

TOWN OF BLUFFTON



STAFF REPORT

Department of Growth Management

MEETING DATE:	June 25, 2025
PROJECT:	Chase Bank at Belfair Towne Village - Certificate of Appropriateness-Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCO)
PROJECT MANAGER:	Sam Barrow Senior Planner

APPLICATION REQUEST: The Applicant, Dynamic Engineering Consultants, on behalf of owner, Jane Cooper, LLC, requests approval from the Planning Commission of the following application:

COFA-03-25-019625. A Certificate of Appropriateness-HCO to convert an existing restaurant to a commercial bank with drive through, and associated parking, landscaping and infrastructure. The property zoned Belfair PUD and consists of 0.77 acres, is identified by tax map number R610 031 000 1085 0000 and located at 15 Towne Drive within the Town of Bluffton Highway Corridor Overlay District.

INTRODUCTION: The Applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness – Highway Corridor Overlay application to convert an existing restaurant to a commercial bank with drive-through window. A Preliminary Development Plan Amendment (DP-02-25-019598) was heard by the Development Review Committee on March 26, 2025 but was not approved, pending additional requirements regarding stormwater. Comments are provided as Attachment 8. The COFA-HCO application was heard by the Development Review Committee on April 9, 2025 and was approved with conditions (Attachment 9). As presented, this project proposes minimal changes to architecture and lighting, and moderate changes to landscaping. The Applicant’s response to the DRC’s COFA-HCO comments, and subsequent final submission have satisfied all conditions (Attachment 10).

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS: On July 24, 1995, Beaufort County Council approved a request for rezoning to a PUD District for 1,028 acres, located north of US 278, establishing the Belfair Planned Unit Development Zoning District. The majority of the development was approved for low intensity single family residential, with 33 acres approved for multifamily, and fifty acres for commercial development.

As part of the Buck Island Simmonsville Annexation of 2005, the commercial portion of the Belfair PUD was annexed into the Town of Bluffton and the Belfair PUD, as approved by

Beaufort County, was adopted by the Town of Bluffton as the official zoning for the property.



REVIEW CRITERIA & ANALYSIS: Town Staff and Planning Commission are required to consider the criteria set forth in Section 3.17.3 of the UDO in assessing an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness-HCO. These criteria are provided below followed by a Staff Finding based upon review of the application submittals to date.

1. Section 3.17.3.A. The proposed development must be in conformance with applicable architectural, landscaping and lighting provisions provided in Article 5, Design Standards.
 - a) *Finding.* The project is located in the Belfair PUD. There are specific design standards established by the PUD and the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO), which are attached to the PUD. As a result, Article 5 of the current Unified Development Ordinance does not apply to this proposal.
2. Section 3.17.3.B. The proposed development shall be in conformance with any approved Development Agreement, PUD Concept Plan, PUD Master Plan, Subdivision Plan, or any other agreements or plans that are applicable.

The property is located in the Belfair PUD and the Belfair PUD Master Plan. As a result and as previously noted, the property is subject to the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance. This Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance contains architectural, landscaping, and lighting design standards for properties located in the Highway Corridor Overlay District. As previously noted, only the landscaping design is being proposed for modification in this application; therefore, the architectural standards are not applicable.

i. Finding - Landscape Design. Section 4.23.2.1.C. of the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance states that the purpose of this subsection is to achieve at maturity a semi-continuous and semi-opaque vertical plane of tree canopy, understory trees and shrubbery coverage in order to soften the appearance of structures and parking lots visible from the highway, to screen headlight glare of and off site, and to mitigate commercial lighting as seen by neighboring properties and from the highway. Natural appearing landscape forms are encouraged.

Staff finds that the proposed tree removal will not significantly impact the buffer and will correspond to the intent of the above referenced section.

ii. Finding - Landscape Design. Section 4.23.2.1.C.7. of the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance states where commercial parking areas would be visible from the highway, additional vegetation, walls, fences, berms, or some combination shall be used to screen those areas.

