Town of Bluffton

Applications Manual

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Town of Bluffton
Department of Growth Management
Applications Manual

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This project was funded wholly or in part by the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) under a Section 319 Grant through the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC), as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office of Ocean and Coastal Management (OCRM), and SC DHEC through a SC Coastal Nonpoint Program Capacity Building Grant for Local Governments by award number NA09NOS4190092.

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Applications Manual User Guide

Purpose

This Applications Manual is intended to be a user-friendly guide to the Town of Bluffton Growth Management Department's applications. This Manual contains application forms, application process narratives, and application checklists associated with annexation, zoning, development, subdivision, and construction.

This Manual was created to guide applicants through the various types of permits that may be required. The permit types are summarized in the Application Process Table. For additional information pertaining to specific applications, the Application Process Table notes the applicable Code or policy reference.

Note: This Manual does not serve as a substitute for any of the Town of Bluffton's adopted ordinances and is intended only as a guide for the users of the Unified Development Ordinance. In case of conflict between this Manual and other Town ordinances, the adopted Town ordinances shall prevail.

Feedback

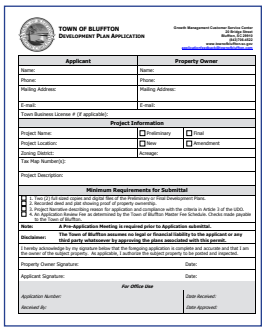
In order for the Town of Bluffton to better serve the community, please provide feedback to applicationfeedback@townofbluffton.com to help us improve our procedures for the review of applications.

Process

Each tab of the Applications Manual contains an application on which a user will find the minimum submittal requirements and a narrative describing the review and approval process for each application. Certain applications also contain checklists to assist in the development of submittal materials.

To prevent delays in processing, it is important that all applications are filled out entirely and include accurate, clear, and detailed information for review. Incomplete applications will not be accepted. Once a complete application is submitted, the application will follow the steps outlined in the application process narrative.

1. **Refer to the Application Process Table** to see what steps your application process will follow and to read the corresponding section in the Ordinance.
2. **Schedule a Pre-Application Meeting**. In some cases, as an applicant you are required to schedule a pre-application meeting to review the procedures and requirements with Town Staff.
3. **Fill out the form**. Be sure fill out the application form completely and provide all information required to be submitted with the application. The minimum submittal requirements are listed on the application and, for certain applications, on the application checklist.



TOWN OF BLUFFTON
DEVELOPMENT PLAN APPLICATION

Growth Management Customer Service Center
20 Bridge Street
P.O. Box 386
(843)706-4522
www.townofbluffton.sc.gov
applicationfeedback@townofbluffton.com

Applicant	Property Owner
Name:	Name:
Phone:	Phone:
Mailing Address:	Mailing Address:
E-mail:	E-mail:
Town Business License # (if applicable):	
Project Information	
Project Name:	☐ Preliminary ☐ Final
Project Location:	☐ New ☐ Amendment
Zoning District:	Acreage:
Tax Map Number(s):	
Project Description:	
Minimum Requirements for Submittal	

1. Two (2) full sized copies and digital files of the Preliminary or Final Development Plans.
2. Recorded deed and plat showing proof of property ownership.
3. Project Narrative describing reason for application and compliance with the criteria in Article 3 of the UDO.
4. An Application Review Fee as determined by the Town of Bluffton Master Fee Schedule. Checks made payable to the Town of Bluffton.

Note: **A Pre-Application Meeting is required prior to Application submittal.**

Disclaimer: **The Town of Bluffton assumes no legal or financial liability to the applicant or any third party whatsoever by approving the plans associated with this permit.**

I hereby acknowledge by my signature below that the foregoing application is complete and accurate and that I am the owner of the subject property. As applicant, I authorize the subject property to be posted and inspected.

Property Owner Signature: Date:

Applicant Signature: Date:

For Office Use

Application Number: *Date Received:*

Received By: *Date Approved:*

4. **Submit the application**. Submit the application with the required fee (listed in the Master Fee Schedule) and the required submittal information to the Growth Management Customer Service Center.
5. **Town Staff Review**. Once a complete application is received, Town Staff will begin the review process. Typically the first step is an administrative review by the Development Review Committee (representatives of different departments). A report is prepared and provided to you to alert you of any changes needed to your application materials.
6. **Decision Process**. Depending upon the type of review, and following the administrative review of the Development Review Committee, the UDO Administrator or Building Official will take action on your request or, if necessary, forward your request to the Planning Commission, Historic District Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, or Town Council as appropriate.
7. **Meeting**. If your request is required to be forwarded to a Board, Commission, or Town Council, you will be notified when your request will be heard at a meeting (where required). Upcoming meeting dates and agendas can be found on the Town's website. Applicants are required to attend all meetings, including Development Review Committee meetings.

