

Regular Town Council Meeting

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

July 08, 2025

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Toomer called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Toomer.

III. INVOCATION

The Invocation was given by Councilmember Hamilton.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

1. Regular Meeting Minutes of 06/10/2025

A motion made by Councilmember Burden; Seconded by Councilmember Frazier to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of 06/10/2025 as submitted.

V. PRESENTATIONS, CELEBRATIONS, AND RECOGNITIONS

1. Beaufort County School District Character Student of the Month - Mayor Larry Toomer

On behalf of Town Council, Mayor Larry Toomer honored the student of the month, Anthony Santiago, a first grader from MC Riley Elementary School. Anthony was recognized for the Character Traits of responsibility and cooperation.

2. Introduction of New Employees, Promotions, and Interns - Anni Evans, Director of Human Resources

EXECUTIVE:

Stephen Steese, Town Manager

Lyndee Simoneaux promoted from Special Events Welcome Center Manager to Director of Events and Venues effective 07/01/2025

Chris Forster, Assistant Town Manager

Paul Arvantides promoted Director of Innovation Services to CEO of DRCI effective 07/01/2025

PUBLIC SERVICES:

Larry Beckler, Director of Public Services

Welcome - Cinthia Mendieta, Public Services Worker II – Grounds Maintenance

EVENTS AND VANUES:

Lyndee Simoneaux, Director of Events and Venues

LeeAnn Lennek promoted from Welcome Center Coordinator to Welcome Center Assistant Manager effective 07/01/2025

Welcome: Ross Patterson

Department: Communications and Community Outreach

Job Title: Part-Time Garvin Garvey House Docent

Prior Employment: Head Docent at The Garvin Garvey House

Education: MBA from Campbell University

Welcome: David Berver

Department: Communications and Community Outreach

Job Title: Part-Time Garvin Garvey House Docent

Prior Employment: Program and Logistics Coordinator at Arlington Soccer Association

Education: Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communication from George Washington University

FINANCE:

Natalie Majorkiewicz, Director of Finance & Administration

Shannon Milroy promoted from Budget Grant/Procurement Admin to Budget and Procurement Manager effective 07/01/2025

HUMAN RESOURCES:

Anni Evans, Director of Human Resources

Welcome: Sharon Murray

Department: Human Resources

Job Title: Human Resources Intern

Reporting to: Anni Evans

Prior Employment: Self-Employed Barber

Education: Currently obtaining her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting and HR Management from University of South Carolina

Welcome: Peyton Chrpapin

Department: Public Services

Job Title: Public Services Intern

Reporting to: Larry Beckler

Prior Employment: Front Store Clerk at Publix

Education: Currently obtaining his High School Diploma from May River High School

Welcome: Zoe Stevenson

Department: Communications and Community Outreach

Job Title: Welcome Center Intern

Reporting to: Lyndee Simoneaux

Prior Employment: Social Media Specialist at Beaufort County SC Republican Party Office

Education: Currently obtaining her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Anderson University

Welcome: Dior Shelton

Department: Finance

Job Title: Finance Intern

Reporting to: Natalie Majorkiewicz

Prior Employment: AAU Asst. Basketball Coach/Trainer at H2 Basketball

Education: Currently obtaining her Master's Degree from Limestone University

Welcome: Ryan Deegan

Department: Finance

Job Title: Finance Intern

Reporting to: Natalie Majorkiewicz

Prior Employment: First Mate at Island Head HHI

Education: Currently obtaining his Bachelor's Degree in Financial Management and Accounting from the Clemson University

Welcome: Ransom Albertson
Department: Finance
Job Title: Finance Intern
Reporting to: Natalie Majorkiewicz
Education: Currently obtaining his High School Diploma from Choate Rosemary Hall

Welcome: Angelina Cardone
Department: Police Department
Job Title: Police Department Intern
Reporting to: Jaycee Ruiz
Prior Employment: Cashier at Tropical Smoothie
Education: Currently obtaining her Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from University of South Carolina Beaufort

3. Town Investment Portfolio Update - First Citizens Wealth,

Neil Chapman, Senior Portfolio Strategist and Grant Catoe, Institutional Consultant

Neil Chapman, Senior Portfolio Strategist and Grant Catoe, Institutional Consultant representing First Citizens Wealth provided a comprehensive review of the Town of Bluffton's Investment Portfolio.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Andera Pressley 21 Pinecrest Way - Ms. Pressley addressed council regarding the traffic impact associated with the possible development of the Pinecrest golf course.

