

**By** the Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development; the Committee on Community Affairs; and Senator McClain

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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; requiring that impact fees be calculated as applicable at the time of issuance of building permits; requiring a landowner to apply to the Department of Commerce for approval of a project in order to initiate approval of a blue ribbon plan; requiring that the application include a blue ribbon plan that meets specified requirements; limiting the scope of the department's review; requiring the department to provide copies of the application to

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specified entities for certain review and comment;  
requiring such entities to provide written comments to  
the department with a specified timeframe; requiring  
the department to approve the application or provide  
the applicant with a certain notice within a specified  
timeframe; providing for automatic approval of a  
project under certain circumstances; specifying that a  
project may be located on land with any future land  
use designation or zoning designation; providing that  
local government approval of a project creates a  
certain overlay special district; prohibiting a local  
government from requiring a comprehensive plan  
amendment or rezoning for approval of a project;  
requiring a landowner to apply to the local government  
for approval of a project upon department approval;  
requiring a landowner to apply to multiple local  
governments under certain circumstances; requiring a  
local government to conduct a certain public workshop  
within a specified timeframe after receipt of an  
application; requiring that an applicant be permitted  
to attend and participate in the workshop; requiring a  
local government to review a project within a certain  
timeframe after receipt of an application; limiting  
the scope of the local government's review; requiring  
that certain projects be administratively approved;  
providing that projects approved by the department are  
presumed to comply with certain provisions; providing  
that a local government may overcome such presumption  
in a certain manner; providing for automatic approval

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of a project under certain circumstances; authorizing applicants to hire private companies to conduct plan reviews and building inspections; requiring an applicant to publish notice of an approved project in a specified manner; requiring an applicant to record the plan for an approved project in the public records of the county in which the project property is located; prohibiting an applicant from amending a recorded plan without undergoing a specified review; limiting the scope of such review; authorizing an applicant to appeal the denial of a project application to the department in a specified manner and within a specified timeframe; authorizing a person whose substantial interests are or may be affected by approval of a project to file a written petition with the department requesting an administrative hearing in a specified manner and within a specified timeframe; providing requirements for such petition; authorizing an applicant to intervene as a party to a hearing under certain circumstances; requiring the department to hold certain hearings before issuing certain orders; requiring the department to determine whether a project meets certain requirements and issue a final order; specifying that the department may provide a different determination in the final order; providing applicability; requiring that a project comply with certain provisions; providing an effective date.

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

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

163.3249 Blue ribbon projects.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

(e) "Missing middle housing" means a range of for-sale and for-rent housing types, including, but not limited to, duplexes,

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triplexes, townhomes, small multifamily buildings, and small detached single-family homes, that fill the gap between larger single-family homes and larger apartment buildings. Such housing may be vertically and horizontally integrated.

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

(g) "Reserve area" means land that is set aside for environmental conservation, wildlife corridors, wetland and wildlife mitigation, productive agriculture and silviculture, uses consistent with the public purposes described under s. 570.71(1), parks, recreational activities, utility sites, reservoirs and lakes, or other uses that support such activities. Reserve areas may not include golf courses or data centers.

(h) "Special assessment district" means a community development district, municipal services taxing district, municipal services benefit district, or other district available under state law that allows for the assessment of ad valorem or non-ad valorem taxes on parcels of real property located within a blue ribbon project for the purpose of constructing, maintaining, repairing, and replacing capital improvements that serve the blue ribbon project. The term does not include an improvement district.

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

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

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controlled by the same person, and the majority of which are not located within a municipality.

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

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

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

2. At least 15 percent of the development area must be allocated to nonresidential land uses, which may include mixed-use buildings that contain ground floor nonresidential units. Conservation easement areas may not be counted toward the 15 percent.

3. A portion of the development area must be allocated to uses intended to provide economic development and create high-wage jobs. The development area so allocated must be in a location that is within 60 miles of an interstate interchange, an active rail line, or a regional or international airport or other transportation facility.

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

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175       5. Types of residential units within the development area  
176 must be varied and include single-family, multifamily, and  
177 attached and detached residential units.

178       (4) DEVELOPMENT AREA DENSITIES AND INTENSITIES.—

179       (a) A maximum residential density of 12 units per gross  
180 acre, and a maximum nonresidential intensity of 85 percent  
181 impervious surface ratio per gross acre, is permitted within the  
182 development area, as measured in combination throughout all  
183 phases of the project.

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

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

191       2. Missing middle housing.

192       3. Housing for people eligible for the Florida Hometown  
193 Hero Program under s. 420.5096.

194       (c) The development area may be developed in phases to  
195 accommodate growth projections in the geographical area in which  
196 the project is located. Development rights and mitigation of  
197 project impacts shall be vested for at least 50 years. If the  
198 applicant achieves development as defined in s. 380.04 of at  
199 least 50 percent of the development area within 50 years after  
200 the project's date of initial public dedication of  
201 infrastructure, the vested period must be extended for an  
202 additional 25 years.

