



**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

FLORIDA COMMUNITIES QUARTERLY

**Division of Community Development
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity**

Winter 2020

What's Happening in 2020

During 2020, I look forward to continuing to work with you to energize economic growth in Florida's communities. I am closely watching bills proposed to the Florida Legislature that may provide economic development opportunities for Florida's small and rural communities. This Legislative session, DEO is prioritizing the Qualified Targeted Industry Tax Refund program to make Florida more attractive to businesses looking to expand. Learn more about the program from [Discussions with DEO](#).

Members of my team recently met with the U.S. Department of Treasury and together we are working to identify funding opportunities for various community development projects. As we explore these options, we will share more information with you.

A funding opportunity currently available for which your community may be eligible is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Broadband program to expand high-speed internet in rural communities. Learn more about the ReConnect program on page 4 of this newsletter.



If you have any best practices or exciting, new initiatives that you would like to highlight, please reach out to the Office of Community Partnerships and send us those stories as we would love to share them with other communities across Florida.

Mario Rubio
Director, Division of Community Development

.....

Community Service, Energy Assistance and Weatherization Services

DEO's Bureau of Economic Self-Sufficiency (BESS) assists Florida's low-income populations in overcoming and alleviating workforce barriers to economic self-sufficiency through three community-based programs. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and U.S. Department of Energy programs including the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) each provide grants through the Community Action Agency (CAA) network.

Through the CSBG, local governments and nonprofit agencies work to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty and help people with low incomes improve their lives by attaining the skills, knowledge and motivation necessary to achieve self-sufficiency. Applicants must apply with the local CSBG provider, provide proof of income and identification of all household members.

LIHEAP assists low-income households with utility bills for home heating and cooling. The program has three categories of assistance: home energy assistance, crisis assistance, and weather related or supply-shortage emergency assistance. Applicants must apply with the local LIHEAP provider and meet the household income requirement. Renters are eligible to receive LIHEAP energy assistance as most renters pay utility bills directly to the utility company.

Weatherization services through the WAP program are cost-effective, energy efficiency measures for existing residential and multifamily housing income-eligible residents. To qualify, applicants must meet the income requirement and preference is given to owner-occupied homes, elderly (60 years-plus) or physically disabled residents, families with children under 12 and households with a high energy burden. If the applicants receive Supplemental Security Income, they are automatically eligible to receive weatherization services.

To learn more about how citizens in your community can benefit from these programs, contact the CSBG (www.FloridaJobs.org/CSBGHelp), LIHEAP (www.FloridaJobs.org/LIHEAPHelp) and WAP (www.FloridaJobs.org/WAPHelp) providers in your county.

Where's the Office of Community Partnerships?

See Where We've Been and What We've Been Doing...



Crestview: Met City of Crestview's city planner, saw how Eglin Air Force Base has created growth for the city and discussed how the natural watershed provides both opportunities and challenges.



Blountstown: Attended the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) meeting and met with community leaders regarding Disaster Recovery's Community Development Block Grant funding.



Apalachicola: Attended the Opportunity Florida meeting, where leaders discussed replacement of timber lost to Hurricane Michael with prospective agriculture crops.



Panacea: Spoke with local business owners about innovations in the oyster industry, how to create a more vibrant economy and how the Gulf Coast Specimen Lab provides education and research opportunities related to Florida's native coastal wildlife in Florida.



Lake Butler: Toured the Union County Courthouse, Jail, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Parks and Recreation area and the Wastewater Treatment Facility.



Inverness: Attended the "Fire Up Citrus!" event, where local entrepreneurs from Citrus County presented their prospective business ideas.



Fort Meade: Visited the Fort Meade Historical Society and heard about the annual Peace River Folk Bluegrass and Country Music Festival. We also saw the unique landscape of the Streamsong Golf Resort that brings new life to former phosphate mines in an area known as Bone Valley.



LaBelle: Met with LaBelle leadership and learned about the importance of the annual Swamp Cabbage Festival and parade that draws thousands to the area each year. We also discussed how the U.S. Department of Agriculture funded workforce housing that supports local agriculture.



Okeechobee: Viewed the community and saw improvements made to the City of Okeechobee parks including the Veterans Memorial Park and the Lake Okeechobee Recreation Area. Also, we were given a tour of the city by airboat on beautiful Lake Okeechobee.

Make Your Community's Mark - Schedule A Visit Today!

Planning for Progress: The City of Hawthorne



In January 2011, the City of Hawthorne received devastating news when the area's major employer announced its plant would close and more than 400 jobs would be lost. As a traditionally rural farming community within a low-income area, employment opportunities

vanished. The local bank branch, carwash and family restaurant closed as an indirect result.

The City of Hawthorne, incorporated in 1881 and located in east Alachua County, more recently has struggled with substandard housing, high unemployment, infrastructure deficiencies and a lack of economic development.

In assessing where the City of Hawthorne was and where it needed to be, several discoveries were made and the community got to work.

- In 2011, the wastewater treatment plant was upgraded with a Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) increasing the capacity by 50,000 gallons a day.

