

# PLANNING COMMISSION

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## STAFF REPORT

### Department of Growth Management

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| MEETING DATE:    | May 27, 2026                                                                                                                  |
| PROJECT:         | Beaufort Memorial Primary Care at May River Crossing<br>Certificate of Appropriateness – Highway Corridor<br>Overlay District |
| APPLICANT:       | Josie Abrams, Josie S. Abrams Architecture                                                                                    |
| PROJECT NUMBER:  | COFA-02-26-020148                                                                                                             |
| PROJECT MANAGER: | Angie Castrillon, Planner<br>Department of Growth Management                                                                  |

**REQUEST:** The Applicant, Josie Abrams of Josie S. Abrams Architecture, on behalf of property owner Beaufort Memorial Hospital requests approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness-Highway Corridor Overlay District (COFA-HCOD) application. The project consists of a 5,000 SF single-story medical office building with associated infrastructure (Attachment 1).

**INTRODUCTION:** The subject property is within the Jones Estate Planned Unit Development (PUD) and consists of approximately 1.38 acres identified by tax map number R610 036 000 3212 0000 located within the May River Crossing Master Plan along May River Road (Attachment 2).

**BACKGROUND:** The Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) (DP-03-24-019067) was approved with conditions by the Planning Commission at the June 26, 2024, meeting. This application is for a Certificate of Appropriateness-HCOD located within the Jones Estate PUD and the May River Crossing Master Plan and is subject to the Jones Estate PUD Development Agreement and Concept Plan, the May River Crossing Master Plan, and applicable Unified Development Ordinance Sections 5.3 and 5.10. The Beaufort County Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance 90/3 (ZDSO 90/3), as modified and incorporated into the PUD, establishes the applicable landscaping, lighting, and architectural standards (Attachment 3).

As reflected in the revised submittal, the proposed development includes a single-story 5,000 SF medical office building with associated landscaping, lighting, parking and infrastructure. The proposed architecture incorporates a three-part façade design, recessed and projecting wall planes, brick accents, parapet screening, and metal cornice features. These features are intended to be compatible with the existing architectural character of the May River Crossing development (Attachment 4).

The proposed landscaping plan includes foundation plantings, parking lot interior and perimeter landscaping, a 60-foot commercial buffer and 75-foot commercial setback

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along SC Highway 46, and street trees consistent with the Jones Estate PUD and HCOD standards (Attachment 5). The lighting plan proposes five (5) pole-mounted LED full cut-off parking fixtures and wall-mounted full cut-off LED fixtures at exterior building doors. The photometric plan demonstrates illumination levels within the requirements (Attachment 6).

The Conceptual COFA-HCOD application was reviewed at the April 1, 2026, Development Review Committee (DRC) meeting (Attachment 7). The Applicant provided a response to comments and revised plans on April 28, 2026 (Attachment 8 and 4-6). The Applicant has also provided a letter of approval from the Publix Regional Property Manager that serves as the May River Crossing POA (Attachment 9).

**REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS:** The Planning Commission shall consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.17.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) in assessing a Certificate of Appropriateness-Highway Corridor Overlay District (COFA-HCOD) application. The applicable criteria are provided below, followed by Staff Finding(s) based upon review of the application submittals to date.

1. **Section 3.17.3.A. The application must be in conformance with the applicable landscaping, lighting, and architectural provisions provided in *Article 5, Design Standards*.**

*Finding.* The property is located within the Jones Estate PUD and the May River Crossing Master Plan, therefore, the design standards of Article 5 of the UDO do not apply, except for applicable provisions of Sections 5.3 and 5.10.

2. **Section 3.17.3.B. The application must be in conformance with the approved Development Agreement, Concept Plan, Master Plan, Final Development Plan, Subdivision Plan, and any other agreements or plans applicable.**

*Finding.* The proposed development is subject to the Jones Estate PUD Development Agreement and Concept Plan and the May River Crossing Master Plan. Accordingly, the property is subject to the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO 90/3) and the Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD), which governs architectural, landscaping, and lighting design standards. The application has been reviewed for conformance with the applicable design standards, as outlined below.

