Media Release

Bluffton
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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Town of Bluffton: 2018/Year in Review

The Town of Bluffton is proud to present a look back at its 2018 accomplishments.

Capital Improvement Projects:

- **May River Road Streetscape**: The Town celebrated the completion of this Streetscape project with the July 25 ribbon cutting. This 2,800-linear foot project along May River Road runs from Pin Oak Street to Jennifer Court. The project enhanced the road from Pin Oak Street to Red Cedar Street, including curb and gutter installation. The Town also installed 29 additional on-street parking spaces and installed sidewalks and street lights. Crews also constructed a storm sewer infrastructure, featuring a water-quality control device. This device separates oils and sediments from stormwater prior to stormwater entering the May River. Landscaping, supported by irrigation systems, completed the project which enhances the aesthetic appeal when entering the Town along May River Road.

- **Dr. Mellichamp Drive Streetscape Enhancement Project:** The completion of the Dr. Mellichamp Drive Streetscape Enhancement Project was celebrated with the July 18 ribbon cutting. This project provides new on-street public parking spaces in the Bluffton Historic District with 55 new parking spaces on Dr. Mellichamp Drive and 11 new spaces at the intersection of Dr. Mellichamp Drive and Goethe Road. The project also provides for 46 parking spaces in the grassy area of the Michael C. Riley Sports Complex. The project also connects and activates an existing public parking supply within a few blocks to the new parking lot. Combining the new and existing parking spaces, a total of 191 public parking spaces are available along Dr. Mellichamp Drive and at Michael C. Riley Sports Complex. The project enhanced the roadway, parking and walkability along the entire corridor of Dr.

Mellichamp Drive between Goethe Road and Bluffton Road. These enhancements include sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, street lights, landscaping, as well as increased parking.

- **Dog Park:** Together with the Friends of the Bluffton Dog Parks and Beaufort County, Bluffton's first public dog park, located in Oscar Frazier Park, was completed and opened to the public in October.

- **Town Hall Renovation:** The renovation project is scheduled to be complete early 2019. Town Council will hold its first meeting in the newly renovated Town Hall on February 12. The project includes renovating the existing structure which currently houses Town Hall offices, the Charles E. Ulmer Theater and Calhoun Station. The Town also executed license agreements with May River Theatre and Calhoun Station, so these organizations can continue to serve the Bluffton community as residents of Town Hall. This renovation project also adds 4,571 square feet to the original building to accommodate shared space for Town Council Chambers and the Town of Bluffton Municipal Court. When finished, Town Hall will be 29,223 square feet.

- **Historic District Street Lights:** The Town installed 13 decorative street lights on Lawrence Street, between Wharf and Calhoun Streets. In addition, the Town also installed 23 street lights on Bluffton Road and three on Calhoun Street. The project provides increased illumination along sidewalks and roadways to improve public safety and walkability within Bluffton's Historic District.

- **Jason-Able Street Sewer Extension Project**: The Town completed the Jason-Able Street Sewer Extension Project in March. This project provided 4064 linear feet of main sewer line access to homes and commercial facilities on streets adjacent to the Bluffton Park neighborhood. These homes and commercial facilities are not in a planned community and thus did not have the benefit of pre-planned sewer infrastructure. This project connected 38 residents and business owners, who are in close proximity to the May River, to sewer lines enabling those residents to discontinue using septic tanks. The sewer project begins at the intersection of Whispering Pines Street and Able Street and includes Red Cedar Street, Jason Street and Kerby Lane. This project also includes extending sewer service to empty lots along those streets.

- **Oscar Frazier Park's "Field of Dreams" Improvements:** The Town, through partnerships with the Rotary Club of Bluffton and the Leadership Class of the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, improved the "Field of Dreams" section of Oscar Frazier Park with the following features:
  - ➢ Construction of the Imagination Train playground
  - ➢ Installation of synthetic turf
  - ➢ Installation of fencing, sidewalks, lighting and landscaping

- **Oyster Factory Park Improvement Project**: The Town improved drainage and parking within Oyster Factory Park. The project was comprised of installing an underground storm water retention system, new gravel parking surface, new wheel stops and signage to the auxiliary parking lot. This project formalized 15 parking spaces.

- **184 Bluffton Road:** The Town of Bluffton demolished the two buildings at 184 Bluffton Road in preparation to convert that property into additional parking, a pocket park as well as a potential location for a future work force housing project. The Town acquired this

parcel in September 2017. Construction will begin on the 41 additional parking spaces by spring.

