

Media Release



bluffton
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County to Purchase Historic District Riverfront Property

In a unanimous vote at its March 14 meeting, Bluffton's Town Council authorized the Town Manager to execute a purchase and an operating agreement for a property located at 111 Calhoun Street. This vote followed another unanimous vote by Beaufort County Council on March 13 to assist the Town in funding the purchase through its Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program. The \$1.5 million purchase price will be evenly split by the Town and the County, with the Town assuming primary responsibility for operation and maintenance of the property.

The property, situated at the south end of Calhoun Street, on the river adjacent to the Calhoun Street Public Dock and across the street from Church of the Cross, is both historically and culturally significant. The Squire Pope Carriage House, built circa 1850, sits on the property and is one of the very few structures in the Bluffton Historic District to survive the 1863 "Burning of Bluffton" by the Union Army during the Civil War. Future plans for the property involve converting it into a passive park to provide additional public access to the May River for Bluffton residents and visitors. The Town also expects to rehabilitate the Squire Pope Carriage House, similar to what it has done to rehabilitate the soon-to-be unveiled Garvin House at nearby Oyster Factory Park.

"The Town identified this property as a desired acquisition as part of our award-winning Old Town Master Plan in 2006. We are beyond thrilled that we will now have the opportunity to put an additional public park along the May River that will be enjoyed for generations to come," Mayor Lisa Sulka said. "We are also so grateful for the partnership of Beaufort County and its Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program as its leaders also perceived the value of increasing access to one of our County's most treasured natural resources."

The Town will use Hospitality Tax revenue and other Town funds for its \$750,000 of the total \$1.5 million purchase.

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“Not only will acquiring this property fulfill an identified action item in Town Council’s Strategic Plan, the timing of it couldn’t be better as we prepare to enhance the Calhoun Street Public dock through a regional tourism grant from the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism,” said Town Manager Marc Orlando. “This is a rare opportunity to be able to preserve and make available a property like this with such a valuable amenity adjacent to it.”

Lisa Lord, Beaufort County Rural and Critical Land Preservation Program administrator, said this is an example of how tax dollars are put into action to improve the town’s and region’s amenities and overall quality of life.

“Fifty-percent of the purchase price of the Wright Family Property will be funded by county tax dollars, specifically through bond referendums,” Lord said. “When residents approve Rural and Critical Land bonds, this is the type of project they support. The biggest return on this investment is the generations of people who will make memories at this park for years to come.”

The Town expects to close on the purchase of the property by June, 2017. Future improvements will be programmed for fiscal year 2018 and beyond using various funding sources, to include Hospitality Tax revenues as well as federal, state and regional grants wherever possible.