Questions

If there are any questions regarding a Town application or process, please contact the Department of Growth Management.

Growth Management Customer Service Center
P.O. Box 386
20 Bridge Street
Bluffton, SC 29910
(843)706-4522
www.townofbluffton.sc.gov
applicationfeedback@townofbluffton.com

Applications Manual Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Here are some of the questions most often asked by applicants and design professionals when pursuing some type of construction activity. It will be helpful if you review this list before asking staff questions.

General

What are your hours of operation?

The Town of Bluffton Growth Management Department is open for business from 8:00am to 5:30 pm Monday through Thursday and from 8:00 am to 1:00pm on Fridays.

Where are you located?

The Town of Bluffton Growth Management Department is located at 20 Bridge Street, Bluffton, S.C. 29910.

How do I contact department staff?

For a list of staff members and contact information please click here.

What if I don't have a complete application or I am unsure if a required submittal item applies to my particular project?

Incomplete applications are not accepted. Please contact Town Staff with any questions regarding submittal items.

Is there a particular day when my application request is due?

For applications that must be reviewed by the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Historic Preservation Commission, or Town Council, your complete application must be submitted by a certain date to make the next available meeting. Those dates are listed on the Town's website. For applications being reviewed administratively, it is typically first come, first served.

I am in a hurry. Is there any way I can put a rush on processing my application?

We appreciate that many applicants are under time constraints. However we must adhere to deadlines to provide sufficient time for review of Town department staff, public notice where required, and scheduling for meetings with Town officials.

Zoning and Development Standards

How do I know what my property is zoned?

The Town maintains a searchable map that is accessible from the Town's website. Click on the Bluffton Explorer link. You can also contact Town Staff.

What setback, parking, height, and other development standards apply to my property?

Requirements for site related questions like how much parking, parking space sizes, the required amount of landscaping, lighting, and other design related items are included in the Design Standards in Article 5 of the Unified Development Ordinance.

Do I need Town approval to cut down a tree?

The Town of Bluffton does have regulations controlling the removal of trees. These regulations vary depending on the species, size, and location of the tree. In most cases a tree removal permit is required prior to removing any tree in the Town of Bluffton. Please contact the Growth Management Customer Service Center prior to removing any tree.

Is my property located in the Historic District and if so are there architectural requirements that apply?

The Town maintains a searchable map that is accessible from the Town's website. Click on the Bluffton Explorer link. Any property with a zoning district designation that ends in "HD" is considered to be located in a historic district. Yes, there are architectural and design review requirements for any exterior alterations to any structure within a historic district. These requirements are found in Article 5 of the Unified Development Ordinance. You can also contact the Growth Management Customer Service Center.

Town Approvals

Why are Town approvals required?

Town approvals are required to provide for and protect the health, safety and welfare of the public by ensuring that development and construction is in compliance with adopted Town codes and policies. This includes everything from annexation policies to development and zoning codes to building codes. These codes establish minimum standards and regulations for everything from annexing property into the Town to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.

When do I need to obtain Town approval?

Town approval is necessary for annexation, zoning, subdivision, site development, and building construction activities. These approvals are generally outlined on the Application Process Table. A building permit is required to construct, alter, repair, move, or demolish a building or structure. A permit is also required to install or alter electrical, heating, air, gas, mechanical or plumbing equipment You should always contact Town Staff prior to beginning any construction no how small or simple the project may seem.

When is a Town approval not required?

You should always contact the Growth Management Customer Service Center prior to beginning any project. Only Town Staff can determine if and what Town approval is necessary for the given project. For building permits, a permit is generally not required in the following situations:

- tool sheds and storage sheds, playhouses and similar uses, as long as the total floor area does not exceed 120 square feet;

- Fences 6 feet or under;
- Sidewalks and driveways not more than 30 inches above adjacent grade;
- Painting, papering, tiling, carpeting, cabinets, countertops and similar finish work unless a part of the overall scope of the work;
- Prefabricated swimming pools accessory to 1 and 2 family dwellings that are less than 24 inches deep and not over 5000 gallons; and,
- Swings and playground equipment accessory to 1 and 2 family dwellings, non-fixed and movable fixtures, cases, racks, counters and partitions not over 5 feet 9 inches in height.