1. **Architecture**

*Finding – Roof.* The Applicant has provided justification for the proposed roofline. Staff's interpretation remains that the ordinance (ZDSO 90/3) intends to discourage unarticulated flat rooflines. Based on that interpretation, and the supporting architectural narrative, the proposed cornice is viewed by Staff as meeting the guideline requiring a pediment per Section 5.15.9.D.3 and 5.15.9.E.2.

*Finding – Façade Articulation.* In response to Staff comments regarding façade articulation, the Applicant has revised the south elevation to provide additional architectural detailing, including increased glazing, added wall plane changes, parapet variation, and additional projecting elements. Staff finds the revised design generally responsive to prior comments intended to improve façade articulation and reduce perceived massing per Section 5.15.9.E.3.

*Finding – Colors.* Staff noted that the proposed "Aged Copper" color for the cornice and storefront window frames is not among the colors expressly listed as compatible with the Lowcountry or coastal vernacular palette under ZDSO 90/3 Section 5.15.9.D.5.

*"Any accent color (i.e. black, dark blue, grays, and other dark or strong colors) may be used on a limited basis as an architectural motif and will be allowed according to the discretion of the CRB and on the merits of its use in the overall design, and the use of corporate logos will be considered on a case-by-case basis."*

However, the Applicant has provided justification that Aged Copper is a familiar accent color in Bluffton and presented a physical copy at DRC. Staff finds this use may be considered on a case-by-case basis per Section 5.15.9.D.5. and defers to the Planning Commission for final determination.

*Finding – Dumpster Enclosure.* The design is reflective of and coordinates with the general style of architecture inherent in the primary structure, consistent with Section 5.15.9.F.

## 2. Landscaping

*Finding – Perimeter Buffer.* The Applicant has addressed prior agency comments related to landscaping over utility easements, including confirmation from Dominion Energy regarding the suitability of proposed plantings.

*Finding – Perimeter Buffer.* A landscaped buffer of at least ten (10') in width along the side and rear property boundaries, except for areas of vehicular and pedestrian passageways, is maintained per Section 5.15.8.D.1.

*Finding – Foundation Buffer.* A foundation buffer of at least eight (8') feet wide between any structure and any parking or driveway is maintained per Section 5.15.8.D.2.

## 3. Lighting

*Finding – Lamp Type.* ZDSO 90/3 Section 5.15.11(E)(2) lists permitted lamp types but does not include LED. The Applicant proposes LED fixtures

throughout. The Planning Commission must determine the appropriateness of LED lighting as a substitute for the lamp types listed in Section 5.15.11(E)(2).

*Finding – Illumination Levels.* Proposed illumination levels do not exceed the 10.0 fc maximum permitted under Section 5.15.11(E)(4)(b). All overhead fixtures are shielded. Staff finds the illumination levels compliant.

**3. Section 3.17.3.C. The application must comply with the applicable requirements in the Application Manual.**

*Finding.* The application has been reviewed by Town Staff and has been determined to be complete.

**PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS:** As granted by the powers and duties set forth in Section 2.2.6.C.6. of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), the Planning Commission has the authority to take the following actions with respect to the application:

1. Approve the application as submitted;
2. Approve the application with conditions; or
3. Deny the application as submitted.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Town Staff finds that the requirements of Section 3.17.3 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) are met and recommends that the Planning Commission approve the Certificate of Appropriateness – Highway Corridor Overlay District (COFA-HCOD) application as submitted.

Additionally, Town Staff finds that the Planning Commission should evaluate the following items for consistency with the applicable ZDSO 90/3 standards:

1. Whether the proposed use of “Aged Copper” as an accent color is appropriate under Section 5.15.9.
2. Whether the proposed LED lighting fixtures are an appropriate substitute for the lamp types permitted under Section 5.15.11.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Application and Project Narrative
2. Vicinity Map
3. May River Crossing Master Plan
4. Revised Architectural Plans and Material Board 04 28 2026
5. Revised Landscape Plans 04 28 2026
6. Lighting Plans 04 28 2026
7. DRC Staff Comments and Original Plans 03 27 2026
8. Response to Comments 04 28 2026
9. Letter of Approval from May River Crossing POA