- **Goethe-Shults Neighborhood/Street Lighting:** The Town of Bluffton, along with South Carolina Electric & Gas (SCE&G), installed approximately 35 streetlights within the Goethe-Shults neighborhood in August to improve overall lighting uniformity and to increase safety for residents and other pedestrians.

- **Goethe-Shults Neighborhood/Infrastructure Plan:** The Town of Bluffton, along with the Lowcountry Council of Governments, developed a neighborhood infrastructure plan to provide sidewalks, lighting and improved drainage to this neighborhood. The homes and businesses within the Goethe-Shults neighborhood boundaries are not a part of a planned community and do not have the benefits of pre-planned infrastructure. Town Council approved this plan in September. The Town received a federal Community Development Block Grant for $500,000 to install sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks and drainage improvements in this community. Construction is expected summer 2020.

- **Purchase of 1095 May River Road:** The Town of Bluffton acquired 1.78 acres of property at 1095 May River Road in July 2018. The Town is currently accepting proposals for a public-private partnership to build up to 14 affordable or workforce housing units on this parcel.

- **Purchase of Property at 200 New Riverside Road:** The Town of Bluffton acquired 37 acres in the New Riverside section of Bluffton as an investment in civic space. In the same transaction, the Town acquired an additional seven acres adjacent to this parcel. The Town closed on this property in early January 2019.

Economic Development:

- **Don Ryan Center for Innovation:** The Don Ryan Center for Innovation, which is the Town's economic development arm, has incubated more than 35 companies since the program began in 2012 and has advised more than 130 companies. Graduate companies have created more than 100 jobs in the region and generated more than $5 million in annual payroll as well as more than $30 million in annual revenue.

- **Don Ryan Center for Innovation Selects New CEO and VP of Innovation:** The Town of Bluffton selected Trent Williamson as the organization's new chief executive officer. Williamson was formerly the vice president of economic development for the Don Ryan Center. In addition, the Center hired Charles Wohl as the vice president of innovation. Wohl was formerly executive director of the Texas Capital Network, Inc. in Houston.

- **Groundbreaking of Don Ryan Center for Innovation/Buckwalter Place Location:** The Town of Bluffton and the board of directors for the Don Ryan Center for Innovation broke ground in November for the permanent location of the Center in the Buckwalter Place Commerce Park. The 3,000 square foot facility will house the business incubator as well as the state-of-the-art co-working and meeting space for area entrepreneurs. This space will allow for collaboration and sharing in a high-tech open environment. Construction is underway, and the center is scheduled to be open Memorial Day 2019.

- **Economic Development Video:** The Town of Bluffton's economic development video was a useful tool in 2018 and is still available for personal and professional social media platforms. The video is designed to attract new businesses and to encourage existing businesses to relocate to the Town of Bluffton. According to a recent ranking by the Palmetto Promise Institute, the Town of Bluffton was ranked number one on a list of "Most Enterprise-Friendly Cities in South Carolina." The video is a solid testimony to the ranking bestowed by the Palmetto Promise Institute. Three versions of the Town's economic development video are on the Town's You Tube channel. Please feel free to use this video on personal and professional digital venues.

    ➢ Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/5-minute version
      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYB2K5_5060

    ➢ Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/ 90 second version
      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q58BeOkp5IM

    ➢ Town of Bluffton/Economic Development Video/60 second version
      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgpGiuM_SPw

May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds/Environmental Protection:

- **Town Progresses Toward Sewer Connectivity:** In September, Town Council unanimously supported two initiatives to remove septic systems in the Town's jurisdiction. First, Town Council passed an Amendment to the Sewer Ordinance requiring connection to sanitary sewer within one year of receiving written notice of availability. In addition, the Septic to Sewer Conversion Program was established to offer equitable financial aid to homeowners to connect to sanitary sewer and abandon their septic systems. Town Council also met with Beaufort County Council and Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority officials to discuss options to eliminate septic systems in the headwaters of the May River.

- **May River Watershed Action Plan:** Town Council unanimously agreed to amend its agreements with the University of South Carolina-Beaufort (USCB) to support development of "real-time" microbial source tracking capabilities to identify the sources of bacteria entering the May River. The Town also supported increased monitoring efforts and analysis of data collected in the May River by USCB.

- **Regional Stormwater Standard:** The Town partnered with Beaufort County, Jasper County, Town of Port Royal, City of Beaufort and City of Hardeeville to develop a Regional Stormwater Ordinance and Design Manual to protect the region's coastal waterways. This coordinated effort will assist developers with parallel stormwater regulations and management standards throughout the region. This document is expected in fall 2019 and is expected to be adopted by the municipalities in early 2020.