David Cowart 23 Pinecrest Way - Mr. Coward addressed council to advise and share concerns of the development plan in Pinecrest that will affect the community, school safety and traffic. He also referenced rumors circulating within the community via various social media platforms.

Zeke Jordan 3792 Okatie Hwy - Mr. Jordan addressed council in opposition of the New Riverside Linear Trail Project.

Skylar Jewell 27 Pioneer Point - Mr. Jewell address council regarding the New Riverside Linear Trail Project. He expressed concerns regarding the impact on wildlife and offered alternative locations for recreational space in Bluffton.

Former Mayor Emmett McCracken - Mr. McCracken addressed council regarding the appointment of Walter Nester III to the Military Enhancement Committee. He made the recommendation in support of the Resolution to appoint Mr. Nester to the committee.

Laura Sterling 113 Foreman Hill Road - Ms. Sterling addressed council in opposition to the New Riverside Linear Trail Project. She read a letter from a community member and presented pictures for council to review.

Kim Konte 90 Big Bluff Rd - Ms. Konte spoke of the Non-Toxic Neighborhood program supporting organic landscape management. She has requested adopting further safeguards for our community and assisting in spreading awareness to the Senate.

VII. COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND COUNCIL

Mayor Pro-Tempore Wood – Commended town staff as well as town manager for the success of the festivities of the 4th of July Fireworks and Independence Day Celebration. All the events that are held throughout the town are what having a sense of community is. A recommendation was made to the mayor and council to move the Communications from Mayor and Council ahead of the Public Comment session in the future due to many individuals exiting Council Chambers after the Public Comment period had closed.

Councilmember Hamilton – Mr. Hamilton advised he does not normally respond to public comments made; however, he had decided to respond this evening. He stated, Nextdoor, Facebook, and other social media platforms have turned into an outlet for anyone who is having a bad day to use. He addressed the individual that shared the rumors being shared during his time of public comment, advising they are not true.

Councilmember Burden – Mrs. Burden also addressed individual regarding the rumors, stating her opinion has not changed. She then requested Heather Colin, Assistant Town Manager provide a detailed timeline associated with New River Linear Trail dating back to the June 2000 as part of the Jones Estate Development Agreement.

Heather Colin provided the following outline:

The New River Trail Master Plan was established in 2003.

The Trail Deed Conveyance to the Town occurred 4/11/2005.

Permitting CZC, DHEC, MS4 and other permitting for the current project occurred 11/2024 Phases 1 and 3/2025 Phase 2.

Contract 2025-53 to Nix Construction was awarded - 6/2025 to include the scope of a 10' path along trail, covered pier at New River, reconstruction of three trail bridges.

Funding Sources Grants:

2011 New River Trailhead development project SC PRT grant reimbursement \$85,726

2023 New River Trail Restroom \$26,000

2024 Senate Appropriation \$2,000,000

Community/Notifications of the project were also outlined.

Councilmember Frazier – Ms. Frazier began by thanking Heather Colin for the information. She stated there are times where disagreements occur. It is acceptable to disagree and have passionate voices, however, the passionate voices have been providing misinformation that a lot of times will create a level of distrust and disdain for government and those who are stewarding the projects. She advised that council is sensitive to the need to meet the esthetics of the town and provide to the needs of the inclusive community to include all citizens. This includes someone who may be in a wheelchair or have mobility issues accessibility to the features and green spaces that we do have. Ms. Frazier spoke about the individuals wanting the money to be spent on other things. She expressed the need to understand grants are earmarked for a specific purpose. The funding cannot be utilized for any other purpose other than what the grant has been written for. She also expressed the importance of staying off social media and away from sensationalism. She encouraged citizens to reach out, ask questions as the town has an open-door policy.

