



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of  
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

# FLORIDA COMMUNITIES QUARTERLY

Division of Community Development  
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

FALL 2020

## A Letter from Dane Eagle, Executive Director of the Department of Economic Opportunity

Our state helps Florida communities by providing opportunities for them to obtain the means needed to develop their workforce, create jobs, diversify the economy, build a strong infrastructure, and ensure resiliency for future disasters. It has been a pleasure meeting with several of our local partners about projects in communities throughout the state, and I look forward to seeing the progress Florida communities make with the state’s investments.

With the economic impacts COVID-19 and Hurricane Sally have had on our state, DEO’s Division of Community Development has implemented various programs to assist with economic recovery and continue economic development, ensuring Florida families, businesses, and communities are more resilient in the future. In my short time here, we have launched several programs doing just that.

In September, Governor DeSantis activated the Florida Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan, a short-term, interest-free loan program available to small businesses in Florida that have experienced physical damage and/or economic injury as a result of Hurricane Sally. The Office of Small and Minority Business Capital has been working diligently with our partners in the Panhandle to provide loans as quickly and efficiently as possible. The deadline for businesses to apply for the [Emergency Bridge Loan](#) is November 14, or until all available funds are expended.

In addition, DEO, in partnership with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), will administer \$29 million in Federal funding available to Florida’s community action agencies through the [Community Services Block Grant](#) - Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Funding is available to assist eligible income-qualified households impacted by COVID-19 with antipoverty services such as emergency health, food, housing, day care, transportation assistance, housing counseling, financial management assistance, and other various resources. DEO and HHS have also made \$56 million available through the [Low-Income](#)

[Home Energy Assistance Program](#) - CARES Act appropriation to Florida’s community action agencies to assist income qualified Florida families with home heating and cooling costs.

Despite the challenges we all face due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DEO remains committed to assisting you and your communities. Again, I look forward to engaging with you to ensure the success of all communities throughout our state.

Sincerely, Dane Eagle



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# Columbia County: Growing in All Directions



*Construction of the Railroad Spur.*

Florida's Gateway since 1832 is much more than a motto for Columbia County. The County's location at the intersection of Interstates 10 and 75, its proximity to a full-service international seaport at JAXPORT, the immediate accessibility to Norfolk Southern and Florida Gulf & Atlantic railroads, and the convenience of being centrally located to several regional and international airports, create a strategic destination for manufacturing and distribution industries looking to move into the southeast region of the United States.

In addition to being a part of a designated Rural Area of Opportunity, Columbia County also is home to: an Opportunity Zone; the 2,622-acre North Florida Mega Industrial Park (NFMIP), which includes a 500-acre State designated Catalyst Site, a Foreign Free Trade Zone; CSX Select Site Designation; and Certified as a McCallum Sweeney Mega Industrial Site. These unique assets pave the way for businesses to expedite their location and growth within Columbia County.

Growth has not always been easy for Columbia County. In 2009, a team of local businessman and educators along with city and county officials partnered together with the primary goal of identifying targeted development areas within the county. Recognizing the seven key areas along with their potential targeted industries was the first step taken by many to ensure that Columbia County would successfully grow well into the future.

In 2013, the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) awarded Columbia County \$300,000 through the Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) grant for wetland engineering within the NFMIP Catalyst Site. The City of Lake City, the heart of Columbia County, was awarded \$1,697,456 through the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Springs Grant, \$1,000,000 through Legislative Appropriation, and \$600,000 through an Economic Development Administration Protection Grant for the design, permitting, and construction of lift stations to reduce septic systems.



In 2017, Columbia County was awarded a \$300,000 RIF grant for an engineering rail within the NFMIP. The county also received \$1,045,000 from DEO through the Community Development Block Grant - Economic Development (CDBG-ED) program to expand the wastewater treatment plant at Interstate 75 and Highway 441.

The Florida Job Growth Grant Fund (FJGGF) in the amount of \$3,135,600 was awarded to Columbia County in February 2018 for the construction of a rail spur from the Florida Gulf & Atlantic mainline into NFMIP. In October of the same year, the County was awarded \$10,200,000 to construct a 500k-gallon wastewater treatment plant, which will serve the eastern side of Columbia County/Lake City as well as the NFMIP.

In 2019, the Florida State Legislature awarded \$750,000 for the County to extend the rail construction into the NFMIP. The City of Lake City received \$200,000 from the RIF grant program to complete a wastewater capacity study in northern Columbia County, along the Bell Road Distribution Corridor. In June 2019, Columbia County received \$100,000 from the RIF grant program to complete the design and engineering of the Bell Road utilities. Once that grant was completed, DEO awarded another \$500,000 through the RIF for the completion of a natural gas line loop through the Bell Road Distribution corridor. The County was also awarded \$1,500,000 in CDBG-ED funds to extend sewer to a project site along the Interstate 75 and Highway 47 interchange.

