



## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Town Council  
**FROM:** Glen Umberger, Historic Preservationist  
**CC:** Stephen Steese, Town Manager  
**RE:** Update on SCADpro Welcome Center Design Project  
**DATE:** January 16, 2024

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**REQUEST:** Town Staff requests that Town Council approve the design concepts prepared by SCADpro for implementation in the new Welcome Center at the Squire Pope Carriage House (“Welcome Center”) and provide an allocation of funds to complete the project for a targeted opening date on or about January 1, 2025.

**BACKGROUND:** The Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County, through its Rural and Critical Lands Program, purchased the Squire Pope Carriage House and surrounding Wright Family Park for \$1.5 million in 2017. The intended use of the building is for offices for the Town’s Communications department on the second floor and in the downstairs front space adjacent to the kitchen with the Town’s official Welcome Center in the remaining 540 square feet on the first floor.

The Town contracted with the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)’s SCADpro collaborative design studio to design the new Town of Bluffton Welcome Center at the Squire Pope Carriage House (the “project”). During the Fall 2023 academic quarter, 17 students were registered for SCADpro580, a studio course for the project, under the guidance of a SCAD professor from the Preservation Design Department. These students (eight graduate students and nine undergraduate students, the “cohort”) represented different disciplines including Interior Design, Preservation Design, Architectural History, Graphic Design, Writing, Themed Entertainment, Production Design, and Architecture. The cohort began their work on September 12 and completed the project on November 16, 2023.

On Thursday, September 14, Debbie Szpanka and Glen Umberger, as points of contact from the Town, visited SCAD to meet the cohort and presented the project parameters and provided an overview of the history of Bluffton and some background information on how we function as a municipality. The cohort visited Bluffton on Friday, September 15 to get a first hand look at the Squire Pope Carriage House and to take notes, measurements, and gather other information that they would need to begin the project. They also toured the Garvin-Garvey House and the Heyward House Museum and Welcome Center to gather additional information.

On Tuesday, September 26, Debbie Szpanka and Glen Umberger participated in a virtual “check-in meeting” with the cohort to hear their initial ideas and offered feedback on historical information, branding, design approach, and digital experience and related technologies that the cohort had developed in the first three weeks of the project. The feedback that was provided by Town Staff was used to prepare the mid-term presentation.

On Thursday, October 12, Glen Umberger visited SCAD in person with Debbie Szpanka attending virtually for the cohort's Midpoint Presentation. Town Staff provided feedback during this presentation which aided the cohort in refining their design concepts and project plan.

On Tuesday, October 17, Glen Umberger and Debbie Szpanka, along with Pat Rooney presented a status update at the Town Council Quarterly Workshop and provided elements from the cohort's Midpoint Presentation. Town Council provided feedback which included a request to revise the design aesthetic of the display panels to be "less modern" and to ensure that the history of the Town was presented in an inclusive fashion. This feedback was relayed to the students by Town Staff.

On Tuesday, October 24, Glen Umberger and Debbie Szpanka attended a virtual "check-in" meeting with the cohort and offered some final suggestions and comments.

On Friday, November 3, Town Staff had a site visit with a couple of students from the Cohort at the Squire Pope Carriage House site to discuss the comments from the Town Council workshop and review some proposed changes to their designs for the display boards.

Finally, on Thursday, November 16, Glen Umberger, Debbie Szpanka, and Chris Forster attended the cohort's final presentation in Savannah; members of Senior Staff and Town Council attended the session virtually. The cohort provided details of their design concept and final deliverables which were then transferred to the Town's possession. These materials are available for viewing [here](#).

**NEXT STEPS:**

While Huss is anticipated to complete the rehabilitation of the Squire Pope Carriage House by May 31, 2024, the fabrication and installation of Welcome Center elements will be based on Town Council's approval and FY2025 budget funding. The Welcome Center and grounds are anticipated to open to the public on or about January 1, 2025.