

Regular Town Council Meeting

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

March 10, 2026

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

Councilmember Wood was absent.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Toomer.

III. INVOCATION

The Invocation was led by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

1. Regular Meeting Minutes of 02/10/2026

A motion was made by Councilmember Frazier and seconded by Councilmember Burden to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of 02/10/2026.

All were in favor and the motion passed.

V. PRESENTATIONS, CELEBRATIONS, AND RECOGNITIONS

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

Mayor Larry Toomer, on behalf of Town Council, honored Red Cedar Elementary School 5th-grade student, Mailen Pena Molina, for the character trait of perseverance.

2. Development Disabilities Awareness Month Proclamation (SOAR /Special Olympics Spring Games) - Mayor Larry Toomer

Mayor Larry Toomer, on behalf of Town Council, honored Development Disability Awareness Month with a proclamation. Kimberly Thorn accepted the proclamation for SOAR/Special Olympics Spring Games.

3. Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (Beaufort County DSN) - Mayor Larry Toomer

Mayor Larry Toomer, on behalf of Town Council presented a Development Disabilities Awareness Month to Beaufort County Disabilities and Special Needs Program to Kelsey Price, Client and Ivy Rolf, House Manager.

4. 46th Annual Telly Award - Beaufort County TV for Bluffton Christmas Parade 2024 - Mayor Larry Toomer and Vincent Virga, Director of Broadcast Services

Vincent Virga, Director of Broadcast Services for BCTV, honored the Town of Bluffton’s stage crew for their partnership in the 2024 Bluffton Christmas Parade which was awarded a “Telly” award for that production.

5. Annual Utility Update: Palmetto Electric Cooperative and Dominion Energy

- Palmetto Electric Cooperative - Ashley Feaster, Community Affairs and Economic Development
- Dominion Energy - Blakely Williams, Economic Development and Local Affairs Manager

Ashley Feaster, Community Affairs and Economic Development, reported that Palmetto Electric completed its recent Bluffton tree-trimming cycle, with the next planned in about three years. She noted ongoing system upgrades and proactive transformer replacements that continue to support strong reliability. Palmetto Electric contributed \$1.2 million toward The Cove at the Don Ryan Center and is expanding broadband access through PalmettoLink in partnership with area developers. Cooperative supports state legislation to strengthen protections for utility and restoration workers during declared emergencies and highlighted its recent recognition as a top workplace, expressing appreciation for its partnership with the Town.

Blakely Williams, Economic Development and Local Affairs Manager for Dominion Energy, provided an update noting completion of the Hardy Belt of Bluffton transmission line project, which replaced aging wooden structures with galvanized steel and improved system resiliency, along with construction of a new distribution line serving the Buckwalter Parkway area and a second feeder added at Palmetto Bluff. She reported progress on the Bridge Street overhead-to-underground utility conversion project and upcoming downtown lighting improvements expected to begin this summer. Williams also highlighted ongoing vegetation management efforts, with the first trimming route 43% complete and full completion anticipated by the end of April, emphasized the importance of right-of-way maintenance, Dominion's coordination with Town staff, and the company's continued commitment to safety, reliability, and partnership with the Town.

6. Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation Update - John O'Toole, Executive Director of the Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation

John O'Toole of the Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation reported continued strong regional growth, noting nearly \$60 million in investment and 165 new quality jobs this year, with Bluffton benefiting from long-term gains totaling \$198 million in local investment and significant wage growth. He highlighted active projects with companies such as Spartina, CS Instruments, Jet Zero, Beaufort Memorial, and Dolnik Properties, along with ongoing business retention, attraction, and marketing efforts. O'Toole emphasized Bluffton's strong return on its annual BCEDC contribution and the continued partnership with Town staff and the Don Ryan Center.

7. 2026 CDBG Needs Assessment - Kimberly Varn, C&ED Deputy Director Lowcountry Council of Governments

****MUST BE HEARD AFTER 6:00 PM**

Kimberly Varn, C&ED Deputy Director of the Lowcountry Council of Governments provided the annual update and public hearing for the 2026 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Needs Assessment, outlining available state funding, eligible project categories, and application requirements for programs supporting low- to moderate income residents. She reviewed the various grant types, including community infrastructure, local priorities,

community enrichment, and ready-to-go projects, and noted opportunities to align CDBG funding with ongoing Town initiatives. Barr explained income thresholds, survey requirements, and current fair housing obligations, and requested that Council confirm its top three priority needs—maintaining the previously approved ranking—which Council reaffirmed by vote.