Policies:

- **Business License Ordinance Update:** Town Council approved an amendment to the Business License Ordinance in August which aligns the Town's ordinance with neighboring municipalities, creating a more regionally consistent and streamlined process for businesses. The ordinance is effective January 2019 and it replaces the 20-plus rate classes with an eight-rate class system, provides incentives for in-town businesses, provides discounts for startup businesses during the first few years in business and changes the annual license renewal deadline for business licenses to April 30 from April 15.

- **Plastic Bag Ban:** The Town of Bluffton joined neighboring municipalities (Town of Port Royal, City of Beaufort & Town of Hilton Head Island) and Beaufort County to ban single-use plastic bags. These countywide ordinances went into effect November 1 and prohibit businesses from providing single-use plastic bag to customers.

Programs:

- **Neighborhood Assistance Program:** The Town of Bluffton spent more than $148,500 in 2018, helping 25 Bluffton households with its Neighborhood Assistance Program. This program assists with repairs to homes and properties of low to moderate-income residents and is operated through the Town of Bluffton's Affordable Housing Committee. Repairs include projects such as leaking roofs, unstable or unsafe floors, failing septic tanks, inaccessible private roads, removing broken or unwanted items from a resident's property, removing unsafe structures from a resident's property, ensuring local emergency services have an official address to a resident's property, and assisting in obtaining proper paperwork for heirs' property.

Awards and Accolades:

- **Bluffton Receives MASC's Achievement Award:** The Town of Bluffton received an Achievement Award from the Municipal Association of South Carolina for the population category of 10,001 – 20,000. The award honored the Town's successful rehabilitation of the Garvin-Garvey House, the only-known home built and inhabited by a freedman's family immediately following the Civil War. This house is also the only one of its kind located on the banks of the May River. The Town of Bluffton was among 30 cities and towns which competed in this category.

- **Bluffton Receives Statewide Preservation Award:** Governor Henry McMaster presented the Town of Bluffton and Beaufort County representatives a South Carolina 2018 Historic Preservation Award for their work rehabilitating the Garvin-Garvey House, located in Bluffton's Oyster Factory Park.

- *Coastal Living Magazine* **Honors Bluffton as One of the Happiest Seaside U.S. Towns:** In January, *Coastal Living Magazine* honored Bluffton in the Top 10 List of "Happiest Seaside Towns" in the U.S. After a public voting process, Bluffton ranked #5 on that list. Magazine editors reviewed more than 300 towns for this list and ranked them according to several criteria, including: standard of living, percentage of sunny days, air quality, healthiness of beaches, commute times, crime ratings and other various quality of life factors.

- **Town of Bluffton Receives "High Performance Government Award:"** Cartegraph, an asset management software company, honored the Town with a "High Performance Government Award" for implementing its software during Tropical Storm Irma. Town Council honored its Public Works Division during its August Town Council for this award. The implementation of this software during a critical incident enabled the Town to save countless hours of post-storm paperwork as they logged more than 200 hours of recovery work and was able to file for FEMA reimbursement as they accomplished each task.

Finance & Administration:

- **Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2019-2020 Approved:** Bluffton's Town Council approved and adopted its biannual Strategic Plan during its May Council Meeting. The 2019-2020 Strategic Plan includes 64 action items identified by Town Council and drives the annual budgeting process and work plan for Town staff members.

- **FY2019 Budget Approved:** Bluffton's Town Council approved and adopted the Town's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 consolidated budget in June. State law requires all municipalities to adopt a balanced budget ordinance before July 1. The budget totals $32,824,230 and moves the Town forward through program enhancements and a robust capital projects schedule. Programs for affordable housing, beautification, May River Watershed Action Plan and capital improvements are prominent features of the FY 2019 budget.

Bluffton Police Department:

- **Town of Bluffton Selects Christopher Chapmond as Chief of Police**: After a thorough national search, Bluffton Town Manager Marc Orlando swore in Christopher Chapmond as Bluffton's chief of police on August 27. The Town received more than 60 applicants from 24 states and two countries for this position. Chapmond was formerly the assistant police chief for the Hot Springs (Arkansas) Police Department.

- **Cookout with Cops**: Cookout with Cops is a new outreach program which allows Bluffton residents and police officers to get to know each other during a neighborhood cookout. The Bluffton police officers cooked hot dogs in four neighborhoods and at the M.C. Riley Sports Complex this year. The Cookout with Cops event in November at the M.C. Riley Sports Complex featured a competitive game between local teens and police officers. Town Manager Marc Orlando and Police Chief Chris Chapmond participated on the police team. The teenagers won the game. If you are interested in planning a Cookout with Cops for your neighborhood, please contact Joy Nelson (jnelson@townofbluffton.com).

