

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

December 29, 2017

For More Information:

Debbie Szpanka  
Public Information Officer  
Town of Bluffton  
20 Bridge Street  
Bluffton, South Carolina 29910  
(Office): 843.706.4534  
(Cell): 843.540.2274  
(Email): [dszpanka@townofbluffton.com](mailto:dszpanka@townofbluffton.com)

Town of Bluffton: 2017/Year in Review

The Town of Bluffton is proud to present a look back at its 2017 accomplishments.

Capital Improvement Projects:

- **Dr. Mellichamp Drive Streetscape Enhancement Project:** The Dr. Mellichamp Streetscape Enhancement Project began in late fall and will provide new on-street public parking spaces in the Bluffton Historic District as well as connect and activate an existing public parking supply within close proximity. Upon completion, it will enhance roadway, parking and walkability along the entire corridor of Dr. Mellichamp Drive between Goethe Road and Bluffton Road. These enhancements include sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, street lights, landscaping, and increased parking.
- **Dog Park:** The Town established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Friends of Bluffton Dog Parks and Beaufort County for the design, construction and maintenance of a Dog Park which will be located in Oscar Frazier Park. Friends of the Bluffton Dog Parks held a groundbreaking ceremony December 13, 2017.
- **Pocket Park/May River Road:** The Town of Bluffton adopted a resolution during its October 10 Town Council meeting, accepting a donation of a 0.3-acre parcel in the Stock Farm Development. The parcel will be designed as a pocket park on May River Road.
- **Buck Island-Simmons ville Community Sewer Project/Phase 4:** The Town of Bluffton and its contractor, Jordan Construction, completed Phase 4 of the Buck Island-Simmons ville Community Sewer Project in October. This phase, also known as the Possum Point Sewer extension, connected sewer service to 35 homes and removed septic tanks from their properties. In addition, sewer was made available to six additional lots in that area. The project also installed fire hydrants on Douglis, Possum Point and Little Possum Lanes.

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

- **Town Hall Renovation:** Bluffton Town Council unanimously approved award of a \$4,333,039 contract to JE Dunn Construction Company at its October 10 meeting to renovate Town Hall, located at 20 Bridge Street. The project includes renovating the existing structure which currently houses Town Hall offices, the Charles E. Ulmer Theater and Calhoun Station. It will also add 4,582 square feet to the original building. When finished, total construction will be 28,876 square feet. Construction on Town Hall began in November and will last approximately a year.
- **Buck Island Road Sidewalks:** The Town of Bluffton installed five-foot wide sidewalks on Buck Island Road from the intersection of Simmonsville Road/Buck Island Road to Kitty Road. Street lighting was also installed in conjunction with this project upon completion of sidewalk construction. This project increases public safety and walkability throughout the Buck Island Community while connecting pathways to the Historic District.
- **Purchase of 184 Bluffton Road/Additional Historic District Parking:** The Town of Bluffton acquired the parcel located at 184 Bluffton Road, currently the home of CrossFit 843, when it closed on the purchase Friday, September 29. The .710 acre-property was purchased from May River Storage, LLC for \$600,000. The site, within close proximity to the Promenade, will be used predominantly for public parking. In a future project, the current structures will be demolished and approximately 50 parking space will be added.
- **Goethe-Shults (Roads) Neighborhood Sidewalk Installation:** The Town of Bluffton and its contractor, JS Construction Services, Inc., began the first phase of sidewalk construction for the Goethe-Shults (Roads) Neighborhood starting the week of August 21. This project will install approximately 7,900 linear feet of five-foot wide sidewalk on one side of Goethe, Shults and Hildebrand Roads with additional extensions to existing sidewalks on Eighth and Ninth Avenues to Bluffton Park. The sidewalk will be installed on Goethe Road from Bluffton Parkway to Dr. Mellichamp Drive and on Shults Road from Goethe Road to May River Road. This project increases public safety and walkability throughout the Goethe-Shults Neighborhood and provides sidewalks to the M.C. Riley Sports Complex and the Historic District.
- **Bollards Installation/Calhoun & Bridge Streets:** The Town of Bluffton installed retractable bollards on Calhoun Street at the intersection of Bridge Street in August. The installation process is comprised of digging three-foot holes through the asphalt and pouring a cement sleeve to house the bollards beneath the street level. The bollards look and function identical to the ones which were already in use at the corners of Calhoun and Lawrence/Lawton Streets and Calhoun and May River Road which block off the area every Thursday for the Farmers Market. When deployed, the new bollards will be used to block vehicular traffic entering the south end of Calhoun Street from Bridge Street.