Mayor Larry Toomer – Mayor Toomer spoke regarding the speed of the project stirring discontent within the community within just a few days. He advised he understands those who are opposed to anything improving in their backyard. He stated people want affordable housing, more public parks, and playgrounds but not too close to "my house". This is what council and staff go through to get projects done that benefit the community. He advised in the 12 years he has sat on the dais he has heard numerous requests for trails, bike paths and walking paths to enable people to stay off the dangerous roadways. He stated the project has been in the pipeline for many years and feels the town needs to stick to the plan and move forward with the project for the betterment of the entire community.

VIII. WORKSHOP AGENDA ITEMS

1. Performing Arts Feasibility Study Report - Ryan Johnson, Project Manager, Johnson Consulting

Ryan Johnson, Project Manager of Johnson Consulting highlighted the findings of the Performing Arts Feasibility Study. The study indicates a need for a multi-purpose, flexible venue for performing arts, with the capacity for meetings and conventions as well as social and charitable events.

IX. PUBLIC HEARING & FINAL READING**X. FORMAL AGENDA ITEMS**

1. Consideration of a Resolution of Support for a Childcare and Early Learning Project Utilizing the Tri Share Funding Model. - Chris Forster, Assistant Town Manager

A motion made by Councilmember Hamilton; Seconded by Mayor Pro-Tempore to approve a resolution asking the Beaufort County State Legislative Delegation to support a project pilot implementing a tri-share funding model to improve access to childcare.

Town Council unanimously approved the resolution.

XI. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

A motion made by Mayor Pro-Tempore Wood; Seconded by Councilmember Hamilton to approve the Consent Agenda as submitted.

Town Council unanimously approved the consent agenda items as submitted.

1. Monthly Department Reports: Police, Finance and Administration, Human Resources, Municipal Court, Projects & Watershed Resilience, Public Services, Don Ryan Center for Innovation, and Growth Management
2. Town Manager Monthly Report
3. Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of Easement and Right of Entry Donations from Q New River Forest Holdings, LLC Necessary to Complete the New Riverside Barn Park Public Services Building Project - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience
4. Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of Easement Donations from Property Owners Necessary to Complete the Pritchard Street Streetscape and Drainage Project. - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience
5. Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing an Inter-Governmental Cost Share Agreement with Beaufort County School District to complete the Pritchard Street Streetscape Project - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience
6. Consideration of a Resolution Authorizing an Easement Donation from Heritage at New Riverside Community Association to Complete the New River Linear Trail Project - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience
7. Consideration of an Ordinance for a Non-Exclusive Easement over Certain Real Property Owned by the Town of Bluffton Consisting of Parcel R610-028-000-0018-0000 in Favor of K. Hovnanian's Four Seasons at Carolina Oaks to connect the Four Seasons' Boardwalk to the New River Trail, First Reading - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience
8. Consideration of a Resolution Appointing Walter Nester III to the Military Enhancement Committee for a Three-Year Term - Stephen Steese, Town Manager
9. Consideration of Proposed Amendments to The Town of Bluffton Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 4 – Animals, to Align with Beaufort County's Ordinance. First Reading, Heather Colin, Assistant Town Manager

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

1. Legal Advice Regarding Contractual Negotiations Involving the Verdier Development Agreement (Pursuant to SC Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70 [a] [2])

2. Legal Advice Regarding Emergency Declarations (Pursuant to SC Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70 [a] [2])

XIII. ACTION FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION

No actions were taken during Executive Session.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

A motion made by Councilmember Burden; Seconded by Councilmember Frazier to adjourn the meeting at 7:41PM.

Marcia Hunter, Town Clerk
Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

Larry C. Toomer, Mayor
Town of Bluffton, South Carolina