

70.001 Private property rights protection.—

(1) This act may be cited as the “Bert J. Harris, Jr., Private Property Rights Protection Act.” The Legislature recognizes that some laws, regulations, and ordinances of the state and political entities in the state, as applied, may inordinately burden, restrict, or limit private property rights without amounting to a taking under the State Constitution or the United States Constitution. The Legislature determines that there is an important state interest in protecting the interests of private property owners from such inordinate burdens. Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature that, as a separate and distinct cause of action from the law of takings, the Legislature herein provides for relief, or payment of compensation, when a new law, rule, regulation, or ordinance of the state or a political entity in the state, as applied, unfairly affects real property.

(2) When a specific action of a governmental entity has inordinately burdened an existing use of real property or a vested right to a specific use of real property, the property owner of that real property is entitled to relief, which may include compensation for the actual loss to the fair market value of the real property caused by the action of government, as provided in this section. A property owner entitled to relief under this section retains such entitlement to pursue the claim if the property owner filed a claim under subsection (4) but subsequently relinquishes title to the subject real property before the claim reaches a final resolution.

(3) For purposes of this section:

(a) The existence of a “vested right” is to be determined by applying the principles of equitable estoppel or substantive due process under the common law or by applying the statutory law of this state.

(b) The term “existing use” means:

1. An actual, present use or activity on the real property, including periods of inactivity which are normally associated with, or are incidental to, the nature or type of use; or
2. Activity or such reasonably foreseeable, nonspeculative land uses which are suitable for the subject real property and compatible with adjacent land uses and which have created an existing fair market value in the property greater than the fair market value of the actual, present use or activity on the real property.

(c) The term “governmental entity” includes an agency of the state, a regional or a local government created by the State Constitution or by general or special act, any county or municipality, or any other entity that independently exercises governmental authority. The term does not include the United States or any of its agencies, or an agency of the state, a

regional or a local government created by the State Constitution or by general or special act, any county or municipality, or any other entity that independently exercises governmental authority, when exercising the powers of the United States or any of its agencies through a formal delegation of federal authority.

(d) The term “action of a governmental entity” means a specific action of a governmental entity which affects real property, including acting on an application or a permit or adopting or enforcing any ordinance, resolution, regulation, rule, or policy.

(e) The terms “inordinate burden” and “inordinately burdened”:

1. Mean that an action of one or more governmental entities has directly restricted or limited the use of real property such that the property owner is permanently unable to attain the reasonable, investment-backed expectation for the existing use of the real property or a vested right to a specific use of the real property with respect to the real property as a whole, or that the property owner is left with existing or vested uses that are unreasonable such that the property owner bears permanently a disproportionate share of a burden imposed for the good of the public, which in fairness should be borne by the public at large.

2. Do not include temporary impacts to real property; impacts to real property occasioned by governmental abatement, prohibition, prevention, or remediation of a public nuisance at common law or a noxious use of private property; or impacts to real property caused by an action of a governmental entity taken to grant relief to a property owner under this section. However, a temporary impact on development, as defined in s. 380.04, that is in effect for longer than 1 year may, depending upon the circumstances, constitute an “inordinate burden” as provided in this paragraph.

In determining whether reasonable, investment-backed expectations are inordinately burdened, consideration may be given to the factual circumstances leading to the time elapsed between enactment of the law or regulation and its first application to the subject property.

(f) The term “property owner” means the person who holds legal title to the real property that is the subject of and directly impacted by the action of a governmental entity. The term does not include a governmental entity.

(g) The term “real property” means land and includes any surface, subsurface, or mineral estates and any appurtenances and improvements to the land, including any other relevant interest in the real property in which the property owner has a relevant interest. The term includes only parcels that are the subject of and directly impacted by the action of a governmental entity.