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

- **Purchase of 68 Boundary Street/Additional Historic District Parking:** The Town of Bluffton acquired a 1.47 acre parcel of land in early October, located at 68 Boundary Street. Located between Dubois Park and the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society's Heyward House, the property will be utilized as public open space and will also provide additional public parking spaces in the Bluffton Historic District.
- **The Garvin-Garvey House:** The Town, historical preservation organizations and Town residents celebrated the dedication of The Garvin-Garvey House with a celebration at Oyster Factory Park June 22. The house, located at the Oyster Factory Park, is the last known home on the May River built by a former slave. This historic structure, originally built around 1870, was stabilized and rehabilitated. The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society is currently presenting tours of the Garvin-Garvey House on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- **May River Road Streetscape:** The Town and its contractor, Preferred Materials, Inc., began construction for the second and final phase of the May River Road Streetscape Project in early 2017. This 2,800-foot project along May River Road runs from Pin Oak Street to Jennifer Court and includes:
  - Road improvements from Pin Oak Street to Red Cedar Street, including curb and gutter installation;
  - The road widening portion of this project will enable approximately 30 additional on-street parking spaces to be installed from Pin Oak Street to Whispering Pines Street;
  - Sidewalk/street light installation on both sides of May River Road. On the north side (same side of street as Dollar General), a sidewalk will be installed from Pin Oak Street to Red Cedar Street. On the south side of the street (same side of street as the Stock Farm neighborhood), a sidewalk will be installed from Pin Oak Street to Whispering Pines Street;
  - Storm sewer infrastructure, featuring a water quality control device, will also be installed. This device separates oils and sediments from stormwater prior to stormwater entering the May River;
  - Landscaping, supported by irrigation systems, is also part of this extensive project which will improve the aesthetic appeal when entering the Town along May River Road.
- **Purchase of 111 Calhoun Street/Wright Family Property:** The Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County through its Rural and Critical Lands Program closed in May on the purchase of the Wright Family Property, located at 111 Calhoun Street. The property was sold to the Town and the County for \$1.5 million.
  - The purchase price was evenly split by the Town and the County through its Rural and Critical Preservation Land Program. Through a formal agreement with the County, the Town has primary responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the property, which will provide additional public recreational space along the May River.

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

- 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 the Town’s Garvin House rehabilitation which is located at nearby Oyster Factory Park.
- **Jason Street Sewer Extension Project:** Construction started in February on the Jason Street Sewer Extension Project. This project will provide access to sewer infrastructure to homes and commercial facilities on streets adjacent to the Bluffton Park neighborhood. These homes and commercial facilities are not in a planned community and thus did not have the benefit of pre-planned sewer infrastructure. This project will give residents and business owners, who are located in close proximity to the May River, the option of connecting to sewer lines versus using septic tanks. The sewer project begins at the intersection of Whispering Pines Street and Able Street and will include Red Cedar Street, Jason Street and Kerby Lane. This project will also include extending sewer service to empty lots along these streets.

## Economic Development:

- **Economic Development Video:** The Town of Bluffton released its first economic development video. The video is designed to attract new businesses and to encourage existing businesses to relocate to the Town of Bluffton. According to a recent ranking by the Palmetto Promise Institute, the Town of Bluffton was ranked number one on a list of “Most Enterprise-Friendly Cities in South Carolina.” The video is a solid testimony to the ranking bestowed by the Palmetto Promise Institute. You can find the three versions of the Town’s economic development video on the Town’s YouTube channel.
  - Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/5 minute version  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqD2-nSlLe8&t=8s>
  - Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/ 90 second version  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkqING5n9qY>
  - Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/60 second version  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgpGiuM\\_SPw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgpGiuM_SPw)
- **St. Joseph/Candler Locating to Buckwalter Commerce Park:** St. Joseph’s/Candler announced November 13 its plans to build a four-acre medical campus at the Buckwalter Commerce Park. Paul Hinchey, president and CEO of St. Joseph’s/Candler, said the \$22

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

million capital investment project is expected to create more than 60 jobs. The Buckwalter Commerce Park is a multi-county business park designed to expand the economic base of the Town of Bluffton and the region by attracting knowledge-based industries while providing a venue for a vibrant quality of life.

