

STATUTORY PROCESS GOVERNING MUNICIPAL EMINENT DOMAIN

73.015 Presuit negotiation.—

(1) Effective July 1, 2000, before an eminent domain proceeding is brought under this chapter or chapter 74, the condemning authority must attempt to negotiate in good faith with the fee owner of the parcel to be acquired, must provide the fee owner with a written offer and, if requested, a copy of the appraisal upon which the offer is based, and must attempt to reach an agreement regarding the amount of compensation to be paid for the parcel.

(a) No later than the time the initial written or oral offer of compensation for acquisition is made to the fee owner, the condemning authority must notify the fee owner of the following:

1. That all or a portion of his or her property is necessary for a project.
2. The nature of the project for which the parcel is considered necessary, and the parcel designation of the property to be acquired.
3. That, within 15 business days after receipt of a request by the fee owner, the condemning authority will provide a copy of the appraisal report upon which the offer to the fee owner is based; copies, to the extent prepared, of the right-of-way maps or other documents that depict the proposed taking; and copies, to the extent prepared, of the construction plans that depict project improvements to be constructed on the property taken and improvements to be constructed adjacent to the remaining property, including, but not limited to, plan, profile, cross-section, drainage, and pavement marking sheets, and driveway connection detail. The condemning authority shall provide any additional plan sheets within 15 days of request.
4. The fee owner's statutory rights under ss. 73.091 and 73.092,⁷ or alternatively provide copies of these provisions of law.
5. The fee owner's rights and responsibilities under paragraphs (b) and (c) and subsection (4), or alternatively provide copies of these provisions of law.

(b) The condemning authority must provide a written offer of compensation to the fee owner as to the value of the property sought to be appropriated and, where less than the entire property is sought to be appropriated, any damages to the remainder caused by the taking. The owner must be given at least 30 days after either receipt of the notice or the date the notice is returned as undeliverable by the postal authorities to respond to the offer, before the condemning authority files a condemnation proceeding for the parcel identified in the offer.

(c) The notice and written offer must be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the fee owner's last known address listed on the county ad valorem tax roll. Alternatively, the notice and written offer may be personally delivered to the fee owner of the property. If there is more than one owner of a property, notice to one owner constitutes notice to all owners of the property. The return of the notice as undeliverable by the postal authorities constitutes compliance with this provision. The condemning authority is not required to give notice or a written offer to a person who acquires title to the property after the notice required by this section has been given.

(d) Notwithstanding this subsection, with respect to lands acquired under s. 253.025,⁸ the condemning authority is not required to give the fee owner the current appraisal before executing an option contract.

⁷ Provisions for pre-trial hearing and right to jury trial (see below)

(2) Effective July 1, 2000, before an eminent domain proceeding is brought under this chapter or chapter 74 by ... a ... municipality, ... for the condemnation of right-of-way, the condemning authority must make a good faith effort to notify the business owners, including lessees, who operate a business located on the property to be acquired.
... [omitted]

(3) At any time in the presuit negotiation process, the parties may agree to submit the compensation or business damage claims to nonbinding mediation. The parties shall agree upon a mediator certified under s. 44.102. In the event that there is a settlement reached as a result of mediation or other mutually acceptable dispute resolution procedure, the agreement reached shall be in writing. The written agreement provided for in this section shall incorporate by reference the right-of-way maps, construction plans, or other documents related to the taking upon which the settlement is based. In the event of a settlement, both parties shall have the same legal rights that would have been available under law if the matter had been resolved through eminent domain proceedings in circuit court with the maps, plans, or other documents having been made a part of the record.

(4) If a settlement is reached between the condemning authority and a property or business owner prior to a lawsuit being filed, the property or business owner who settles compensation claims in lieu of condemnation shall be entitled to recover costs in the same manner as provided in s. 73.091 and attorney's fees in the same manner as provided in s. 73.092, more specifically as follows:

(a) Attorney's fees for presuit negotiations under this section regarding the amount of compensation to be paid for the land, severance damages, and improvements must be calculated in the same manner as provided in s. 73.092(1) unless the parties otherwise agree.