(4)(a) Not fewer than 90 days before filing an action under this section against a governmental entity, a property owner who seeks compensation under this section must present the claim in writing to the head of the governmental entity. The property owner must submit, along with the claim, a written appraisal report as defined in s. 475.611(1)(e) that supports the claim and demonstrates the loss in fair market value to the real property. If the action of government is the culmination of a process that involves more than one governmental entity, or if a complete resolution of all relevant issues, in the view of the property owner or in the view of a governmental entity to whom a claim is presented, requires the active participation of more than one governmental entity, the property owner shall present the claim as provided in this section to each of the governmental entities.

(b) The governmental entity shall provide written notice of the claim to all parties to any administrative action that gave rise to the claim, and to owners of real property contiguous to the owner's property at the addresses listed on the most recent county tax rolls. Within 15 days after the claim is presented, the governmental entity shall report the claim in writing to the Department of Legal Affairs, and shall provide the department with the name, address, and telephone number of the employee of the governmental entity from whom additional information may be obtained about the claim during the pendency of the claim and any subsequent judicial action.

(c) During the 90-day-notice period, unless extended by agreement of the parties, the governmental entity shall make a written settlement offer to effectuate:

1. An adjustment of land development or permit standards or other provisions controlling the development or use of land.
2. Increases or modifications in the density, intensity, or use of areas of development.
3. The transfer of development rights.
4. Land swaps or exchanges.
5. Mitigation, including payments in lieu of onsite mitigation.
6. Location on the least sensitive portion of the property.
7. Conditioning the amount of development or use permitted.
8. A requirement that issues be addressed on a more comprehensive basis than a single proposed use or development.
9. Issuance of the development order, a variance, a special exception, or any other extraordinary relief.

10. Purchase of the real property, or an interest therein, by an appropriate governmental entity or payment of compensation.

11. No changes to the action of the governmental entity.

If the property owner accepts a settlement offer, before or after filing an action, the governmental entity may implement the settlement offer by appropriate development agreement; by issuing a variance, a special exception, or any other extraordinary relief; or by any other appropriate method, subject to paragraph (d).

(d)1. When a governmental entity enters into a settlement agreement under this section which would have the effect of a modification, variance, or a special exception to the application of a rule, regulation, or ordinance as it would otherwise apply to the subject real property, the relief granted shall protect the public interest served by the regulations at issue and be the appropriate relief necessary to prevent the governmental regulatory effort from inordinately burdening the real property. Settlement offers made under paragraph (c) shall be presumed to protect the public interest.

2. When a governmental entity enters into a settlement agreement under this section which would have the effect of contravening the application of a statute as it would otherwise apply to the subject real property, the governmental entity and the property owner shall jointly file an action in the circuit court where the real property is located for approval of the settlement agreement by the court to ensure that the relief granted protects the public interest served by the statute at issue and is the appropriate relief necessary to prevent the governmental regulatory effort from inordinately burdening the real property.

This paragraph applies to any settlement reached between a property owner and a governmental entity regardless of when the settlement agreement was entered so long as the agreement fully resolves all claims asserted under this section.

(5)(a) During the 90-day-notice period, unless a settlement offer is accepted by the property owner, each of the governmental entities provided notice under subsection (4) shall issue a written statement of allowable uses identifying the allowable uses to which the subject property may be put. The failure of the governmental entity to issue a statement of allowable uses during the 90-day-notice period shall be deemed a denial for purposes of allowing a property owner to file an action in the circuit court under this section. If a written statement of allowable uses is issued, it constitutes the last prerequisite to judicial review for the purposes of the judicial proceeding created by this section, notwithstanding the availability of other administrative remedies.

(b) If the property owner rejects the settlement offer and the statement of allowable uses of the governmental entity or entities, the property owner may file a claim for

compensation in the circuit court, a copy of which shall be served contemporaneously on the head of each of the governmental entities that made a settlement offer and a statement of allowable uses that was rejected by the property owner. Actions under this section shall be brought only in the county where the real property is located.