- In 2012, the Florida Rural Water Association completed a study of Hawthorne's water system. Findings allowed the City to work with the DEO CDBG, St. Johns River Water Management District and the State of Florida to fund the engineering and construction of 20,000 feet of water line for a combined \$1.2 million-dollar project to replace the aging water lines. The city is currently working with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan to secure engineering for the next phase of the water line replacement project.

- In 2015, the City of Hawthorne was awarded a DEO Community Planning Technical Assistance Grant to create a vision plan to revitalize Hawthorne's downtown area

from economic and social perspectives by updating its urban landscape. Hawthorne's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) approved the vision plan and incorporated it into its CRA Formal Plan.

- In 2017, Wild Spaces Public Places half-cent sales tax helped the City of Hawthorne procure engineering for improvements at three parks. Wild Spaces Public Places and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program funded the construction of handicap accessible sidewalks and ramps, a splash park, new dock and pavilion, boating improvements and outdoor restrooms, which have greatly enhanced the parks.

- In 2019, residents of Hawthorne voted to adopt an ad valorem tax abatement program to attract businesses to invest in Hawthorne. Investors can qualify by either creating new or expanding businesses to bring jobs and investments to offset the property taxes for up to 10 years. This is the city's first-ever, voter-initiated tax abatement program.

- In 2020, Hawthorne Athletic Park will begin construction on tennis courts, basketball courts, outdoor restrooms and a football/soccer field to complete its master plan through a DEO CDBG.

- Looking to the future, Hawthorne plans to develop its industrial park. In 2017, a property owner annexed 1,300 acres into the city. The rail-serviced Hawthorne Industry Park is slated to attract industrial manufacturing, logistics, commercial and retail businesses that could potentially provide thousands of direct and indirect jobs. This property will require major development of infrastructure.

While Hawthorne does not have all the pieces of the planning puzzle in place, the City of Hawthorne continues to work diligently to seek economic development opportunities in hopes that by planning for progress, better opportunities for its residents will be available in the future.

- written by Ellen Vause, City Manager of Hawthorne

** The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of DEO.*



Did You Know?

Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUB Zones) are determined by the U.S. Small Business Administration based on information from the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal agencies. Qualified HubZone businesses receive a 10% price advantage when bidding on federal government contracts.

To qualify, a business must: Be a small business by SBA's [size standards \(www.sba.gov/size-standards/\)](http://www.sba.gov/size-standards/); Recertify every 3 years; Be at least 51% owned and controlled by a U.S. citizen, or citizens, a Community Development Corporation, an agricultural cooperative, a Native Hawaiian organization or an Indian Tribe; At least 35% of the employees must live in a HUB Zone; SBA certification is the only way to qualify for HUB Zone program status.

Visit the [HUBZone Map \(maps.certify.sba.gov/hubzone/map#center\)](http://maps.certify.sba.gov/hubzone/map#center) to locate HUB Zones in your area.

Calendar of Events



Florida State Legislative Session

2020 Session: January 14 - March 13 | Tallahassee, FL

Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Meetings

February 21 | Wauchula, FL • March 20 | Tallahassee, FL

TransPlex (Transportation | Planning | Exchange)

April 20-22 | Embassy Suites by Hilton, Orlando Lake Buena Vista South, 4955 Kynns Heath Road, Kissimmee, FL

Florida Rural Economic Development Association (FREDA) Rural Summit

April 29 - May 1 | Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista Disney Springs, 1751 Hotel Plaza Blvd., Lake Buena Vista, FL

ReConnect Broadband Funding Opportunity

The ReConnect Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has \$550 million in funding available to build high-speed internet eConnectivity to underserved or unserved rural areas. The application is open now until Monday, March 16, 2020, at 6:00 PM Eastern time.

Funds are available through the following funding types:

100% Loan | 50% Grant; 50% Loan | 100% Grant

Please visit the ReConnect Loan and Grant Program webpage (www.usda.gov/reconnect) for more information on eligibility requirements and to apply.

Community Development Block Grant - Mitigation

DEO has submitted the state of Florida's Action Plan for \$633 million in federal Community Development Block Grant - Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) funding to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD announced that this first-of-its-kind funding would be available to the state of Florida for disaster mitigation projects in areas impacted by hurricanes Hermine, Matthew and Irma. HUD will have 60 days to provide feedback and approve the plan.

In total, 51 Florida counties are currently eligible for CDBG-MIT funding. DEO is seeking to increase the entire state's resiliency to natural disasters. To accomplish this goal, in December 2019, DEO submitted a waiver to HUD seeking to make the entire state eligible for CDBG-MIT funding.

For more information about the mitigation program, including timelines and webinars, visit RebuildFlorida.gov.

Connect with the Office of Community Partnerships Today!

Katie Smith, Director | 850-717-8445 | Katie.Smith@deo.myflorida.com

FACEBOOK: facebook.com/FLDEO | TWITTER: twitter.com/FLDEO | LINKEDIN: linkedin.com/FLDEO