

The Florida Senate  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Rules

BILL: CS/SB 266

INTRODUCER: Rules Committee and Senator Passidomo

SUBJECT: Covenants and Restrictions

DATE: March 1, 2018

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. Cochran	Yeatman	CA	<b>Favorable</b>
2. Davis	Cibula	JU	<b>Favorable</b>
3. Cochran	Phelps	RC	<b>Fav/CS</b>

**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Technical Changes

## I. Summary:

CS/SB 266 addresses the covenants and restrictions of property owners' associations and makes the following changes:

- Extends statutes authorizing the preservation and revival of covenants and restrictions to a broader range of associations, notably commercial property owners' associations;
- Allows a homeowners' association to file a form notice with the clerk of court which preserves the association's covenants and restrictions;
- Repeals language that requires a two-thirds vote of the members of the board of directors to preserve existing covenants and restrictions;
- Authorizes parcel owners who were subject to covenants and restrictions, but who do not have a homeowners' association, to use the same mechanisms as a homeowners' association to revitalize extinguished covenants and restrictions; and
- Requires a homeowners' association to annually consider preservation of the covenants and restrictions and requires that the association file a summary preservation every 5 years.

## II. Present Situation:

### The Marketable Record Title Act

The Marketable Record Title Act (MRTA) was enacted in 1963 to simplify and facilitate land transactions.<sup>1</sup> In general terms, MRTA provides that any person who has been vested with any estate in land of record for 30 years or more has a marketable record title, free and clear of most claims or encumbrances against the land. In essence, MRTA serves as the ultimate land statute of limitations by eliminating older, unpreserved rights to an interest in real property.<sup>2</sup>

One unintended effect of MRTA, however, is that covenants and restrictions are extinguished 30 years after their creation. Therefore, homeowner associations' covenants and restrictions can expire and become unenforceable. In order to protect the covenants, MRTA has long provided a method for renewing the covenants. Even so, many homeowners' associations still fail to timely file a renewal of their covenants. In 2004, laws were enacted to provide a method for reviving the covenants and restrictions of a mandatory homeowners' association.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, nonmandatory homeowners' associations became eligible for revitalization.<sup>4</sup> Revitalization requires the creation of an organizing committee, notice to all affected property owners, approval by a majority of the homeowners, approval by the Department of Economic Opportunity, and the recording of notice in the public records.<sup>5</sup>

Two categories of property impacted by MRTA have not been included in the laws permitting renewal or revival of their covenants and restrictions: commercial land in office parks, industrial parks, and other commercial districts and neighborhoods having enforceable covenants but no formal homeowners' association. Owners of these properties, like the owners of property within a homeowners' association, enact and enforce covenants and restrictions regarding their property and that of their neighbors.

Due to the disparate issues in the bill, the present situation for each section is discussed in more detail below in conjunction with the Effect of Proposed Changes.

## III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

### Preservation of Existing Covenants

#### *Present Situation*

Sections 712.05 and 712.06, F.S., provide that a homeowners' association may timely preserve its covenants by complying with the following conditions:

- The board must give written notice to every parcel owner of the impending preservation of the covenants;<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Blanton v. City of Pinellas Park*, 887 So. 2d 1224, 1227 (Fla. 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory M. Cook, *The Marketable Record Title Act Made Easy*, The Florida Bar Journal, (Oct. 1992) available at <https://www.floridabar.org/news/tfb-journal/?durl=/DIVCOM/JN/jnjournal01.nsf/cb53c80c8fabd49d85256b5900678f6c/E3897C8163A7258285256BD80071EED5!opendocument>

<sup>3</sup> Ch. 2004-345, s. 11, Laws of Fla.

<sup>4</sup> Ch. 2007-173, s. 1, Laws of Fla.

<sup>5</sup> Sections 720.403, 720.404, 720.405, 720.406, and 720.407, F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 712.06(1)(b), F.S.

