

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Projects and Watershed Resilience Department



MEETING DATE:	June 13, 2023
PROJECT:	Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing the Approval of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of South Carolina Beaufort and the Town of Bluffton for Water Quality Laboratory Services (Fiscal Impact: \$185,000.00)
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience

REQUEST: Staff requests that Town Council authorize the Town Manager execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Attachment 2) between the University of South Carolina Beaufort and the Town of Bluffton for Water Quality Laboratory Services.

The MOU amount for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 is \$185,000 with an annual review of the budget and a term of five (5).

BACKGROUND: The current MOU, executed September 13, 2017, expires on June 30, 2023. The proposed MOU (Attachment 2, Exhibit A) would expire in June 2028 and continue the Town's financial commitment of \$185,000, with an annual review of the budget, for a term of five (5) years.

In 2007, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) reported rising fecal coliform levels in the headwaters of May River resulting in a shellfish harvesting classification downgrade to nearly one-third of the river's length in 2009. In response, the Town of Bluffton (Town) and the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB) entered into a MOU and partnership on June 25, 2008. The MOU established a Water Quality Laboratory funded in part by the Town and operated by USCB to receive and analyze water samples in support of the May River Watershed Action Plan and to inform management decisions.

In 2008, at the time of execution of this MOU, the Town committed \$100,000 to USCB and established its routine USCB Water Quality Laboratory (USCB-WQL) monitoring program aimed at identifying fecal coliform bacteria "hotspots" in the May River Watershed headwaters. Data from this program was incorporated into the *May River Watershed Action Plan (MRWAP)* which was adopted by Town Council via Resolution in 2011. Following its adoption, staff initiated efforts to implement and evaluate *MRWAP* watershed best management practices (BMPs) aimed at reducing fecal coliform loading into the May River. This MOU was amended one (1) time to accommodate rising costs of materials and increased the Town's financial commitment from \$100,000 to \$110,000.

In 2014, the Town and USCB amended the MOU and the Town increased its financial commitment from \$110,000 to \$120,000 in order to accommodate funding for:

- the USCB Water Quality Analyst's salary for Town sample collection, processing, and analysis; and
- weekly fecal indicator bacteria monitoring; and
- monthly *2010 South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Water Quality Concerns in the May River Study* recommended program changes; and
- additional monitoring and evaluation of Town *MRWAP* watershed best management practices (BMP's); and
- laboratory equipment maintenance and repair.

In 2015, SCDHEC designated the Town a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) Phase II Community. To comply with the Phase II permit, the Town implemented its quarterly MS4 water quality monitoring program and required the USCB Water Quality Laboratory to obtain SCDHEC certification, enabling them to accept regulatory compliance samples from the Town.

In 2017, the Town created a new partnership and MOU agreement with USCB to create the Microbial Source Tracking (MST) Laboratory. This laboratory identifies the type of fecal contamination in the May River to inform and prioritize areas for management. With the creation of the USCB MST Laboratory, the Town implemented its USCB-MST monitoring program and expanded monitoring locations to include the Bluffton Historic District.

As a result of these partnerships with USCB, data collected from the USCB-WQL and USCB-MST water quality monitoring programs were included in the *MRWAP Update and Modeling Report (MRWAP Update)* which was adopted by Town Council via Resolution in 2020. Based on recommendations in the *MRWAP Update*, the Town incorporated additional monitoring locations in the May River headwaters and the addition of nutrient testing.

These additional services and associated costs resulted in the Town increasing its financial support in 2021 to the current fee of \$185,000 and is representative of the ongoing partnership between the Town and USCB.

NEXT STEPS:

- Execution of this MOU with the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

SUMMARY: This MOU supports:

- Implementing the *May River Watershed Action Plan Update and Modeling Report*;
- Complying with the MS4 Program;
- Evaluating the efficacy of watershed BMP's; and
- Conducting statistical analyses of data collected.

It is supportive of the following guiding principles of the Town:

- May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds Guiding Principle #1. Support initiatives, such as the May River Watershed Action Plan, to improve water quality of the May, Okatie/Colleton and New Rivers and their watersheds.
- May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds Guiding Principle #2. Seek collaboration and partnerships that project and improve the May, Okatie/Colleton and New Rivers and their watershed.

Consistent with these Guiding Principles, Staff is requesting Town Council authorize the Town Manager to renew a Memorandum of Understanding (Attachment 3) between the University of South Carolina Beaufort and the Town of Bluffton regarding Water Quality Monitoring Services.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1) Presentation
- 2) Resolution
 - a. Exhibit A – MOU with USCB and supporting documentation
- 3) Proposed Motion