

# TOWN COUNCIL



## STAFF REPORT Department of Growth Management

<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	October 13, 2015
<b>PROJECT:</b>	Resolution Amending the Town of Bluffton Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy
<b>PROJECT MANAGER:</b>	Kendra Lelie, AICP Assistant Director of Growth Management

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Affordable Housing Committee recommends Town Council approve a Resolution amending the Town of Bluffton Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy.

**BACKGROUND:** In 2009, the Town of Bluffton established a Neighborhood Assistance Program that provides various services to assist low and moderate income owners of single-family properties in Bluffton with property repairs and improvements that will help to increase the quality of life for all residents while creating a safer, more vibrant community that retains its character and provides for quality affordable housing.

At their meeting on September 1, 2015, the Affordable Housing Committee recommended Town Council approve an amendment of the abatement and demolition of unsafe structures policy within the Neighborhood Assistance Program. This amendment proposes three tiers of assistance to income and non-income qualified applicants for the abatement or demolition of unsafe structures. Currently this service is only available to certain applicants that meet income qualifications. In order to better assist in the elimination of blight associated with unsafe structures, the Affordable Housing Committee recommends the following levels of assistance:

1. Income Qualified Applicant Earning 80% or Less of the Area Median Income for Beaufort County: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the unsafe structure and manages the completion of the work. A lien will not be attached to the property. This is the current policy established within the Program and the Town Code.
2. Non-Income Qualified Applicant: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the unsafe structure and manages the completion of the work. A five (5) year forgivable lien will be placed on the property equal to the cost to abate or demolish the structure. The applicant shall provide a document from a licensed contractor for review by and approval from the Chief Building Official indicating the structure is unsafe or that the cost to repair the structure is unreasonable. The lien will be reduced 20% of the total cost each year until the termination of the lien occurs.

3. Non-Income Qualified Applicant of a Structure Determined to be a Hazard to Public Safety: Town will provide funds for the abatement or demolition of an unsafe structure determined to be a hazard to public safety as determined by unanimous approval of the Town Manager, Chief of Police and the Chief Building Official and manages the completion of the work. A lien will not be placed on the property.

**ANALYSIS:** The Affordable Housing Committee determined that the abatement or demolition of all unsafe structures, regardless of owner income qualifications, within a neighborhood should be addressed to the greatest extent possible to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the community is protected. The additional tiers of qualification for the Neighborhood Assistance Program funds provide flexibility to the process in order to properly address the unsafe structures that need attention and resolution.

**NEXT STEPS:** If approved by Town Council, the Program changes will immediately go into effect and Town Staff will begin implementing the new services.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Resolution Amending the Town of Bluffton Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy
2. Amended Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy

**RESOLUTION  
AMENDING THE TOWN OF BLUFFTON  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM POLICY**

**WHEREAS**, the need to address quality of life issues for the Town of Bluffton (“the Town”) and addressing the concerns and issues of low-to-moderate income residents is a priority for the Town; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2009 the Town of Bluffton, South Carolina established the Neighborhood Assistance Program; and

**WHEREAS**, on June 9, 2009, the Town of Bluffton Town Council adopted the 2009-2010 Fiscal Year Budget which included funding for Neighborhood Assistance Program activities, such as Home Repair; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town has continued to allocate funding with each subsequently adopted Budget for the Neighborhood Assistance Program; and

**WHEREAS**, on June 14, 2011 Town Council, by Consent Agenda for the Growth Management Update, adopted the Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy to provide guidance with the administration of the program; and

**WHEREAS**, at various times Town Council, as recommended by the Affordable Housing Committee, has amended the Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy to adapt to the changing needs of the community; and

**WHEREAS**, on September 1, 2015 the Affordable Housing Committee voted 3 to the affirmative and 1 to the negative to amend the Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy to approve an amendment of the abatement and demolition policy which involves permitting three tiers of assistance to applicants for the abatement or demolition of unsafe structures; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town desires to amend Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy per the Affordable Housing Committee recommendations as detailed below.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWN OF BLUFFTON TOWN COUNCIL AS FOLLOWS:**

1. Town Council hereby amends the Town of Bluffton Neighborhood Assistance Program Policy, as follows and directs Town Staff to immediately institute such amendments:

Create three tiers to the provision of assistance for the abatement or demolition of unsafe structures to include the following:

- a. Income Qualified Applicant Earning 80% or Less of the Area Median Income for Beaufort County: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the unsafe structure and manages the completion of the work. A lien will not be attached to the property.

- b. Non-Income Qualified Applicant: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the structure. A 5 year forgivable lien will be placed on the property equal to the cost to abate or demolish the unsafe structure and manages the completion of the work. The applicant shall provide a document from a licensed contractor for review by and approval from the Chief Building Official indicating the structure is unsafe or that the cost to repair the structure is unreasonable. The lien will be reduced 20% of the total cost each year until the termination of the lien occurs.
  
- c. Non-Income Qualified Applicant of a Structure Determined to be a Hazard to Public Safety: Town will be provide funds for the abatement or demolition of the unsafe structure determined to be a hazard to public safety as determined by unanimous approval of the Town Manager, Chief of Police and the Chief Building Official and manages completion of the work. A lien will not be placed on the property.

**THIS RESOLUTION SHALL BE EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY UPON ADOPTION.**

**SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED AS OF THIS \_\_\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_, 2015.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Lisa Sulka, Mayor  
 Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Sandra Lunceford, Town Clerk  
 Town of Bluffton, South Carolina

Town of Bluffton  
Department of Growth Management  
Neighborhood Assistance Program

### **Policy Statement**

The Town of Bluffton has established the Neighborhood Assistance Program to assist low to moderate income residents of Bluffton with property repairs and improvements that will help to increase the quality of life for all residents while creating a safer, more vibrant community that retains its character and provides for quality affordable housing.

