.
222 7. Advance the efficient use of land and other resources.
223 8. Create quality communities of a design that reduces and
224 captures vehicle trips and promotes mobility options.
225 9. Enhance the prospects for state and local economic
226 development objectives and high-wage job creation.

227 (g) Development standards for each type of land use
228 proposed within the development area which is typically found in
229 a planned unit development as defined in s. 163.3202(5)(b).

230 (h) Provision for an easement granted without charge to the
231 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services under s. 570.71
232 for any portion of the reserve area which will be reserved for

578-01917-26

2026354c1

233 uses consistent with the public purposes provided in s.
234 570.71(1). The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
235 and the landowner must enter into an agreement regarding
236 allowable uses for the easement interest before an easement is
237 granted. The plan must also include a covenant that any easement
238 or property granted to another state agency, a water management
239 district, or a local government will be granted without charge.

240
241 A blue ribbon plan must be based on a planning period longer
242 than the generally applicable planning period of the local
243 comprehensive plan and must specify the projected population
244 within the planning area during the chosen planning period. A
245 plan is not required to demonstrate need based on projected
246 population growth or any other basis. If under the plan a
247 project contributes land or funds or otherwise causes the
248 construction of public facilities pursuant to s. 163.3180, the
249 project must receive dollar-for-dollar credits against impact,
250 mobility, proportionate share, or other fee credits from the
251 local government for such facility improvements as required by
252 s. 163.3180.

253 (6) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF BLUE RIBBON
254 PLANS.—

255 (a) A blue ribbon project may be located on land with any
256 future land use designation provided in the applicable local
257 government's comprehensive plan and with any zoning designation
258 listed in the applicable local government's land development
259 regulations. A comprehensive plan amendment or rezoning may not
260 be required for approval of a project.

261 (b) A landowner may apply to the local government for

578-01917-26

2026354c1

262 approval of a blue ribbon project. A project that meets the
263 requirements of this section must be administratively approved
264 without further action by the local government or any quasi-
265 judicial or administrative reviewing body. Local government
266 review of a project is limited to review for compliance with
267 this section. If the local government fails to provide written
268 comments on a project application within 60 days after receipt
269 of the application, or within 30 days after the applicant files
270 amended application documents that are responsive to initial
271 local government review, the application is automatically
272 approved. At any point after the local government's initial 60-
273 day review period, the applicant may request a final
274 determination by the local government, and the local government
275 must provide the determination within 7 days after receipt of
276 such request. If the local government fails to provide the
277 determination within the 7-day period, the application is
278 automatically approved.

279 (c) Applicants may hire private companies to conduct plan
280 reviews and building inspections pursuant to s. 553.791.

281 (d) If a blue ribbon project is approved, the applicant
282 must publish notice of such approval in a newspaper of general
283 circulation in the area in which the land is located. The notice
284 must include the local government order number, if any; the
285 section, township, and range in which the land is located; and a
286 description of the project. The notice must be published within
287 14 days after the approval is issued.

288 (e) After a blue ribbon project has been reviewed and
289 approved, the applicant must record the blue ribbon plan in the
290 public records of the county in which the project property is

578-01917-26

2026354c1

291 located, and the plan shall run with title to the land. The
292 applicant may not amend the recorded plan without undergoing
293 local government review of the plan amendment in accordance with
294 paragraph (b). Local government review of a plan amendment is
295 limited to the portions of the plan which are being revised.

296 (7) APPEAL PROCEDURE.-

297 (a) If a local government denies an application for a blue
298 ribbon project, the applicant may appeal the decision by filing
299 a written petition with the Department of Commerce within 21
300 days after the date on which the applicant receives the local
301 government's written notice of application denial. The applicant
302 shall provide a copy of the notice of appeal to the local
303 government.

304 (b) Any person whose substantial interests are or may be
305 affected by the local government's approval of a blue ribbon
306 project may request an administrative hearing by filing a
307 written petition with the Department of Commerce pursuant to ss.
308 120.569 and 120.57. The petition must be filed with the
309 Department of Commerce within 21 days after newspaper
310 publication of the notice of the local government decision in
311 accordance with paragraph (6) (d). The petition must clearly
312 state the reasons for the petition and describe how the project
313 will adversely affect the person more substantially than the
314 general population of the geographical area in which the project
315 is located. A copy of the petition must also be provided to the
316 local government. If a petition is timely filed pursuant to this
317 subsection, the applicant may intervene as a party to the
318 hearing.

319 (c) Before issuing an order on an appeal or petition under

578-01917-26

2026354c1

320 this subsection, the Department of Commerce must hold a hearing
321 in accordance with chapter 120.

322 (d) The Department of Commerce shall determine whether the
323 blue ribbon project meets the requirements of this section and
324 issue a final order granting or denying the application. The
325 department may attach conditions and restrictions to the order.

326 (e) Section 120.595 applies to proceedings brought by a
327 person whose substantial interests are or may be affected by the
328 local government's approval of a blue ribbon project under this
329 section.

330 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.