- **Don Ryan Center for Innovation:** The Don Ryan Center for Innovation, which is the Town's economic development arm, has incubated 33 companies since the program began in 2012 and has advised more than 130 companies. This year, the Center began a "Phase II" program designed to assist companies beyond the startup phase. This year the Center also merged with the Town's Bluffton Public Development Corporation enabling the Center to perform economic development outreach activities as well as act as the region's business incubator. The Center also added two positions, a vice president of economic development and an operations manager.

## May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds/Environmental Protection:

- **Federally-Mandated Stormwater Inspections:** In November, as a requirement of a federally-mandated program regulated by the state of South Carolina, the Town started inspecting all stormwater drainage and treatment systems. Inspections will include drainage ponds, curb inlets, pipes and other necessary system components to ensure they are properly maintained and operating as intended. This is a necessary measure because the stormwater from these systems drains into the May River and other regional waterways.
- **Town Council Adopts Sewer Connection & Extension Policy:** Bluffton Town Council unanimously approved a resolution at its September 26 Town Council Meeting which adopts the Town of Bluffton Sewer Connection and Extension Policy. This policy is the blueprint for how the Town will further implement Town Council's goal of providing public sewer access and connection for all Town residents. The policy is designed to address and implement four priorities which include Town of Bluffton strategic planning, regional coordination, Town of Bluffton code revisions/program development, and proactive community education and programs.
- **Federal Grant Awarded/Town of Bluffton Watershed Division:** The South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control (SCDHEC) awarded the Town of Bluffton its third federal United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Clean Water Act-Section 319 grant to protect the May River's water quality. The latest \$231,350 grant pushes the Town's total of federal 319 grant funds past the million dollar mark. All of these grants have supported the implementation of projects, programs and policies supporting the May River Watershed Action Plan.

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

## Policies:

- **Historic District Parking Ordinance:** Town Council approved changes to parking ordinance provisions at the November 14 Council meeting. The changes increased the minimum number of parking spaces required for restaurants in the Historic District to provide 6 parking spaces per 1000 square feet of commercial property, with on-street and shared parking areas not allowed to be counted in the parking calculations.
- **Special Events Ordinance:** Bluffton's Town Council approved the new Special Events Ordinance during its second and final reading at its August 8 Council meeting. The updated ordinance amends portions of the Town of Bluffton Code of Ordinances by streamlining the process for vendors within a special event to be compliant with the Town's business license rules.
- **Strategic Plan Action Agenda Adopted:** Town Council adopted a resolution during its June 13 meeting to amend its 2017-2018 Strategic Plan Action Agenda. This agenda guides Town Council and staff members through the year as they prioritize projects, programs, policies and budgets. The amended action agenda is the result of a mid-course review of the plan which was accomplished at a Town Council Workshop in February, 2017.
- **Mobile Vending Ordinance:** Town Council amended its mobile vending ordinance with a second and final reading on February 14. This amended ordinance provides business-friendly guidelines and direction for food truck owners and other mobile vendors to allow them to operate within Town limits. It is inclusive of all mobile vending including food trucks, pushcarts, ice cream trucks, agricultural/seafood sales and non-food mobile vendors. Private catering and mobile vending at special events are unaffected by the changes to the ordinance. Food trucks, along with other mobile food vending, is a trending business segment. Examining the issue of mobile vending, with particular emphasis on the consideration of food trucks, was an action agenda item in the Town's 2017-18 Strategic Plan Action Agenda.

## Programs:

- **Neighborhood Assistance Program:** The Town of Bluffton spent more than \$93,000 in 2017 for its Neighborhood Assistance Program. This program offers repairs to homes and properties of low to moderate-income residents. This program, which is operated through the Town of Bluffton's Affordable Housing Committee, offers assistance with repairs for projects such as: leaking roofs, unstable or unsafe floors, failing septic tanks, inaccessible private roads, removing broken or unwanted items from a resident's property, removing unsafe structures from a resident's property, ensuring local emergency services have an official address to a resident's property and assisting in obtaining proper paperwork for heirs' property.