### **Program Overview**

The Neighborhood Assistance Program provides Town of Bluffton qualified owners of single-family properties with the following home and community improvements.

1. Home Repair – Assist residents with repairs to the inside and outside of their homes that result in a drier and safer home.
2. Septic System Maintenance/Repair and Sewer Connection – Provide maintenance, repair or replacement of failing septic systems or connection to public sewer (if available).
3. Property Clean-Up – Facilitate the removal of debris and other objects, such as abandoned cars and boats, from the property.
4. Private Road Repair for Emergency Access – Repair of private roads in order to accommodate emergency service vehicles. Need shall be determined by the emergency service agencies providing service to the area.
5. Abatement/Demolition of Unsafe Structures – Assist with the abatement or demolition of unsafe structures on residential property in accordance with the procedures outlined in Chapter 5, Article 9 of the Municipal Code of the Town of Bluffton. The Town may assume the cost of abatement or demolition for qualified residents if funds are available. There are three tiers to the provision of assistance for the abatement or demolition of unsafe structures:
  - a. Income Qualified Applicant Earning 80% or Less of the Area Median Income: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the unsafe structure and manages the completion of the work. A lien will not be attached to the property.
  - b. Non-Income Qualified Applicant: Town provides the necessary funds to abate or demolish the structure and manages the

completion of the work. A 5 year forgivable lien will be placed on the property equal to the cost to abate or demolish the structure. The applicant shall provide a document from a licensed contractor for review by and approval from the Chief Building Official indicating the structure is unsafe or that the cost to repair the structure is unreasonable. The lien will be reduced 20% of the total cost each year until the termination of the lien occurs.

- c. Non-Income Qualified Applicant of a Structure Determined to be a Hazard to Public Safety: Town will provide funds for the abatement or demolition of an unsafe structure determined to be a hazard to public safety as determined by unanimous approval of the Town Manager, Chief of Police and the Chief Building Official and manages the completion of the work. A lien will not be placed on the property.

6. Heirs Property Title Assistance – Work with The Center for Heirs Property to provide legal services for property owners wanting to clear title to their land.
7. E-9-1-1 Address Posting – Confirm correct addressing and provide address markers and posting to ensure that properties are correctly marked for 9-1-1 emergency services.

Some requested services may require additional Town reviews and/or approvals. Town Staff will assist the applicant in obtaining the necessary reviews. Fees for building permits and any other Town of Bluffton applications will be waived.

### **Eligibility**

The program is available for qualified owners of single-family properties within the Town of Bluffton. Eligibility for certain programs is based on the total income of all adults (18 years and older) living in the household and the number of household members. Additionally the maximum amount of expenditures on an individual property may be limited for certain programs. The table below identifies income and expenditure limits.

**Neighborhood Assistance Program  
Income and Expenditure Limits**

Program	Income Limit*	Maximum Expenditure**
Home Repair	60%	\$10,000 Roof Repair \$5,000 All Other Repairs
Septic System Maintenance and Repair	N/A	\$5,000
Sewer Connection	60%	\$10,000
Property Clean-Up	60%	\$5,000
Private Road Repair for Emergency Vehicle Access	N/A	N/A
Abatement / Demolition of Unsafe Structures***	80%	N/A
Heirs Property Title Assistance	60%	\$5,000
E-911 Address Posting	N/A	\$5,000

\* Income limit is based upon current year Area Median Income for Beaufort County as established by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

\*\* Maximum expenditure is per program per property per Town fiscal year unless an emergency situation exists as determined by the Town Manager.

\*\*\* Income limit is established by Chapter 5, Article 9 of the Town Code.

Income verification and qualification is determined through an agreement with the LowCountry Council of Governments. In order to verify income, any (*not all*) of the following types of documentation must be submitted by the applicant and each adult living in the household.

- Three (3) consecutive payroll stubs *or,*
- ~~A completed verification of employment form~~ *or,*
- Social Security annual statement, Retirement statement or stub *or,*
- Bank statements-Deposit Snapshot from bank for social security income or income from other sources *or,*
- Previous year income tax return.

### **Required Applicant Forms and Documentation**

The applicant is required to submit all of the following forms and documentation when requesting any of the services offered under this Program:

1. A Complete Application;
2. Proof of Property Ownership;
3. A Total Monthly Income Information form(s) that includes the gross income of each adult member of the household;
4. Income documentation for each adult (18 and over) member of the household. If an adult does not have an income, the net zero income form must be completed; and
5. A Temporary Access Easement Agreement which allows Town Staff and Town contractors access to the property for the purpose of evaluating and performing work as described on the work specifications sheet. Other waiver(s) may be required depending on the request type.

### **Program Administration**

The Program is administered through the Department of Growth Management Customer Service Center. Due to the Program scope, several Town Departments are involved and oversee specific responsibilities associated with the Program, as further defined in the Standard Operating Procedures.

The Program is promoted through community outreach to individual property owners, neighborhood groups, service organizations, community stakeholders, public meetings, Town of Bluffton website, Town of Bluffton Customer Service Center, and the media.

### **Contact Information**

Growth Management Customer Service Center  
Town of Bluffton  
20 Bridge Street  
Bluffton, SC 29910

Email – [growthmanagementcs@townofbluffton.com](mailto:growthmanagementcs@townofbluffton.com)

Phone - 843-706-4522