



May River Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, January 22, 2026 at 3:00 PM

Theodore D. Washington Municipal Building, Henry "Emmett" McCracken Jr. Council Chambers,
20 Bridge Street, Bluffton, SC

AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

1. Adoption of October 23, 2025 Meeting Minutes

IV. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Update on Town Wetland Ordinance – Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager

VII. OLD BUSINESS

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Establishment of a Town Resilience Plan, WAPAC Strategic Plan Priority, Update – Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager
2. Implementation of a SECOORA Water Elevation Meter – Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager
3. Introduction of New Stormwater Technician – Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager

IX. ADJOURNMENT

NEXT MEETING DATE: APRIL 23, 2026

"FOIA Compliance – Public notification of this meeting has been published and posted in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Bluffton policies."

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Executive Session – The public body may vote to go into executive session for any item identified for action on the agenda.

**Please note that each member of the public may speak at one public comment session and a form must be filled out and given to the Town Clerk. To submit a public comment online, please click here:*

<https://www.townofbluffton.sc.gov/FormCenter/Town-15/Public-Comment-60>

Public comment is limited to 3 minutes per speaker.

May River Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

Theodore D. Washington Municipal Building, Henry "Emmett" McCracken Jr. Council Chambers, 20 Bridge Street, Bluffton, SC

October 23, 2025

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rogers called the meeting to order at **3:00 PM**.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Amber Kuehn
Chair, Stan Rogers
Jessie White
Larry Toomer

ABSENT

Chris Shoemaker
Vice-Chair, Al Stokes
Chris Kehrer

III. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

1. Adoption of July 24, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Motion made to adopt the July 24, 2025, meeting minutes made by Mr. Toomer, Seconded by Ms. White.

Voting Yea: Kuehn and Chair Rogers.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. John Genovese, 68 Farnsleigh Avenue – Mr. Genovese discussed Hampton Hall's stormwater project and inquired about coordination with Town staff and the Town's stormwater permitting process.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Update on Town Wetland Ordinance - Beth Lewis, Water Quality Program Manager

Ms. Lewis gave the committee a brief update on ongoing work related to the Town's wetland protection ordinance and the anticipated timeline moving forward. She noted that staff's tentative plan is to present proposed modifications to the current wetland protection ordinance at the January 2026 Town Council Workshop. The committee is expected to review these proposed changes at the April 2026 meeting, although the timeline may be subject to change.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Introduction of New Stormwater Technician - Bill Baugher, Watershed Management Division Manager

Mr. Baugher introduced the Town of Bluffton's new Stormwater Technician, Alex Bunn, to the committee.

2. Adoption of 2026 Meeting Dates and Times - Beth Lewis, Water Quality Program Manager

Motion to adopt the proposed 2026 meeting schedule, with a correction to change the July 24th date to July 23, 2025, to maintain meetings on the fourth Thursday of the month. Motion made by Mr. Toomer and seconded by Ms. White.

Voting Yea: Kuehn and Chair Rogers.

3. Update on the May River Watershed Action Plan: Water Quality and Education Programs – Beth Lewis, Water Quality Program Manager

Ms. Lewis presented the updated Water Quality Program results and the new targeted educational efforts in response to Microbial Source Tracking (MST) results. She then answered the committee's questions.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at **4:00pm** made by **Mr. Toomer**, Seconded by **Ms. Kuehn**.

Voting Yea: Chair Rogers and White.

NEXT MEETING DATE: January 22, 2026

Update on Town Wetland Ordinance

Presentation to WAPAC
Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager
Department of Projects and Watershed Resilience
January 22, 2026

Background

In January of 2025, Town Council approved a Master Service Agreement (MSA) task authorization to McCormick Taylor, Inc. to develop Town Wetland and Resilience Ordinances to protect health, life, and safety of our citizens and natural resources. This included the following:

- 1. Review current Town policies;**
- 2. Identify and inventory wetlands within the Town's jurisdiction;**
- 3. Develop a map of wetlands to be protected;**
- 4. Develop a Wetland Ordinance for the Town;**
5. Apply comprehensive drainage study results to map resiliency zones;
6. Identify primary conveyance systems; and,
7. Develop a Resilience Ordinance for the Town.