8. Update of Beaufort County Transportation Penny Tax Advisory Committee (TAC) - Lisa Sulka
Lisa Sulka provided an update on the Beaufort County Transportation Penny Tax Advisory Committee, noting the planned November referendum and outlining the committee's review of proposed transportation projects using an online map and upcoming project-ranking process. She highlighted past penny tax accomplishments, reasons for delays in 2018 project completion, and the need for a new penny to address critical transportation issues not funded by the state. Sulka asked the Town to identify its priority projects, particularly improvements along Highway 170/46, Bluffton Parkway, and key intersections, so she can bring that guidance back to the committee before its final municipal presentations.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Sharon Brown, 163 Buck Island Road - Ms. Brown requested transparency and community involvement in planning the Buck Island Park, expressing concern that an informal advisory group had provided input without adequate neighborhood representation. She asked the Town to establish an official committee—including local residents—to help guide park planning, noting the importance of features that serve seniors, individuals with special needs, and the surrounding community.

VII. COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND COUNCIL

No communication was received from Mayor Toomer, Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton or Councilmember Frazier.

Councilmember Burden requested to be advised who is on the advisory committee Ms. Brown spoke of. Stephen Steese, Town Manager, addressed the inquiry stating this was a misstatement made at the community meeting by staff. There were some residents who Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton thought it would be good for the town to sit down with to receive their input. No advisory committee has been established.

VIII. WORKSHOP AGENDA ITEMS

IX. PUBLIC HEARING & FINAL READING

X. FORMAL AGENDA ITEMS

1. Consideration of an Ordinance Amending the Town of Bluffton FY 2026 Budget to Provide for the Expenditures of Certain Funds and to Allocate Sources of Revenue for the Said Funds - Second & Final Reading - Natalie Majorkiewicz, Director of Finance

A motion was made by Councilmember Burden and seconded by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton to approve the second and final reading of an Ordinance amending the Town of Bluffton FY 2026 Budget.

Town Council unanimously approved the second reading of this ordinance.

2. Resolution Expressing Support of the University of South Carolina Beaufort Sand Shark 20/20 Project Creating a Multi-Purpose Arena and Sports Complex - Paul Arvantides, CEO, Don Ryan Center for Innovation, Inc.

A motion was made by Councilmember Frazier and was seconded by Councilmember Burden to authorize a resolution expressing support of the University of South Carolina Beaufort Sand Shark 20/20 Project Creating a Multi-Purpose Arena and Sports Complex.

Town Council unanimously agreed to the resolution of support.

3. Consideration of Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations for Quarter Ending December 30, 2025 - Shannon Milroy, Budget & Procurement Manager

- The Rotary Club of Bluffton for Mayfest Weekend in Bluffton, Requesting \$25,000

Motion 1 - A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton and was seconded by Councilmember Frazier to approve a \$25,000 grant to the Rotary Club of Bluffton for Mayfest Weekend in Bluffton.

Town Council unanimously approved the grant.

- Beaufort Water Search and Rescue for Water Rescue Services & Water Related Event Patrols, Requesting \$20,000

Motion 2 - A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton and was seconded by Councilmember Frazier to support the recommendation made by ATAC of no award to Beaufort Water Search and Rescue for the purchase of a replacement boat.

Town Council unanimously rejected the approval the grant.

4. Approval to Authorize a Construction Contract with Sea Island Land Development, LLC for Construction of Bridge Street Streetscape, Phases 2 and 3 (Fiscal Impact: \$1,512,992.29) - Pat Rooney, Capital Improvement Program Manager

A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton and was seconded by Councilmember Frazier authorizing the Town Manager to execute the construction contract with Sea Island Land Development, LLC for Construction of Bridge Street Streetscape, Phases 2 and 3 (Fiscal Impact: \$1,512,992.29).

Town Council unanimously approved the authorization of the contract.

5. Resolution to Accept the Updated Historic Resource Survey - Glen Umberger

A motion was made by Councilmember Burden and was seconded by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton to accept the updated Historic Resource Survey as submitted.

Town council unanimously agreed to the motion.

XI. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

A motion was made by Councilmember Wood and seconded by Councilmember Burden to accept the Consent Agenda as submitted.

Town Council unanimously agreed to the motion to accept 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 Donations from Property Owners Necessary to Complete a Portion of the Public Safety Cameras Project - Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience and Joe Babkiewicz, Chief of Police

XXI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

1. Discussions Relating to Potential Contractual Arrangements Between the Town and Other Parties Related to Grant Applications and Agreements. (Pursuant to SC Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70 [a] [2])

A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton and seconded by Councilmember Burden to enter into Executive Session.

XIII. ACTION FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION

No votes or action were taken during Executive Session.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Hamilton and was seconded by Councilmember Frazier to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 PM.

Marcia Hunter, Town Clerk
Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

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