

Mega-Developments Could Override Local Land-Use Rules Under New “Blue Ribbon Projects” Framework

[SB 354](#) – Sen. Stan McClain (HB 299 – Rep. Lauren Melo)

General Bill Summary

CS/CS/CS/SB 354 establishes a new state framework for large-scale developments called “Blue Ribbon Projects.” These projects are intended to enable the development of large planned communities while reserving a significant portion of land for conservation or other protected uses.

To qualify, a project must meet major scale requirements, including at least 15,000 acres of land. At least 60 percent of the project area must be designated as “reserve area,” which may include environmental conservation, agriculture, recreation, and utility uses. The remaining portion may be developed over time into residential and commercial areas that could function as new towns or cities.

The bill authorizes the creation of a “Blue Ribbon Plan,” which outlines the long-term development concept for the project. Once approved, the plan provides development rights for the project area, including specified residential density and nonresidential intensity limits.

A key feature of the bill is that qualifying projects may be developed regardless of existing comprehensive plan designations, zoning classifications, or local land development regulations. The legislation also includes provisions requiring certain local government credits or offsets for infrastructure or related contributions under specified conditions.

The bill creates the statutory framework and procedures for approving and implementing these large projects within Florida.

Potential County Impact

The bill could significantly affect county land-use authority and growth management responsibilities.

Most notably, the legislation allows qualifying Blue Ribbon Projects to override local comprehensive plans, zoning, and land development regulations once a Blue Ribbon Plan is approved. This represents a form of state preemption of traditional local planning authority, which counties typically exercise under Chapter 163, F.S.

Counties would still play an administrative role in reviewing and approving the Blue Ribbon Plan. However, the review process is largely procedural and tied to the statutory framework established in the bill, potentially limiting local discretion over land-use outcomes.

Because projects must cover extremely large areas—15,000 acres or more—they could occur primarily in rural or undeveloped portions of counties, potentially reshaping long-term growth

patterns. Over time, these developments could create new communities or urban centers, increasing demand for county infrastructure, emergency services, transportation, and utilities.

Fiscal impacts are uncertain. While the bill requires substantial land to remain in reserve uses and may involve infrastructure contributions, counties could face long-term service and infrastructure costs associated with large-scale population growth. The dollar-for-dollar credit provisions may also affect local revenue or development agreement negotiations.

Counties may need to evaluate how Blue Ribbon Projects integrate with regional transportation planning, environmental management, and existing comprehensive plan strategies.

Effective Date

July 1, 2026.

Primary Statutory References

- s. 163.3249, F.S. – Blue Ribbon Projects