Background

Concurrent, yet independent from the MSA work, Town Council adopted a wetland protection ordinance in June of 2025 that accomplished the following:

- Required a 50 ft. undisturbed buffer around the perimeter of all wetlands;
- Allowed for enforcement of unpermitted filling of wetlands;
- Filled gaps left by loosened federal rules after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency* decision; and
- Made Bluffton the first municipality in South Carolina to enact such laws in response to federal changes.

Background

Since its adoption, Town staff have received:

- One (1) variance request (Board of Zoning Appeals); and
- Three (3) waiver requests (UDO Administrator)

Background

Current wetland ordinance was adopted as an interim wetland ordinance to be later superseded by a comprehensive wetland ordinance, incorporating:

- The Consultant's recommendations; and
- Reliance upon a new, Town-owned, wetland mapping tool.

Accurate wetlands data allows the Town to focus its protection efforts and inform future development, projects, policies, programs, and partnerships.

- Currently relying on the National Wetland Inventory (NWI), which was last updated based on 2006 and 2011 imagery and does not often indicate the presence of smaller, isolated wetlands.

Next Steps

Section VI. Item #1.

UDO Text Amendment Procedure	Tentative Dates	Complete
Step 1. Town Council - Workshop	January 27, 2026	✗
Step 2. Public Comment Period	February 2 – March 2, 2026	✗
Step 3. Consultant Review Period	March 9 – March 23, 2026	✗
Step 4. Planning Commission Workshop	April 22, 2026	✗
Step 5. Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting	April 23, 2026	✗
Step 6. Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation	May 27, 2026	✗
Step 7. Town Council – First Reading	June 9, 2026	✗
Step 8. Town Council Meeting – Final Reading and Public Hearing	July 14, 2026	✗

TOWN OF BLUFFTON RESILIENCY PLANNING FROM DATA TO DECISIONS



August 2024

Beth Lewis, Town of Bluffton Watershed Management Division



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01 BACKGROUND – THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



- The Town's Comprehensive Plan, known as Blueprint Bluffton, is intended to guide decision making for the next ten (10) years. It serves as the vision for the Town of Bluffton.
- In 2022, the South Carolina Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act (S.C. Code Section 6-29-510) required local governments to add a resilience element to comprehensive plans.
- Blueprint Bluffton was adopted in November 2022.
- For the first time, it included a Resiliency Chapter to meet this requirement and prepare the Town for a more resilient future.

01 BACKGROUND - THE STRATEGIC PLAN



- The Town of Bluffton uses strategic planning to implement the Town's Comprehensive Plan.
- Town Council, the Town Manager, and Town staff develop the Town's Strategic Plan every two (2) years, with annual reviews.
- The Strategic Plan uses Strategic Focus Areas and Strategies to:
 - Develop the operating budget.
 - Consider revisions to capital improvement projects.
 - Develop new projects and assign them to Staff for execution.
 - Implement projects and initiatives already approved in existing town plans.
 - Determine an agreed upon process and schedule to prioritize projects and revise priorities as necessary.

01 BACKGROUND- STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

Section VIII. Item #1.



Affordable and/or Workforce Housing



Community Quality of Life



Economic Development



Fiscal Sustainability



Infrastructure



May River and Surrounding Rivers
and Watersheds



Town Organization

01 BACKGROUND - MAY RIVER AND SURROUNDING RIVERS AND WATERSHEDS

Section VIII. Item #1.



Guiding Principal 4:

Support active planning and management for resilience of natural resources and our response to weather events, future disasters and changing environmental conditions.

Action Agenda Item:

Develop a resiliency plan focused on the Town's natural resources, sustainability, wetland ordinance/restoration and environmental principals.

02 WAPAC STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY FY25-FY26

Establish a Climate Resiliency Plan for adaptation to coastal impacts from changing environmental conditions (“rain bombs” and sea level rise) on stormwater runoff water quality and quantity. Assess the environmental resilience of stormwater ponds to changing climate conditions for retrofit opportunities, e.g. ensuring ponds have capacity to hold rain events instead of being pumped full with ground water.