203       (5) BLUE RIBBON PLANS.—A blue ribbon project must have a

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blue ribbon plan, which is the master development plan for the project. Blue ribbon plans must include a document that addresses the requirements of this section and exhibits, including maps, illustrations, and text supported by data and analysis, that demonstrate compliance therewith. The plan must include all of the following:

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

(b) Identification and analysis of necessary water supplies and available sources of water, including water resource development and water supply development projects, and water conservation measures required to meet the projected demand from each phase of the project. Water and wastewater facilities must be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such facilities may be provided by the applicant; a local unit of special purpose government or a special district, except an improvement district; a local government; or the state. Local governments are encouraged to enter into public-private partnerships to accomplish water storage and other water quality and capacity improvements within the boundaries of blue ribbon projects pursuant to s. 373.4591.

(c) Identification and analysis of the transportation facilities and future transportation corridors necessary to serve development area land uses in the master development plan, including guidelines to be used to establish each modal component intended to optimize mobility. Transportation facilities must be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such facilities must be provided by the applicant or a special



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assessment district created at the request of the applicant. A special assessment district, a local government, or the state may enter into a public-private partnership with the applicant pursuant to s. 255.065 to provide such facilities. Internal roads must be designed in accordance with the Department of Transportation's traditional neighborhood development guidelines provided in chapter 19 of the Manual of Uniform Minimum Standards for Design, Construction and Maintenance for Streets and Highways, 2023 edition.

(d) Identification of other regionally significant public facilities necessary to support the project's permitted density as provided in paragraph (4)(a) for each phase of the project, which facilities must include utilities, parks, and schools, and policies providing the procedures to mitigate the impacts of the project's permitted density on public facilities. Public facilities must be provided in compliance with s. 163.3180. Such facilities must be provided by the applicant or a special assessment district created at the request of the applicant. A special assessment district, a local government, or the state may enter into a public-private partnership with the applicant pursuant to s. 255.065 to provide such facilities.

(e) Identification of regionally significant natural resources within the reserve area based on the best available data and policies, and provision of mechanisms to ensure the perpetual protection or conservation of specific resources, consistent with the overall conservation and development strategy for the project area. The provision of regionally significant natural resources within the reserve area is determined to be a net ecosystem benefit.

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262       (f) General principles and guidelines that do all of the  
263 following:

264       1. Address the land uses within the development area and  
265 reserve area, and the interrelationships between such areas.

266       2. Address the protection and, as appropriate, restoration  
267 and management of reserve areas identified in the recorded blue  
268 ribbon plan for permanent conservation and public use, which  
269 must be phased in coordination with the phased development  
270 within the development area as specified in the master  
271 development plan.

272       3. Achieve a cleaner, healthier environment.

273       4. Limit urban sprawl.

274       5. Provide a range of housing types.

275       6. Protect wildlife and natural areas.

276       7. Advance the efficient use of land and other resources.

277       8. Create quality communities of a design that reduces and  
278 captures vehicle trips and promotes mobility options.

279       9. Enhance the prospects for state and local economic  
280 development objectives and high-wage job creation.

281       (g) Development standards for each type of land use  
282 proposed within the development area which is typically found in  
283 a planned unit development as defined in s. 163.3202(5)(b) and  
284 which is consistent with new urban design.

285       (h) Provision for an easement granted without charge to the  
286 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services under s. 570.71  
287 for any portion of the reserve area which will be reserved for  
288 uses consistent with the public purposes provided in s.  
289 570.71(1). The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
290 and the landowner must enter into an agreement regarding

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allowable uses for the easement interest before an easement is granted. The plan must also include a covenant that any easement or property granted to another state agency, a water management district, or a local government will be granted without charge.

A blue ribbon plan must be based on a planning period longer than the generally applicable planning period of the local comprehensive plan and must specify the projected population within the planning area during the chosen planning period. A plan is not required to demonstrate need based on projected population growth or any other basis. If under the plan a project contributes land or funds or otherwise causes the construction of public facilities pursuant to s. 163.3180, the project must receive dollar-for-dollar credits against impact, mobility, proportionate share, or other fee credits from the local government for such facility improvements as required by s. 163.3180. Impact fees must be calculated as applicable at the time of issuance of building permits.

(6) STATE ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF BLUE RIBBON PLANS.—In order to initiate approval of a blue ribbon plan, a landowner shall apply first to the Department of Commerce for approval of a blue ribbon project. The application must include a blue ribbon plan that meets the requirements of subsection (5). The department's review of a project is limited to a review for compliance with this section. The department shall provide copies of the application to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Department of Transportation, and the applicable water management district for

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review and comment within each entity's respective legal purview on the plan's compliance with this section. Such entities shall provide written comments to the Department of Commerce within 21 days after receipt of the application by the department. Within 45 days after receipt of the application, the department shall approve the application or provide to the applicant a written notice that identifies with specificity any areas of noncompliance and includes the written comments received from the specified entities. If the department fails to either approve the application or provide such notice within 45 days after receipt of the application, or fails to provide a written approval or denial of the application within 20 days after the applicant provides a response to the notice, the application is automatically approved by the department. At any point after the department's initial 45-day review period, the applicant may request a final determination of approval or denial by the department, and the department must provide the determination within 7 days after receipt of the request. If the department fails to provide the determination within the 7-day period, the application is automatically approved by the department.