Staff finds that the existing buffer meets the minimum requirement.

iii. Finding - Landscape Design. Section 4.23.2.1.C.8. of the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance states that trees and shrubs shall not be pruned in any manner that would significantly diminish the desired softening character of the buffer except in accordance with standard horticultural practice. Trees shall not be limbed-up from the ground more than six (6') feet to the lowest branches except as required within sight triangles at intersections or to provide adequate light for understory plantings.

Staff finds that the proposed tree removal will not significantly impact the buffer and will correspond to the intent of the above referenced section.

A. BELFAIR PUD/PUD CONCEPT PLAN

The Belfair PUD references the Beaufort County 1990/3 Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO) and The Town of Bluffton Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD) for development standards. Compliance has been demonstrated except for the following findings:

1. Architecture (See Attachment 4 for Building Elevations Plan)

Applying Section 5.15.9. (Town of Bluffton Highway Corridor Overlay District, June 20, 2000, Architectural Design), architectural styles should be reflective of, or at least compatible with, architectural styles which exemplify the unique character of the Lowcountry region and conform to the general standards of architectural quality. Sub-section 5.15.9.(D) provides that materials and elements not specifically listed may be considered by the Planning Commission provided consistency with general principles for Lowcountry architecture is demonstrated.

Findings include:

- a. **Finding - Accent Colors.** Black is the proposed color for roof, parapet wall coping, canopies, and dumpster fencing. UDO Sec. 5.14.3 allows black to be used as an accent color on a limited basis and at the discretion of the Planning Commission. In addition, “Bright Blue” is the proposed color for the ATM in the drive-through lane on the left elevation.

2. **Landscaping** (See Attachments 5 & 6 for Landscaping Plan)

- a. **Finding – The Applicant is not proposing changes to the existing HCOD buffer.** Moderate changes to landscaping include minor tree removal for sidewalk installation. *The Site Plan and Landscape Plan meet UDO requirements as submitted.*

3. **Lighting** (See Attachment 7 for Lighting Plan)

Applying Section 5.15.11., (Highway Corridor Overlay District, Lighting), findings include:

- a. **Finding – The Lighting and Photometric Plans meet UDO requirements as submitted.**

C. **DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The Preliminary Development Plan has been reviewed and Town Staff is Stormwater requirements to be met prior to issuing Development Plan Amendment approval.

1. **Finding –** As the work proposed in the scope of this project do not modify the landscaping or open space calculations for the site, and only slightly modify the parking calculations, the UDO Administrator has determined the work is in compliance with the approved Preliminary Development Plan Amendment (DP-02-25-019598).

D. **APPLICATIONS MANUAL**

The application must comply with applicable requirements in the Application Manual (Section 3.17.3.C).

1. ***Finding – Applications Manual.*** The application has been reviewed by Town Staff and has been determined to be complete and that it meets all requirements of the Applications Manual. Per the Town of Bluffton Applications Manual, a separate Sign Permit will be required for all signage that is being proposed in association with this development.

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 this application:

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

TOWN STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The requirements of Section 3.17.3 of the UDO will be met if the Planning Commission approves the application with the following conditions:

1. Provide a letter of approval from the Master Plan Declarant responsible for the covenants and restrictions for the community.

Additionally, Town Staff finds that the Planning Commission must determine if certain architectural, landscaping and lighting elements satisfy the requirements of the ZDSO, including the following:

Architecture

1. Determine if the color black is appropriate for the roof, parapet wall coping, canopies, and dumpster fencing per UDO Sec. 5.14.3
2. Determine if the color blue is appropriate for the for the ATM per UDO Sec. 5.14.3.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Application
2. Narrative
3. Plat
4. Elevations
5. Landscape Plan 1
6. Landscape Plan 2
7. Lighting Plan
8. DRC Comments (DPA 02-25-019598)
9. DRC Comments (COFA 03-25-019625)
10. Applicant Response to COFA-HCO Review