(b) If business damages are recovered by the business owner[omitted]

(c) Presuit costs must be presented, calculated, and awarded in the same manner as provided in s. 73.091, after submission by the business or property owner to the condemning authority of all appraisal reports, business damage reports, or other work products for which recovery is sought, and upon transfer of title of the real property by closing, upon payment of any amounts due for business damages, or upon final judgment.

(d) If the parties cannot agree on the amount of costs and attorney's fees to be paid by the condemning authority, the business or property owner may file a complaint in the circuit court in the county in which the property is located to recover attorney's fees and costs.

This shall only apply when the action is by the Department of Transportation, county, municipality, board, district, or other public body for the condemnation of a road right-of-way.

(5) Evidence of negotiations or of any written or oral statements used in mediation or negotiations between the parties under this section is inadmissible in any condemnation proceeding, except in a proceeding to determine reasonable costs and attorney's fees.
History.—s. 57, ch. 99-385; s. 8, ch. 2001-256; s. 28, ch. 2016-233.

...

73.021 Petition; contents.—Those having the right to exercise the power of eminent domain may file a petition therefor in the circuit court of the county wherein the property lies, which petition shall set forth:

⁸ 253.025, F.S. governs acquisition of state lands; therefore it is not applicable here.

(1) The authority under which and the public use or purpose for which the property is to be acquired, and that the property is necessary for that public use or purpose;

(2) A description identifying the property sought to be acquired. The petitioners may join in the same action all properties involved in a planned project whether in the same or different ownership, or whether or not the property is sought for the same use;

(3) The estate or interest in the property which the petitioner intends to acquire;

(4) The names, places of residence, legal disabilities, if any, and interests in the property of all owners, lessees, mortgagees, judgment creditors, and lienholders, so far as ascertainable by diligent search, and all unknown persons having an interest in the property when the petitioner has been unable to ascertain the identity of such persons by diligent search and inquiry. If any interest in the property, or lien thereon, belongs to the unsettled estate of a decedent, the executor or administrator shall be made a defendant without joining the devisee or heir; if a trust estate, the trustee shall be made a defendant without joining the cestui que trust. **The court may appoint an administrator ad litem to represent the estate of a deceased person whose estate is not being administered, and a guardian ad litem for all defendants who are infants or are under other legal disabilities; and for defendants whose names or addresses are unknown.** A copy of the order of appointment shall be served on the guardian ad litem at least 10 days before trial unless he or she has entered an appearance;

...

(6) A statement that the petitioner has surveyed and located its line or area of construction, and intends in good faith to construct the project on or over the described property; and

(7) A demand for relief that the property be condemned and taken for the uses and purposes set forth in the petition, and that the interest sought be vested in the petitioner. History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369; s. 2, ch. 77-51; s. 358, ch. 95-147; s. 3, ch. 2006-11.

73.031 Process; service and publication.—

(1) Upon the filing of the petition, the clerk of the court shall issue a summons to show cause why the property should not be taken, directed "to all whom it may concern," containing the names of all the defendants named in the petition, commanding them and any other persons claiming any interest in the property described to serve written defenses to the petition on a day specified in the summons not less than 28 nor more than 60 days from the date of the summons. A copy of the summons and the petition shall be served upon all resident defendants in the manner provided by law and not less than 20 days before the return day.

(2) If any defendant is alleged to be a nonresident of the state, or if the name or residence of any defendant is alleged to be unknown, or if personal service cannot be had upon any defendant for any other reason, the clerk shall cause a notice to be published at least once each week for 2 consecutive weeks prior to the return day in some newspaper published in the county; provided, however, that if the petitioner be a municipality and a newspaper is published therein, the notice shall be published in such a newspaper. This notice shall contain the names of the defendants to whom it is directed, a description of the property sought to be appropriated, the nature of the action, and the name of the court in which it is pending. The clerk shall mail a copy of the summons and the petition to each out-of-state defendant at the address as set forth in the petition. The clerk shall file a certificate of mailing which, together with proof of publication, shall constitute effective service as though the defendant had been personally served with process within this state.