- **Distracted Driving Campaign**: The Distracted Driving Campaign is a proactive and ongoing educational tool the police department created to make the public aware of how dangerous and deadly distracted driving is. The Bluffton Police Department officially kicked off this program in April. Campaign elements include: placement of signs around Bluffton, media interviews, social media posts and video displays.

- **Explorer Program**: Twenty-five cadets graduated from the Bluffton Police Department Explorer Program this year. This is a five-month program for middle and high school students. It provides an in-depth look at law enforcement for students interested in pursuing a public safety career. The students meet weekly and have instruction from an

officer who is trained in a specific field of law enforcement. This program is offered annually.

- **Citizens Police Academy**: Twenty-eight students graduated from the 2018 Citizens Police Academy class. This is a unique opportunity for the public to learn what it's like to be a police officer. The 12-week course focuses on the four divisions of the department, traffic enforcement, radar operation, evidence collection, fingerprint recovery, defensive tactics, firearms and more. The intent of the program is to increase the citizens knowledge of the department and positively influence the public's perceptions of those working in law enforcement through transparency. This was the 5th annual Citizens Police Academy.

- **National Night Out**: More than 2,000 people attended the 5th annual Bluffton Police Department National Night Out event held at Eagles Field. The police department partners with other local law enforcement agencies and non-profit organizations to provide public safety information for Bluffton residents.

- **The Town of Bluffton Toy Drive**: Hundreds of toys were collected by the Bluffton Police Department during the 2018 Town of Bluffton Toy Drive. This is the sixth year the Bluffton Police Department has hosted the drive. All the toys collected were delivered to local Bluffton families who were experiencing financial challenges. Toys were collected for children from infants to 15 years old. As in years past, the Bluffton community was very generous and donated hundreds of toys.

- **Shop with a Cop**: A brainchild of a Bluffton police officer, the first "Shop with Cop" event happened this year. A school resource officer chose a student from each Bluffton school to go Christmas shopping with an officer. Each child was given a $100 gift card to pay for their gifts. This event was funded through money raised during a basketball tournament involving police, firefighters, Marines and Beaufort County School District teachers and coaches. This event is expected to be held annually.

Special Events:

- **Town Hosted Third Annual Historic Preservation Symposium:** The Town of Bluffton hosted its third annual Historic Preservation Symposium, Thursday, May 31 at 5: 30 p.m. at the Historic Campbell Chapel AME Church. The symposium, "The Bluffton Historic District: This Place Has History," brought together historic preservation organizations, residents, students, business owners and Town leaders to discuss the importance of preservation. This symposium also celebrated the 22nd anniversary of the designation of the Bluffton Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The symposium, featuring regional historic preservation experts, provided an overview about the history, culture and preservation of Gullah Heritage and discussed new initiatives preservationists are using to help save endangered places in South Carolina.

- **May River Cleanup:** The Town hosted its 18th Annual May River Cleanup April 28. This event, in which hundreds participated, is an annual way to honor the May River as volunteers picked up trash and debris throughout the nearby streets and on the River. The Town collected nearly 1.5 tons of debris during this event. A quarter-ton of that debris was recycled.

- **Town Celebrated Arbor Day:** Mayor Lisa Sulka, members of Town Council and members of the Town's Beautification Committee celebrated Arbor Day as they planted five Live Oak trees, two Sabal Palms, three Crape Myrtles and one Fringe Tree at Oscar Frazier Park playground area, April 27, 2018. The Town annually celebrates Arbor Day to honor the contributions of local trees as they provide beauty, shade and a habitat for birds and other animals.

- **Town Hosted Two "History Harvest" Events:** The Town hosted two History Harvest events in November. These events encouraged residents to bring family photos, documents and stories so event organizers can better document sites and structures throughout the Bluffton area that are historically and culturally important to the African American community.

- **January's Snowstorm**: Bluffton and surrounding areas received a rare storm, leaving four inches of snow on the ground Wednesday, January 3. This rare winter storm resulted in local government and school closures.

- **Hurricane Florence:** The Town of Bluffton's Emergency Operations Center was open four days in September during the potential impact of Hurricane Florence. Hurricane Florence shifted north, and Bluffton received minimal impact from the storm. However, due to the shifting predictions and the potential for impact, town employees spent six days preparing for the possible effects and were prepared for heavy flooding, power outages and significant debris and damage to buildings.

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