

Update on Town Wetland Ordinance

Presentation to WAPAC

**Beth Lewis, Watershed Resilience Manager
Department of Projects and Watershed Resilience
January 22, 2026**

Background

In January of 2025, Town Council approved a Master Service Agreement (MSA) task authorization to McCormick Taylor, Inc. to develop Town Wetland and Resilience Ordinances to protect health, life, and safety of our citizens and natural resources. This included the following:

- 1. Review current Town policies;**
- 2. Identify and inventory wetlands within the Town's jurisdiction;**
- 3. Develop a map of wetlands to be protected;**
- 4. Develop a Wetland Ordinance for the Town;**
5. Apply comprehensive drainage study results to map resiliency zones;
6. Identify primary conveyance systems; and,
7. Develop a Resilience Ordinance for the Town.

Background

Concurrent, yet independent from the MSA work, Town Council adopted a wetland protection ordinance in June of 2025 that accomplished the following:

- Required a 50 ft. undisturbed buffer around the perimeter of all wetlands;
- Allowed for enforcement of unpermitted filling of wetlands;
- Filled gaps left by loosened federal rules after the U.S. Supreme Court's Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency decision; and
- Made Bluffton the first municipality in South Carolina to enact such laws in response to federal changes.

Background

Since its adoption, Town staff have received:

- One (1) variance request (Board of Zoning Appeals); and
- Three (3) waiver requests (UDO Administrator)

Background

Current wetland ordinance was adopted as an interim wetland ordinance to be later superseded by a comprehensive wetland ordinance, incorporating:

- The Consultant's recommendations; and
- Reliance upon a new, Town-owned, wetland mapping tool.

Accurate wetlands data allows the Town to focus its protection efforts and inform future development, projects, policies, programs, and partnerships.

- Currently relying on the National Wetland Inventory (NWI), which was last updated based on 2006 and 2011 imagery and does not often indicate the presence of smaller, isolated wetlands.

Next Steps

UDO Text Amendment Procedure	Tentative Dates	Complete
Step 1. Town Council - Workshop	January 27, 2026	✕
Step 2. Public Comment Period	February 2 – March 2, 2026	✕
Step 3. Consultant Review Period	March 9 – March 23, 2026	✕
Step 4. Planning Commission Workshop	April 22, 2026	✕
Step 5. Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee Meeting	April 23, 2026	✕
Step 6. Planning Commission Public Hearing and Recommendation	May 27, 2026	✕
Step 7. Town Council – First Reading	June 9, 2026	✕
Step 8. Town Council Meeting – Final Reading and Public Hearing	July 14, 2026	✕