Who is authorized to apply for Town approvals?

A property owner is able to apply for any Town approval. Any person or agency applying on behalf of a property owner must provide a letter of authorization issued by the property owner.

For building permits, property owners submitting an application must complete a Disclosure Statement required by the State of South Carolina. Contractors must have a South Carolina license covering the scope of work included in the permit.

Where do I find the applications for Town approvals?

Application forms and other required documentation forms are available online or at the Growth Management Customer Service Center located in the Theodore D. Washington Municipal Building at 20 Bridge Street, Bluffton, South Carolina, 29910.

Is there a fee for obtaining Town approval?

In most cases there is fee associated with obtaining Town approval. The cost is based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to, the type of request, the land area or square footage involved, or the value including material, labor and profit consistent with our area. Impact fees are also required for new structures, non-residential additions, and certain up-fits. The Town of Bluffton Master Fee Schedule can be found in the Applications Manual.

How long are Town approvals effective?

Town approvals vary in the amount of time they are valid depending on the type of approval. The Application Process Table provides expiration timeframe for most approvals. In most cases extensions can be requested through a separate application.

Building permits expire after 180 days if the project is not active. Extensions of 90 days may be granted upon written request to the Growth Management Customer Service Center.

How do I get an extension on my approval?

Before the approval expires, and depending on the type of approval, you must submit an application or letter requesting an extension with specific details as to why an extension is necessary. For building permits extensions of up to 90 days may be allowed by the building official provided a justifiable cause is demonstrated. For all other approvals, the extension is generally for up to one-year and may be allowed by the UDO Administrator if certain requirements are met. Please contact the Growth Management Customer Service Center for more information on approval expirations and extensions.

What happens if work that required a Town approval is undertaken before obtaining approval?

Work that is begun before obtaining the necessary Town approval may be subject to additional fees including a double building permit fee. All work will still need to fully comply with the applicable Town codes and policies. If the approval is not granted, work that was begun without approval will be required to be removed and the site and/or building returned to the condition that existed prior to the start of work.

What documents are needed to apply for Town approval?

Each application in the Applications Manual identifies the minimum necessary submittal items to be included. With certain applications also contain checklists to assist in the development of submittal materials.

Building Permits and Inspections

What needs to be included on a site plan submitted with a building permit?

The site plan must show the new structure, addition to the existing structure, or site addition drawn to scale. A site plan is not required for residential improvements where there are no building footprint changes. The application must include all contractors, subcontractors, architects, and engineers and their current Town of Bluffton Business License numbers.

What needs to be included on construction drawings submitted with a building permit?

Generally, construction or "working" drawings need to furnish enough information for a builder to complete an entire project and incorporate all three main groups of drawings-architectural, electrical, and mechanical.

In drawings for simple structures, this grouping may be hard to discern because the same single drawing may contain both the electrical and mechanical layouts. In complicated structures, however, a combination of layouts is not possible because of overcrowding. In this case, the floor plan may be traced over and over for drawings for the electrical and mechanical layouts. All or any one of the three types of drawings gives you enough information to complete a project.

How do I check that the contractor I hire is licensed?

The State of South Carolina Department of Labor and Licensing provides online licensing information. You will need to know whether the contractor is registered with the General Contracting division or the Residential Builders division.

Ask to see a copy of the licensing card. Contractors are issued cards by the appropriate agency. The card will also indicate the type of work the contractor is licensed to perform. Also, make sure that the contractor and any subs he hires have both the proper state licensing and a Town of Bluffton Business License. Business licensing information is available online using the Town of Bluffton License Look-Up.

How will I know if I need inspections?

All permits require inspection unless the building official has agreed to an inspection by affidavit. All permits must receive a final inspection in order to close out the permit.

How do I know which inspections are required?

The type of inspections will depend on what is involved in the project. You will receive a list of required inspection upon issuance of your permit. You should review the inspections and request any changes that you feel are necessary. An inspection is required prior to covering up any part of the construction.

How do I schedule an inspection?