- The board must give written notice to every parcel owner of a meeting of the board of directors where the directors will decide whether to preserve the covenants;<sup>7</sup>
- The board of directors of the association must approve the renewal by a two-thirds vote;<sup>8</sup> and
- Notice of the renewal must be recorded in the official records of the county.<sup>9</sup>

**Sections 3 and 4** of the bill change this procedure to:

- Provide that compliance by a homeowners' association with newly created s. 720.3032, F.S. (see discussion below) may substitute for the requirements of ss. 712.05 and 712.06, F.S.;
- Provide that an amendment to a community covenant or restriction indexed under the legal name of the property owners' association may also substitute for the requirements of ss. 712.05 and 712.06, F.S.;
- Repeal the requirement that a decision to preserve covenants be approved a two-thirds vote of the board; and
- Repeal the requirement that affected property owners be furnished notice of the board meeting to vote on preservation.

### **Preservation and Revitalization of Covenants by a Commercial Property Owners' Association**

#### ***Present Situation***

Current law provides for the preservation and revitalization of covenants by a homeowners' association.

#### ***Effect of the Bill***

**Section 2** provides a definition for the term "community covenant or restriction" and substitutes the term "property owners' association" for "homeowners' association." A property owners' association includes a homeowners' association as defined in s. 720.301, F.S., a corporation or entity responsible for the operation of property in which the voting membership is made up of the owners of the property or their agents, or a combination thereof, and in which membership is a mandatory condition of property ownership, as well as an association of parcel owners authorized to enforce a community covenant or restriction. The bill also makes conforming changes for these new terms.

The bill replaces all uses of the term "homeowners' association" found in chapter 712, F.S., with the term "property owners' association." The effect is to expand MRTA laws on preservation and revitalization of covenants or restrictions to cover commercial associations.

**Section 12** inserts language to provide that covenant revitalization, is intended to provide mechanisms for revitalization of covenants or restrictions by all types of communities and property associations, not just residential communities.

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<sup>7</sup> Section 712.05(1), F.S.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Section 712.06(2), F.S.

## **Revitalization by an Owner Not Subject to Homeowners' Association**

### ***Present Situation***

Some residential communities have recorded covenants and restrictions similar to those found in a homeowners' association, but never created an association. Current law permits individual owners to file a notice of preservation of covenants before they expire,<sup>10</sup> but there are no means of revitalizing those covenants and restrictions.

### ***Effect of the Bill***

**Section 6** provides for covenant or restriction revitalization by parcel owners of a community who are not subject to a homeowners' association.

Under this section, parcel owners may use the process available to a homeowners' association<sup>11</sup> to revive covenants or restrictions that have lapsed under MRTA. The parcel owners do not need to provide articles of incorporation or bylaws to revive the covenants or restrictions and only need the approval of a majority of the affected parcel owners in writing. The organizing committee of the community may execute the revived covenants or restrictions in the name of the community and the community name can be indexed as the grantee of the covenants with the parcel owners listed as grantors.

A parcel owner who has ceased to be subject to covenants or restrictions as of October 1, 2018, may commence an action by October 1, 2019, to determine if revitalization would unconstitutionally deprive the parcel owner of right or property. Revived covenants or restrictions do not affect the rights of a parcel owner that are recognized by a court order in an action commenced by October 1, 2019, and may not be subsequently altered without the consent of the affected parcel owner. Although a parcel owner has from October 1, 2018, to October 1, 2019, to file a legal action objecting to the revitalization of a covenant or restriction, the bill does not provide any mechanism to inform parcel owners of this right. Moreover, the bill allows parcel owners seeking to revitalize an extinguished covenant or restriction to proceed after October 1, 2019.

## **Requirements on the Board of Directors of a Homeowners' Association**

### ***Present Situation***

While it is probably good practice for a homeowners' association to regularly consider the need for preservation of the covenants and restrictions of their neighborhood, there is no statutory requirement that a board of directors of a homeowners' association do so.

### ***Effect of the Bill***

**Section 7** amends s. 720.303(2), F.S., to require that the board of directors for a homeowners' association consider whether to file a notice to preserve the covenants and restrictions affecting the community from extinguishment pursuant to MRTA. This must be considered at the first board meeting after the annual meeting of the members.

