

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT Executive Department



MEETING DATE:	August 11, 2026
PROJECT:	Consideration to Negotiate a Service Agreement with Beaufort Water Search and Rescue
PROJECT MANAGER:	Stephen Steese, Town Manager

REQUEST: Town Staff requests Town Council to authorize the Town Manager to negotiate a contract for search and rescue services in exchange for a financial contribution for a new vessel with Beaufort Water Search and Rescue.

BACKGROUND: In March 2026, Beaufort Water Search and Rescue (BWSAR) made an Accommodations Tax grant application to the Town of Bluffton for a financial contribution of one-half the cost of a new rescue vessel; the proposed use in the application was for search and rescue patrols within the Bluffton district. That application was not approved as due to insufficient nexus to tourism as required under State law, however the idea of partnering with a local search and rescue organization was deemed worthwhile to explore.

During FY 26-27 Budget Workshops, Town Council discussed partnering with BWSAR for water rescue efforts, to provide support during town events, and serve as needed during Emergency Response operations for the town. \$21,875.00 was requested by Council to be added to the budget for FY 26-27 with the anticipation that an agreement would be put in place to outline services and expectations.

An agreement was drafted to reflect search and rescue patrols for specific events, metrics reporting, and a communications chain of command for times when the Emergency Operations Center was activated in exchange for reimbursement for one half the cost of a new rescue vessel not to exceed \$21,875.00. That draft agreement is attached.

Beaufort Water Search and Rescue is a South Carolina non-profit entity in good standing with the South Carolina Secretary of State. Although headquartered in Beaufort, they have volunteer members who live in the Greater Bluffton area.

NEXT STEPS: Town Council to approve via resolution to contract with BWSAR for search and rescue activities in exchange for a one-time reimbursement for one half of a new rescue vessel not to exceed \$21,875.00.

SUMMARY: A two-year contract between the Town and Beaufort Water Search and Rescue would oblige BWSAR to commit to certain water patrols, to be on-call for the Bluffton Police Department for water rescues, and be matrixed to the Emergency Operations Center during declared emergencies in exchange for a one-time financial contribution toward a new rescue vessel.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft agreement
2. Recommended Motion
3. Resolution