(3) The failure of any party to receive notice by mail shall not invalidate the proceedings of the court or any order made pursuant to this chapter.

History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369; s. 2, ch. 90-279; s. 359, ch. 95-147.

73.032 Offer of judgment.—

(1) This section shall provide the exclusive offer of judgment provisions for eminent domain actions.

(2) The petitioner may serve a defendant with an offer of judgment no sooner than 120 days after the defendant has filed an answer and no later than 20 days prior to trial.

(3) A defendant may make an offer to have judgment entered against defendant for payment of compensation by petitioner only for an amount that is under \$100,000, and such offer may be served on petitioner no sooner than 120 days after the defendant has filed an answer and no later than 20 days prior to trial.

(4)(a) The offer of judgment must:

1. Be in writing;
2. Settle all pending claims with that party or parties exclusive of attorney's fees and costs;
3. State that the offer is made pursuant to this section;
4. Name the parties to whom the offer is made;
5. Briefly summarize any relevant conditions;
6. State the total amount of the offer; and
7. Include a certificate of service.

(b) The offer of judgment must be served in the same manner as other pleadings upon the parties to whom it is made, but may not be filed with the court unless it is accepted or unless filing is necessary to enforce this section.

(c) The offer of judgment shall be deemed rejected unless accepted by filing both a written acceptance and the written offer with the court within 30 days after service of the offer, or before the trial begins if less than 30 days. Upon proper filing of both the offer and acceptance, the court shall enter judgment thereon. A rejection of an offer terminates the offer.

(d) The party making the offer may withdraw the offer in a writing served on the opposing party before a written acceptance is filed with the court. Once withdrawn in this manner, an offer is void.

(e) An offer of judgment which is rejected or which is withdrawn does not preclude the making of a subsequent offer of judgment; however, any such subsequent offer of judgment shall automatically void the prior offer of judgment as if the same had never been made.

(5) If a defendant does not accept the offer of judgment made by the petitioner and the judgment obtained by the defendant, exclusive of any interest accumulated after the offer of judgment was initially made, is equal to or less than such offer, then the court shall not award any costs incurred by the defendant after the date the offer of judgment was rejected.

(6) If the petitioner rejects the offer of judgment made by defendant and the judgment obtained by defendant, exclusive of any interest accumulated after the offer of judgment was initially made, is equal to or is more than such offer, then the court shall award a reasonable attorney's fee to the defendant based on the factors set forth in s. 73.092(2) and (3).

(7) At the time an offer of judgment is made by the petitioner, the petitioner shall identify and make available to the defendant the construction plans, if any, for the project on which the offer is based.

(8) Evidence of an offer of judgment is admissible only in proceedings to enforce an accepted offer or to determine the costs to be awarded a defendant pursuant to subsection (5) or a reasonable attorney's fee pursuant to subsection (6).

History.—s. 53, ch. 90-136; s. 2, ch. 90-303; s. 1, ch. 94-162.

73.041 Acquiring or perfecting title after appropriation.—In any instance, where the petitioner has not acquired the title to or a necessary interest in any lands which it is using, or if at any time after an attempt to acquire such title or interest, it is found to be defective, the petitioner may proceed under this chapter to acquire or perfect such title or interest; provided, however, that the compensation to be allowed the defendants shall be determined as of the date of appropriation.

History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369.

73.051 Returns; defaults.—Any person interested in or having a lien upon the property, whether named as a defendant or not, may file his or her written defenses to the petition, as a matter of right, on or before the return date set in the notice or thereafter by leave of court. If a defendant does not file his or her defenses on or before the return date, defaults may be entered against the defendant, but nothing shall prevent any person who is shown by the record to be interested in the property from appearing before the jury to claim the amount of compensation that he or she conceives to be due for the property.