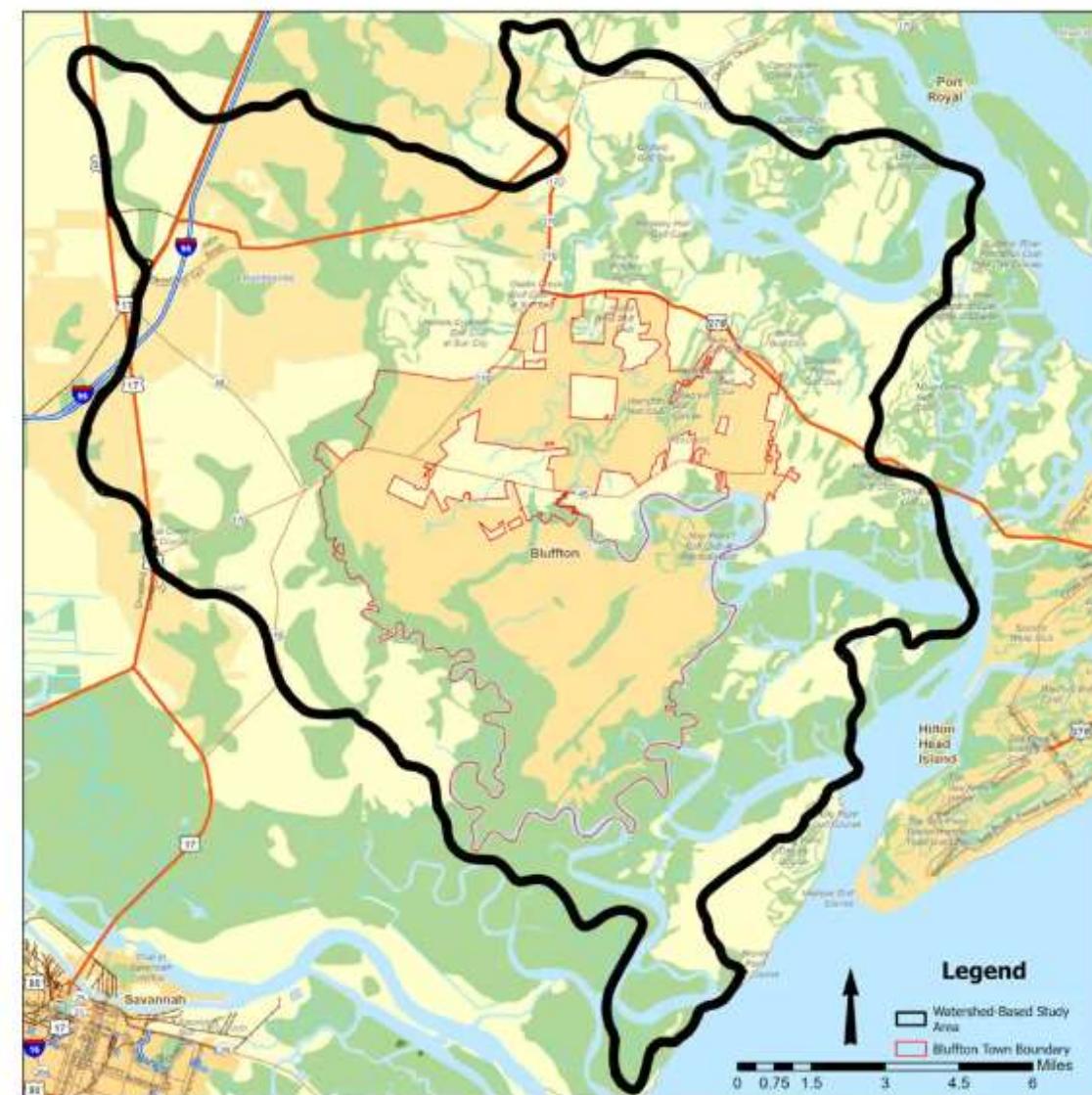
03 RESILIENCY ANALYSIS

- Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), included funding for a Resiliency Analysis.
- In February 2024, the Town contracted with the College of Charleston and the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium to develop resiliency-focused scientific models and engage community members.
- This project focuses on observing current impacts and anticipating future challenges related to climate change and associated vulnerabilities.
- To mitigate potential damage and maintain critical infrastructure functionality, Bluffton is developing reliable information to guide policy and planning decisions.