(6)(a) The circuit court shall determine whether an existing use of the real property or a vested right to a specific use of the real property existed and, if so, whether, considering the settlement offer and statement of allowable uses, the governmental entity or entities have inordinately burdened the real property. If the actions of more than one governmental entity, considering any settlement offers and statement of allowable uses, are responsible for the action that imposed the inordinate burden on the real property of the property owner, the court shall determine the percentage of responsibility each such governmental entity bears with respect to the inordinate burden. A governmental entity may take an interlocutory appeal of the court's determination that the action of the governmental entity has resulted in an inordinate burden. An interlocutory appeal does not automatically stay the proceedings; however, the court may stay the proceedings during the pendency of the interlocutory appeal. If the governmental entity does not prevail in the interlocutory appeal, the court shall award to the prevailing property owner the costs and a reasonable attorney fee incurred by the property owner in the interlocutory appeal.

(b) Following its determination of the percentage of responsibility of each governmental entity, and following the resolution of any interlocutory appeal, the court shall impanel a jury to determine the total amount of compensation to the property owner for the loss in value due to the inordinate burden to the real property. The property owner retains the option to forego a jury and elect to have the court determine the award of compensation. The award of compensation shall be determined by calculating the difference in the fair market value of the real property, as it existed at the time of the governmental action at issue, as though the owner had the ability to attain the reasonable investment-backed expectation or was not left with uses that are unreasonable, whichever the case may be, and the fair market value of the real property, as it existed at the time of the governmental action at issue, as inordinately burdened, considering the settlement offer together with the statement of allowable uses, of the governmental entity or entities. In determining the award of compensation, consideration may not be given to business damages relative to any development, activity, or use that the action of the governmental entity or entities, considering the settlement offer together with the statement of allowable uses has restricted, limited, or prohibited. The award of compensation shall include a reasonable award of prejudgment interest from the date the claim was presented to the governmental entity or entities as provided in subsection (4).

(c)1. In any action filed pursuant to this section, the property owner is entitled to recover reasonable costs and attorney fees incurred by the property owner, from the governmental entity or entities, according to their proportionate share as determined by the court, from the date of the presentation of the claim to the head of the governmental entity under paragraph (4)(a), if the property owner prevails in the action.

2. In any action filed pursuant to this section, the governmental entity or entities are entitled to recover reasonable costs and attorney fees incurred by the governmental entity or entities from the date of the filing of the circuit court action, if the governmental entity or entities prevail in the action and the court determines that the property owner did not accept a bona fide settlement offer, including the statement of allowable uses, which reasonably would have resolved the claim fairly to the property owner if the settlement offer had been accepted by the property owner, based upon the knowledge available to the governmental entity or entities and the property owner during the 90-day-notice period.

3. The determination of total reasonable costs and attorney fees pursuant to this paragraph shall be made by the court and not by the jury. Any proposed settlement offer or any proposed decision, except for the final written settlement offer or the final written statement of allowable uses, and any negotiations or rejections in regard to the formulation either of the settlement offer or the statement of allowable uses, are inadmissible in the subsequent proceeding established by this section except for the purposes of the determination pursuant to this paragraph.

(d) Within 15 days after the execution of any settlement pursuant to this section, or the issuance of any judgment pursuant to this section, the governmental entity shall provide a copy of the settlement or judgment to the Department of Legal Affairs.

(7)(a) The circuit court may enter any orders necessary to effectuate the purposes of this section and to make final determinations to effectuate relief available under this section.

(b) An award or payment of compensation pursuant to this section shall operate to grant to and vest in any governmental entity by whom compensation is paid the right, title, and interest in rights of use for which the compensation has been paid, which rights may become transferable development rights to be held, sold, or otherwise disposed of by the governmental entity. When there is an award of compensation, the court shall determine the form and the recipient of the right, title, and interest, as well as the terms of their acquisition.

(8) This section does not supplant methods agreed to by the parties and lawfully available for arbitration, mediation, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution, and

governmental entities are encouraged to utilize such methods to augment or facilitate the processes and actions contemplated by this section.