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

## Awards and Accolades:

- **Bluffton Ranked as #1 Most Enterprise-Friendly City in SC:** Palmetto Promise Institute, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit, educational organization based in Columbia, SC, ranked the Town of Bluffton as the “Most Enterprise-Friendly City” in South Carolina. (April 2017)
- **Upgraded Bond Rating:** Moody’s Investors Service recently upgraded the Town of Bluffton’s bond rating to Aa1 (i.e. double A 1), elevating the Town’s credit rating to the second-highest rating for a municipality.
- **Bluffton Ranked as #5 Safest City in South Carolina:** SafeHome.org ranked the Town of Bluffton the 5<sup>th</sup> Safest City in South Carolina. SafeHome.org is a professional review site dedicated to enhancing communities’ safety. (December 2017)
- **Governor Henry McMaster Awards Preservation Award for Garvin House Research:** Bluffton resident Melanie Marks received a statewide Preservation Service award for her extensive research regarding the Cyrus Garvin-Garvey family genealogy. The Garvin-Garvey House, built around 1870 and located in what is now known as Oyster Factory Park in Bluffton, is the only house still standing on the May River which was previously owned by freed slaves. The Town of Bluffton has recently rehabilitated the house and it is considered an asset of the National Register Historic District. Marks’ research will serve as the foundation for future, docent-led tours which will be presented by staff members of the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society.

## Finance & Administration:

- **FY 2018 Budget Approved/Reduced Tax by Two Mills:** Bluffton’s Town Council approved the second reading and adopted the Town’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 consolidated budget during the June 13 Town Council meeting. State law requires all municipalities to adopt a balanced budget ordinance before July 1. The proposed budget, totaling \$36,759,268, moves the Town forward through program enhancements and a robust capital projects schedule. The proposed budget reduces the tax liability to property owners by two mills, from 42.35 to 40.35, yields a revenue reduction of \$353,170 for FY 2018 before applying the effect of the Town’s growth to the projected property tax revenue.

## Special Events:

- **Town Hosted Second Annual Historic Preservation Symposium:** The Town of Bluffton hosted its second annual historic preservation symposium, Thursday, May 25 at 5: 30 p.m. at Town Hall. The symposium, “The Bluffton Historic District: Past · Present · Future,” brought together historic preservation organizations, residents, students, business owners and Town leaders to discuss the importance of preservation. This symposium also celebrates the 21<sup>st</sup>

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

anniversary of the designation of the Bluffton Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The symposium, featuring regional historic preservation experts, provided an overview of historic preservation, benefits for town businesses and residents and educational/volunteer opportunities for those who wish to be more involved in local preservation.

- **Town Celebrated Arbor Day:** Mayor Lisa Sulka, members of Town Council and members of the Town's Beautification Committee celebrated the planting of two Live Oak trees at Oyster Factory Park, Friday, April 28 at 8:30 a.m. in honor of Arbor Day. These two trees will help mitigate the trees lost during Hurricane Matthew. More than 15 mature trees were uprooted in the storm and the storm greatly reduced the tree canopy at the park. Each Live Oak, when mature, will eventually provide a canopy of more than 60' in diameter and provide shade to the walkways leading to the newly renovated dock and boat ramp.
- **Town Presented Second Annual Citizens Engagement Workshop:** The Town of Bluffton hosted its second annual Citizens Engagement Workshop, Tuesday, March 28, 2017 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. in Town Hall's auditorium (20 Bridge Street). During this free workshop, participants will receive an overview of town government, operations and initiatives.
- **Town of Bluffton Municipal Election:** Election for two Town Council seats was held November 7. Incumbents Mayor Pro Tempore Larry Toomer and Councilmember Fred Hamilton were both re-elected.

**Tropical Storm Irma:** Tropical Storm Irma occurred September 11. More than 65 town employees (police and town staff) worked the storm to prepare for its arrival, guarantee public safety for residents and property during the storm and provided post-storm tasks such as inspecting buildings, clearing debris from roads, traffic control and patrolling neighborhoods and businesses.