DATA COLLECTION – RESILIENCY ANALYSIS PROJECT AREA

Project Area

Section VIII. Item #1.



DATA COLLECTION – RESILIENCY ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

Identify opportunities to implement elevation-based zoning in low-lying areas, enhance the Town's Flood Management Policies, and strengthen the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program. Explore financial incentives to encourage more resilient development, and leverage conservation tools and funding strategies to expand Bluffton's Land Acquisition Fund, with a focus on prioritizing high-impact parcels.

COMPREHENSIVE DRAINAGE STUDIES

04 DATA COLLECTION – COMPREHENSIVE DRAINAGE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Identify & determine stormwater infrastructure conveyance systems by type, condition, size, and owner.
- Identify stormwater infrastructure conveyance systems in need of maintenance, repair, upgrade in size or type.
- Identify areas of inundation from storms of different magnitudes.
- Provide information to guide policy and program recommendations for implementation.

DATA COLLECTION – COMPREHENSIVE DRAINAGE STUDIES TIMELINES

- Will include all subwatersheds within the Town's jurisdiction, not just the May River.
- Successfully completed the Heyward Cove Watershed Comprehensive Drainage Study in October 2023. Serving as a model for on-going and future Comprehensive Drainage Studies.
- Work associated with the Crooked and Guerrard Cove Watersheds underway.
- Rose Dhu Creek Phase 1 Internal Procurement Process underway.
- Studies include 2D H/H Model development and preparation of the Master Planning Report.
- Submitted HGMP grant application for planning work associated with the Verdier and Huger Cove Watersheds. Pending.

OTHER DATA SOURCES

05 DATA COLLECTION OTHER DATA SOURCES

- May River Baseline Assessment Update Final Report
- SC Forestry Commission Technical Assistance for Tree Canopy Mapping – Final report expected in first quarter of 2026
- Furman University Sustainability Practicum Heat Mapping Outcomes - Final report expected in first quarter of 2026
- Current work underway with McCormick Taylor, Inc. for Wetland and Resilience Protections
- Town Planning Documents
- Regional and Statewide Plans

THANK YOU

Beth Lewis
Town of Bluffton
Watershed Resilience Manager



Implementation of a SECOORA Water Elevation Meter

Presentation to WAPAC
Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager
Department of Projects and Watershed Resilience
January 22, 2026

Background

Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) Observing system provides access to historical and real-time coastal ocean data that advances science, technology innovation, and product development. Insights generated from observing data ensure the right decisions are made to secure resilient futures and safeguard coastal ocean ecosystems and communities.

Background

- Town partnership with South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium and SECOORA through the South Carolina Water Level Monitoring Initiative.
- The goal of the project is to install low-cost water level sensors across the southeast to help with coastal flooding challenges.
- These water level sensors allow communities to observe real-time, publicly accessible data on the elevation of a waterbody's surface in their community.

Example Station

Section VIII. Item #2.

- The Town of Bluffton installation at the Calhoun Street Dock on January 20, 2026.
- Will be accompanied by educational signage and QR code for data access.



Draft Educational Signage

Section VIII. Item #2.

Southeast Water Level Network

This water level sensor measures the height of the water below the dock. It is a collaborative effort between the Town of Bluffton, SC Sea Grant, and the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA).

Why measure water level?

Real-time water level sensors measure and report the height of the water, which is critical during storm and king tide events. This data can help communities like Bluffton make informed decisions about flooding and tidal elevation changes over time.

Data made possible by:



Scan the QR code to access water level data:



Please contact wlnetwork@secoora.org to report an issue.

<https://secoora.org/southeast-water-level-network/>