There are 2 ways to request an inspection:

1. Inspections can be requested by the property owner or contractor online on the Town's website. The property owner or contractor must be registered with the Town of Bluffton to use this option.
2. You may call the inspection request line at 1-888-890-4518. Inspections requested before 4:00 pm will be processed the next day if possible. This is an automated system and you will be required to enter the permit number and the inspection item number. All required paperwork for the inspection must be in Town files prior to requesting the inspection.

How do I cancel an inspection?

There are 3 ways to cancel an inspection:

1. Inspections can be canceled by the property owner or contractor online on the Town's website. The property owner or contractor must be registered with the Town of Bluffton to use this option.
2. You may call the inspection request line at 1-888-890-4518. This is an automated system and you will be required to enter the permit number and the inspection item.
3. You may call the Growth Management Customer Service Center before 8:30am the day of the scheduled inspection to cancel the inspection.

What documents are required at the job site for the inspector?

A copy of the stamped approved plans must be available at the job site. The permit card must be posted and visible from the road.

Does someone need to be at the job site for the inspection?

Yes. It is the property owner or contractor's responsibility to arrange for the inspectors to have access to the premises to inspect all permitted work.

What does the inspector need to inspect?

Generally, the building inspector will need to inspect all aspects of the work before it's covered or concealed from view. These inspections are done to assure that the work has been done to a minimum safety standard and that it complies with the approved plans for the project. The following is a list of the typical inspections that may be required on a project:

- Foundation Slab
- Framing
- Insulation
- Drywall
- Fireplace
- Plumbing and Electrical(rough and final)
- Duct Work
- Air Conditioning and Heating equipment
- Gas piping and gas equipment
- And others, depending on the type of work being done.

When can I begin to move in or occupy a building?

No occupancy is allowed prior to an approved final inspection. Occupancy prior to approval of this inspection will be a violation and subject to penalties.

When do I need to get a Certificate of Occupancy?

New structures and buildings, structures, or portions thereof that change the existing occupancy classification require a Certificate of Occupancy before the structure or portion of the structure can be occupied.

How can I contact my inspector?

You can leave a message for the inspection on the automated inspection request line at 1-888-890-4518.

What is a special inspection?

Special inspections are inspections required in addition to those performed by the Office of Building Safety. These types of inspections are usually specified by the design professional in charge and are performed by Independent testing and inspections companies. An application for special inspections approval must be submitted at the time of the permit application.

How much does an inspection or re-inspection cost?

There is no fee for inspection. However, a re-inspection fee of $50 for the first incident and $100 for each subsequent incident will be levied for the following reasons:

- wrong address;
- condemned work resulting from faulty work;
- repairs or corrections not made when inspections are called;
- work not ready for inspection when called; and,

- approved plans not on job site for inspection.

Do inspectors work on weekends?
No. Working hours for inspectors are Monday through Thursday from 8:00am to 5:30pm and 8:00am to 1:00pm on Fridays.

Who is responsible for scheduling inspections?
The property owner or the contractor can schedule inspections.

Fire Safety

What items are considered fire safety issues?
Items such as fire rated walls and partitions, flame spread rating of interior finishes, water or chemical fire suppression systems, fire alarm systems and emergency lighting are all fire safety issues.

Who can install fire safety systems?
Contractors who are licensed by the State of South Carolina for the type of system being installed.

What codes apply to fire safety in construction?
In new construction, International Building Code chapter 7 Fire-Resistance- Rated Construction, chapter 8 Interior Finishes and chapter 9 Fire Protection Systems are used to determine the construction requirements and the National Fire Protection Association Standards are used for requirements pertaining to installation.

For existing commercial buildings the International Fire Code and National Fire Protection Association Standards are used for maintenance of the building and systems.

Are permits required to install fire safety systems?
If the system is part of a new construction, renovation or alteration project it will be part of the construction permit. If the system is the only work being done, as a retrofit or alteration, it will require a separate permit before start of work.

Are plans required for fire safety systems?
Detailed drawings and specifications must be submitted for approval prior to issuance of a permit.

What inspections are required for fire safety systems?
Fire safety systems are required to be installed and inspected per the specific NFPA standard that applies to the type system.