With more than \$21 million in grant funding through DEO and the state of Florida and almost \$67 million in private investment, each of the seven identified key development areas either have infrastructure and utilities in place or projects underway for construction. Columbia County now is well positioned to continue growing.

## Broadband Funding Resources

The Florida Office of Broadband markets and promotes broadband internet services and funding opportunities available to communities around the state, as directed in [Section 364.0135, Florida Statutes](#). Visit the [Office of Broadband webpage](#) for more information. The webpage is updated regularly with current information.

# Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Hurricane Sally Relief Efforts for Forest Creek in Pensacola

When Hurricane Sally swept through the Panhandle on September 18, 2020, residents throughout Escambia County were impacted, but especially residents of Pensacola's Forest Creek Apartments. Many apartments were flooded leaving residents with no choice other than to move out of their homes. A total of 72 first floor units became uninhabitable, so many residents were left with the immediate need of housing and other types of assistance.

With the combined efforts of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and organizations such as Community Action Program Committee (CAPC) and the Florida Department of Emergency Management, the state of Florida was able to help provide relief to Forest Creek residents and fulfill urgent needs.

From September 25 to 27, 2020, DEO, in conjunction with CAPC, spearheaded Hurricane Sally relief efforts near the Forest Creek apartment complex in Pensacola. Displaced residents were bussed to the Patton Drive Community Outreach Center on Old Corry Field Road. DEO deployed staff from the Division of Community Development, who worked with CAPC case managers and support staff to personally interview and identify urgent needs of displaced residents of Forest Creek as well as other individuals and families in the area. Thanks to funds set aside and available through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), residents of Forest Creek were able to have a variety of unique, urgent needs met. DEO and CAPC were able to assist residents



*Identifying needs and assisting residents.*

with services such as: temporary housing, medication replacement, identification document replacement fees, food, relocation expenses, utility assistance, bedding, furniture, toiletries, basic cell phones for communication, and transportation aid.

To date, DEO and CAPC have processed 111 applications, (70 Forest Creek applications have been completed), assisted 12 households with emergency housing, and helped a resident find a job.

While the focus of the relief effort is currently on providing temporary and finding permanent housing, DEO will continue to work closely with CAPC to assist Forest Creek residents in accomplishing the ultimate goal of maintaining stability and working toward economic self-sufficiency.



*Clean up from the flooding in the first floor units.*



*The American Red Cross working alongside CAPC.*

# Calendar *of* Events



## **Small Cities Community Development Block Grant**

Deadline to Apply: November 9, 2020, at 5 p.m., Eastern Time

Learn More: [www.FloridaJobs.org/SmallCitiesCDBG](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/SmallCitiesCDBG)

## **Learners to Earners Workforce Solution Seminars Series**

November 10, 2020 | Virtual Seminar

Learn more: [www.flchamber.com/event\\_post/learners-to-earners-workforce-solution-seminars-series/](http://www.flchamber.com/event_post/learners-to-earners-workforce-solution-seminars-series/)

## **Florida League of Cities Legislative Conference**

November 12-13, 2020 | Embassy Suites Orlando - Lake Buena Vista South, 4955 Kyngs Heath Rd., Kissimmee, FL 34746

Learn more: [www.redevelopment.net/2020-annual-conference/](http://www.redevelopment.net/2020-annual-conference/)

## **Rural Infrastructure Fund Panhandle Specific Appropriation Application Cycle**

Deadline to Apply: November 30, 2020, at 5 p.m., Eastern Time

Learn More: [www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF](http://www.FloridaJobs.org/RIF)

## **Rebuild Florida Voluntary Home Buyout Program for Hurricane Michael Impacted Communities**

Deadline to Apply: November 30, 2020

Learn more: [www.RebuildFlorida.gov](http://www.RebuildFlorida.gov)

## **Rebuild Florida General Infrastructure Repair Program for Hurricane Michael Impacted Communities**

Deadline to Apply: November 30, 2020

Learn more: [www.RebuildFlorida.gov](http://www.RebuildFlorida.gov)

## **Florida Association of Counties Legislative Conference**

December 2-4, 2020 | Jacksonville, FL

Learn more: [www.fl-counties.com/node/3737](http://www.fl-counties.com/node/3737)

## **Transportation, Growth and Infrastructure Solution Summit**

December 9, 2020 | Virtual Seminar

Learn more: [www.flchamber.com/event\\_post/transportation-growth-infrastructure-solution-seminars/](http://www.flchamber.com/event_post/transportation-growth-infrastructure-solution-seminars/)

## **Rebuild Florida Workforce Recovery Training Program for Hurricane Michael Impacted Communities**

Deadline to Apply: December 15, 2020

Learn more: [www.RebuildFlorida.gov](http://www.RebuildFlorida.gov)

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Learn more: [www.RebuildFlorida.gov](http://www.RebuildFlorida.gov)

**Connect with the Office of Community Partnerships Today!**

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