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<sup>10</sup> See sections 712.05 and 712.06, F.S.

<sup>11</sup> See sections 720.403- 720.407, F.S.

**Section 8** creates s. 720.3032, F.S., which specifies procedures that any property owners' association may use to preserve its covenants from termination. Using these procedures, the association must file in the official records of the county in which it is located a notice detailing:

- The legal name of the association;
- The mailing and physical addresses of the association;
- The names of the affected subdivision plats and condominiums, or the common name of the community;
- The name, address, and telephone number for the current community association management company or manager, if any;
- An indication as to whether the association desires to preserve the covenants or restrictions affecting the community from extinguishment pursuant to MRTA;
- The name and recording information of those covenants or restrictions affecting the community which the association wishes to preserve;
- A legal description of the community affected by the covenants or restrictions; and
- The signature of a duly authorized officer of the association.

The section creates a statutory form for the notice. The bill further provides that the filing of the completed form is considered a substitute for the notice required for preservation of the covenants pursuant to ss. 712.05 and 712.06, F.S. As such, every 5-year filing of the form will have the effect of starting the MRTA 30-year period anew.

A copy of this notice to preserve covenants or restrictions must be included as a part of the next notice of meeting or other mailing sent to all members of the association. The original signed notice must be recorded in the official records of the clerk of the circuit court or other recorder for the county.

### **Other Changes Made by the Bill**

**Section 1** provides a short title of the "Marketable Record Title Act" for chapter 712, F.S.

**Sections 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15** make changes to conform various statutory and definitional cross-references to the substantive changes made by the bill.

**Section 16** provides an effective date of October 1, 2018.

## **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**D. Other Constitutional Issues:**

The State Constitution addresses the property rights of citizens in two pertinent provisions. Article 1, section 2 provides that all natural persons have the right to acquire, possess and protect property. Article 1, section 9 provides that “No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law . . . .” Additionally, the State Constitution, in Article 1, section 10, also prohibits any law that impairs the obligation of contracts.

Because of these constitutional property rights protections, two issues arise from the bill. The first is whether the expiration of covenants and restrictions vests additional property rights in the owner of a property. A vested right is defined as “an immediate, fixed right of present or future enjoyment.”<sup>12</sup> For example, the expiration of covenants and restrictions might allow a property owner to build a nonconforming structure on the property or to use the property in a manner not allowed under the covenants and restrictions. The second issue is whether the bill, by allowing the reinstatement of expired covenants and restrictions, allows property rights to be taken in violation of the State Constitution.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:****A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

A person who believes that the revitalization of an expired covenant or restriction is a taking of a vested property right or other constitutional violation may be required to spend substantial funds to vindicate his or her rights in court.

Section 8 of the bill requires associations to prepare and record a notice every 5 years. The recording fee is nominal (\$10 for the first page, \$8.50 for additional pages). Because the form is in statute, associations may be able to complete the task without assistance, or a community association manager can assist an association with preparation and filing without reference to a licensed attorney.

Providing mechanisms to preserve and revitalize covenants and restrictions may have a positive impact on property values in affected areas or communities.

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<sup>12</sup> *Coral Lakes Cnty. Ass'n v. Busey Bank, N.A.*, 30 So. 3d 579, 583 (Fla. 2nd DCA 2010) (quoting *Pearsall v. Great N. Ry. Co.*, 161 U.S. 646, 673, (1896)).

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The bill requires the recording of documents in the public records of the county. Recording is subject to a fee of \$10.00 for the first page and \$8.50 for every subsequent page, payable to the recording department (in most counties, the clerk of the court).<sup>13</sup> The net revenues to county recorders, after deductions for incremental costs of recording and indexing documents, are unknown.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 712.01, 712.05, 712.06, 712.11, 720.303, 702.09, 702.10, 712.095, 720.403, 720.404, 720.405, and 720.407.

This bill creates the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 712.001, 712.12, and 720.3032.

**IX. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS by Rules on March 1, 2018:**

Makes a technical change to correct “covenant” to “community covenant” in section 3 of the bill.

**B. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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<sup>13</sup> Section 28.24(12), F.S.