Department of Growth Management
Customer Service Center
Application Process Table

	Application Type	Applicable Code Reference	Pre-Application		Review Bodies									Public Hearing Notice				Permit	
			Pre-Application Meeting	Application Check-In Meeting	UDO Administrator	Development Review Committee	Building Official	Historic Preservation Commission	Historic Preservation Review Committee	Planning Commission	Board of Zoning Appeals	Negotiating Committee	Town Council	Planning Commission Workshop	Public Hearing Newspaper Posting	Posting of Property	Certified Mailing to Adjacent Property Owners	Approval Expiration	Application Fee [6]
Legislative/Quasi-Judicial	Annexation																		
	100% Petition[2]	Annexation Policy & Procedures Manual	■	■	■					■		■	♦	■	■	■	■	N/A	$500
	75% Petition[2]		■	■	■					■		■	♦	■	■	■	■	N/A	$650
	25% Petition[2]		■	■	■					■		■	♦	■	■	■	■	N/A	$650
	Development Agreement[2]	Ordinance 1998-06	■	■	■					■		■	♦		■			Varies	$2,000
	Transfer of Development Rights[1, 2]	Ordinance 2007-19	■	■	■					■			♦		■	■	■	N/A	$1,000
	Comprehensive Plan Amendment[2]	UDO Section 3.3	■		■					■			♦		■			N/A	$500
	Zoning Map Amendment[2]	UDO Section 3.4	■	■	■					■			♦	■	■	■	■	N/A	$500
	UDO Text Amendment[2]	UDO Section 3.5	■		■					■			♦		■			N/A	$500
	Special Exception[3]	UDO Section 3.6	■	■	■						♦				■	■	■	2 yrs	$250
	Variance[3]	UDO Section 3.7	■	■	■						♦				■	■	■	2 yrs	$250
Land Development	Planned Unit Development (PUD)																		
	Concept Plan[2]	UDO Section 3.8	■	■	■	■				■			♦		■			N/A	$500
	Master Plan[1]	UDO Section 3.9	■	■	■	■				■			♦					5 yrs	$500
	Development Plan[1]																		
	Preliminary[7]	UDO Section 3.10	■	■	♦	■												2 yrs	$500
	Final	UDO Section 3.10		■	♦	■												2 yrs	$1,000
	Subdivision Plan[1]																		
	General[7]	UDO Section 3.11	■	■	♦	■												2 yrs	$100.00 + $10/lot
	Exempt Plat	UDO Section 3.12			♦													2 yrs	$25
	Development Surety	UDO Section 3.13		■	♦													1 yr	$100
	Certificate of Construction Compliance	UDO Section 3.14		■	♦													N/A	$50
	New Street Name	UDO Section 3.15			■	■				♦								N/A	$0
	Street Renaming[4]	UDO Section 3.16	■	■	■	■				♦					■		■	N/A	$250
	Addressing	Muni Code Section 14-8			♦													N/A	$0
	Certificate of Appropriateness																		
	Highway Corridor Overlay District	UDO Section 3.17	■	■	■					♦								2 yrs	$100
	Historic District	UDO Section 3.18	■	■	■			♦	■									2 yrs	$100
	Historic District - Demolition[5]		■	■	■	■		♦	■						■	■		2 yrs	$250
	Site Feature - Historic District	UDO Section 3.19			♦													2 yrs	$25
	Zoning Permit	UDO Section 3.20			♦													1 yr	$25
	Sign	UDO Section 3.21			♦													2 yrs	$25
	Tree Removal	UDO Section 3.22			♦													2 yrs	$25
	Silviculture	UDO Section 3.23		■	♦	■												1 yr	$1,500
	Public Project	UDO Section 3.24			♦	■												2 yrs	$0
	Designation of Contributing Structure[5]	UDO Section 3.25	■	■	■			■					♦		■	■		N/A	$250
	Building Permit	Muni Code Chapter 5					♦											Varies	Varies

Legend:

■ Required

♦ Final Approval Authority

Notes:

[1] Application may qualify for Sustainable Development Incentives as described in Article 6.

[2] A Public Hearing shall be held by both Planning Commission and Town Council.

[3] A Public Hearing shall be held by Board of Zoning Appeals.

[4] A Public Hearing shall be held by Planning Commission.

[5] A Public Hearing shall be held by Historic Preservation Commission.

[6] Fees per Town of Bluffton Adopted Fee Schedule.

[7] Application may be subject to Planning Commission approval.

Revision Date 12/11/2012