History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369; s. 1, ch. 70-285; s. 27, ch. 73-333; s. 360, ch. 95-147.

73.0511 Prelitigation notice.—Prior to instituting litigation, the condemning authority shall notify the fee owners of statutory rights under s. 73.091.

History.—s. 1, ch. 87-148.

73.061 Pretrial hearing.—

(1) Prior to the date of trial, the court may hold a hearing, in limine, to settle all disputed matters properly before it which must be determined prior to trial. Should it appear that the causes of action joined cannot be conveniently disposed of together, the court may order separate trials; provided, however, that any such actions shall be tried in the county in which the lands are located.

(2) The court in which an action in eminent domain is pending shall have jurisdiction and authority over any and all taxes and assessments encumbering the lands involved in such actions, and may stay or defer the enforcement of such taxes and assessments, including all applications for tax deeds, foreclosures and other enforcement proceedings, until final termination of such eminent domain actions. The said court may make such orders concerning such taxes and assessments as may be equitable and proper; provided, however, that ad valorem taxes levied upon any such lands shall be prorated against the owner to the date of taking.

History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369.

73.071 Jury trial; compensation; severance damages; business damages.—

(1) When the action is at issue, and only upon notice and hearing to set the cause for trial, the court shall impanel a jury of 12 persons as soon as practical considering the reasonable necessities of the court and of the parties, and giving preference to the trial of eminent domain cases over other civil actions, and submit the issue of compensation to them for determination, which issue shall be tried in the same manner as other issues of fact are tried in the circuit courts.

(2) The amount of such compensation shall be determined as of the date of trial, or the date upon which title passes, whichever shall occur first.

(3) The jury shall determine solely the amount of compensation to be paid, which compensation shall include:

(a) The value of the property sought to be appropriated;

(b) Where less than the entire property is sought to be appropriated, any damages to the remainder caused by the taking, including, when the action is by the Department of Transportation, county, municipality, board, district or other public body for the condemnation of a right-of-way, and the effect of the taking of the property involved may damage or destroy an established business of more than 4 years' standing before January 1, 2005, or the effect of the taking of the property involved may damage or destroy an established business of more than 5 years' standing on or after January 1, 2005, owned by the party whose lands are being so taken, located upon adjoining lands owned or held by such party, the probable damages to such business which the denial of the use of the property so taken may reasonably cause; any person claiming the right to recover such special damages shall set forth in his or her written defenses the nature and extent of such damages; and

...

(4) When the action is by the Department of Transportation, county, municipality, board, district, or other public body for the condemnation of a road, canal, levee, or water control facility right-of-way, the enhancement, if any, in value of the remaining adjoining property of the defendant property owner by reason of the construction or improvement made or contemplated by the petitioner shall be offset against the damage, if any, resulting to such remaining adjoining property of the defendant property owner by reason of the construction or improvement. However, such enhancement in the value shall not be offset against the value of the property appropriated, and if such enhancement in value shall exceed the damage, if any, to the remaining adjoining property, there shall be no recovery over against such property owner for such excess.

(5) Any increase or decrease in the value of any property to be acquired which occurs after the scope of the project for which the property is being acquired is known in the market, and which is solely a result of the knowledge of the project location, shall not be considered in arriving at the value of the property acquired. For the purpose of this section, the scope of the project for which the property is being acquired shall be presumed to be known in the market on or after the condemnor executes a resolution which depicts the location of the project.

(6) The jury shall view the subject property upon demand by any party or by order of the court.

(7) If the jury cannot agree on a verdict the court shall discharge them, impanel a new jury, and proceed with the trial.

History.—s. 1, ch. 65-369; ss. 23, 35, ch. 69-106; s. 1, ch. 70-283; s. 1, ch. 77-51; s. 19, ch. 79-400; s. 36, ch. 85-180; s. 361, ch. 95-147; ss. 58, 59, ch. 99-385; ss. 56, 57, ch. 2002-20.