(9) This section provides a cause of action for governmental actions that may not rise to the level of a taking under the State Constitution or the United States Constitution. This section may not necessarily be construed under the case law regarding takings if the governmental action does not rise to the level of a taking. The provisions of this section are cumulative, and do not abrogate any other remedy lawfully available, including any remedy lawfully available for governmental actions that rise to the level of a taking. However, a governmental entity shall not be liable for compensation for an action of a governmental entity applicable to, or for the loss in value to, a subject real property more than once.

(10)(a) This section does not apply to any actions taken by a governmental entity which relate to the operation, maintenance, or expansion of transportation facilities, and this section does not affect existing law regarding eminent domain relating to transportation.

(b) This section does not apply to any actions taken by a county with respect to the adoption of a Flood Insurance Rate Map issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the purpose of participating in the National Flood Insurance Program, unless such adoption incorrectly applies an aspect of the Flood Insurance Rate Map to the property in such a way as to, but not limited to, incorrectly assess the elevation of the property.

(11) A cause of action may not be commenced under this section if the claim is presented more than 1 year after a law or regulation is first applied by the governmental entity to the property at issue.

(a) For purposes of determining when this 1-year claim period accrues:

1.a. A law or regulation is first applied upon enactment and notice as provided for in this sub-subparagraph if the impact of the law or regulation on the real property is clear and unequivocal in its terms and notice is provided by mail to the affected property owner or registered agent at the address referenced in the jurisdiction's most current ad valorem tax records. The fact that the law or regulation could be modified, varied, or altered under any other process or procedure does not preclude the impact of the law or regulation on a property from being clear or unequivocal pursuant to this sub-subparagraph. Any notice under this sub-subparagraph shall be provided after the enactment of the law or regulation and shall inform the property owner or registered agent that the law or regulation may impact the property owner's existing property rights and that the property owner may have only 1 year after receipt of the notice to pursue any rights established under this section.

b. If the notice required in sub-subparagraph a. is not provided to the property owner, the property owner may at any time after enactment notify the head of the governmental entity in writing via certified mail and, if available, e-mail that the property owner deems the impact of the law or regulation on the property owner's real property to be clear and unequivocal in its terms and, as such, restrictive of uses allowed on the property before the enactment. Within 45 days after receipt of a notice under this sub-subparagraph, the governmental entity in receipt of the notice must respond in writing via certified mail and, if available, e-mail to describe the limitations imposed on the property by the law or regulation. The property owner is not required to formally pursue an application for a development order, development permit, or building permit, as such will be deemed a waste of resources and shall not be a prerequisite to bringing a claim under paragraph (4)(a). However, any such claim must be filed within 1 year after the date of the property owner's receipt of the notice from the governmental entity of the limitations on use imposed on the real property.

2. Otherwise, the law or regulation is first applied to the property when there is a formal denial of a written request for development or variance.

(b) If an owner seeks relief from the governmental action through lawfully available administrative or judicial proceedings, the time for bringing an action under this section is tolled until the conclusion of such proceedings.

(12) No cause of action exists under this section as to the application of any law enacted on or before May 11, 1995, or as to the application of any rule, regulation, or ordinance adopted, or formally noticed for adoption, on or before that date. A subsequent amendment to any such law, rule, regulation, or ordinance gives rise to a cause of action under this section only to the extent that the application of the amendatory language imposes an inordinate burden apart from the law, rule, regulation, or ordinance being amended.

(13) In accordance with s. 13, Art. X of the State Constitution, the state, for itself and for its agencies or political subdivisions, waives sovereign immunity for causes of action based upon the application of any law, regulation, or ordinance subject to this section, but only to the extent specified in this section.

History.—s. 1, ch. 95-181; s. 1, ch. 2006-255; s. 1, ch. 2011-191; s. 2, ch. 2012-94; s. 1, ch. 2015-142; s. 9, ch. 2021-51; s. 1, ch. 2021-203.