(7) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF BLUE RIBBON PLANS.-

(a) A blue ribbon project may be located on land with any future land use designation provided in the applicable local government's comprehensive plan and with any zoning designation listed in the applicable local government's land development regulations. A local government's approval of a project creates an overlay special district within the local government's comprehensive plan which must adhere to the project's blue

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349 ribbon plan. A local government may not require a comprehensive  
350 plan amendment or rezoning for approval of a project.

351 (b)1. Upon approval of a blue ribbon project by the  
352 Department of Commerce, the landowner shall apply to the local  
353 government for approval of the project. If the project is  
354 located within more than one local government's jurisdiction,  
355 the landowner must apply to each applicable local government. In  
356 reviewing the project, each applicable local government shall  
357 apply subsections (3), (4), and (5) to the project as a whole.

358 2. Within 30 days after receipt of an application for  
359 approval of a project, the local government shall conduct a duly  
360 noticed public workshop at which the project is presented. The  
361 applicant must be permitted to attend and participate in the  
362 workshop.

363 3. The local government shall review the project within 15  
364 days after receipt of the application. The review is limited to  
365 a review for compliance with this section. A project that is in  
366 compliance with this section must be administratively approved  
367 without further action by the local government or any quasi-  
368 judicial or administrative reviewing body. A project approved by  
369 the Department of Commerce is presumed to be in compliance with  
370 this section. In order for a local government to overcome such  
371 presumption, the local government must find that the blue ribbon  
372 plan does not comply with subsection (5). If the local  
373 government makes such a finding, the local government must  
374 provide a written notice to the applicant which identifies with  
375 specificity the area of noncompliance and provides the applicant  
376 60 days to respond and submit any information necessary to  
377 comply with subsection (5). If the local government fails to

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378 provide such notice within 90 days after receipt of the  
379 application, or fails to provide a written approval or denial of  
380 the application within 30 days after the applicant provides a  
381 response to such notice, the application is automatically  
382 approved. At any point after the local government's initial 90-  
383 day review period, the applicant may request a final  
384 determination of approval or denial by the local government, and  
385 the local government must provide the determination within 7  
386 days after receipt of the request. If the local government fails  
387 to provide the determination within the 7-day period, the  
388 application is automatically approved.

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

391 (d) If a blue ribbon project is approved, the applicant  
392 must publish notice of such approval in a newspaper of general  
393 circulation in the area in which the land is located. The notice  
394 must include the local government order number, if any; the  
395 section, township, and range in which the land is located; and a  
396 description of the project. The notice must be published within  
397 14 days after the approval is issued.

398 (e) After a blue ribbon project has been reviewed and  
399 approved, the applicant must record the blue ribbon plan in the  
400 public records of the county in which the project property is  
401 located, and the plan shall run with title to the land. The  
402 applicant may not amend the recorded plan without undergoing  
403 local government review of the plan amendment in accordance with  
404 paragraph (b). Local government review of a plan amendment is  
405 limited to the portions of the plan which are being revised.

406 (8) APPEAL PROCEDURE.—

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407       (a)1. If the Department of Commerce denies an application  
408 for a blue ribbon project, the applicant may request an  
409 administrative hearing pursuant to ss. 120.569 and 120.57 within  
410 21 days after the date on which the applicant receives the  
411 department's written denial.

412       2. If a local government denies an application for a blue  
413 ribbon project, the applicant may appeal the decision by filing  
414 a written petition with the Department of Commerce within 21  
415 days after the date on which the applicant receives the local  
416 government's written denial. The applicant shall provide a copy  
417 of the notice of appeal to the local government.

418       (b) Any person whose substantial interests are or may be  
419 affected by the local government's approval of a blue ribbon  
420 project may request an administrative hearing by filing a  
421 written petition with the Department of Commerce pursuant to ss.  
422 120.569 and 120.57. The petition must be filed with the  
423 Department of Commerce within 21 days after newspaper  
424 publication of the notice of the local government decision in  
425 accordance with paragraph (7) (d). The petition must clearly  
426 state the reasons for the petition and describe how the project  
427 will adversely affect the person more substantially than the  
428 general population of the geographic area in which the project  
429 is located. A copy of the petition must also be provided to the  
430 local government. If a petition is timely filed pursuant to this  
431 paragraph, the applicant may intervene as a party to the  
432 hearing.

433       (c) Before issuing an order on an appeal or petition under  
434 this subsection, the Department of Commerce must hold a hearing  
435 in accordance with chapter 120.

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436       (d) The Department of Commerce shall determine whether the  
437 blue ribbon project meets the requirements of this section and  
438 issue a final order granting or denying the application. The  
439 department may attach conditions and restrictions to the order.  
440 The department may provide a determination in the final order  
441 which is different from the determination it provided after  
442 review of the application under subsection (6).

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

447       (9) A blue ribbon project must comply with applicable  
448 provisions of chapters 373 and 403.

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