

Media Release



bluffton
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™

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Town of Bluffton Celebrates Town Hall Renovations
Ribbon-Cutting and Open House, Wednesday, May 29

Bluffton Town Council, Town Manager and town staff welcome the public for a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house Wednesday, May 29 at 4:30 p.m. to celebrate the renovated Theodore D. Washington Municipal Building, located at 20 Bridge Street.

The four-year process, which included budgeting, planning, designing and constructing, was finished February 2019. The construction phase began in November 2017 and town staff members were relocated to alternate working locations throughout the 15-month process.

“Renovating Town Hall allowed it to remain in the Historic District, which Town Council believed was important,” Mayor Lisa Sulka said. “This building has been a part of Bluffton’s history for nearly a century and now it is renovated, enhanced and equipped to continue its legacy of public service for another 100 years.”

Councilmember Dan Wood said since 1928, this building has been central gathering place for Bluffton residents.

“This building has already contributed to Bluffton as its only school, a high school, a middle school, a daycare, a theatre, a gathering place and a town hall,” Wood said. “This renovation

project has enabled this building to add more chapters to its already rich history of serving our community.”

The renovation project included updating the existing structure which currently houses Town Hall offices, the Charles E. Ulmer Auditorium and Calhoun Station. It also added 4,571 square feet to the original building to accommodate the Henry “Emmett” McCracken, Jr. Town Council Chambers and the Town’s municipal court. This addition has a capacity of 145 seats. Town Hall is now a total of 29,223 square feet.

In addition, Town Hall’s exterior façade was renovated. The building’s information technology infrastructure was upgraded with state-of-the-art equipment to support Gigabit internet access and future technological advances. Parking capacity was increased for Town Hall as well as provide additional public parking in the Historic District. The enhanced parking areas was constructed with pervious material able to reduce stormwater runoff.

“About fifty-five employees work at Town Hall, performing numerous functions,” Town Manager Marc Orlando said. “When you tour the building, you will see clean, open work spaces as well as many meeting rooms where staff members can collaborate on projects or meet privately with residents. This building is designed to facilitate a productive work environment while aligning itself with the architecture of the Historic District.”

The following positions have offices at Town Hall: Customer Service Center (i.e. permitting, licensing and general information), town manager, deputy town manager, town clerk, public information officer, project managers, engineers, planners, building inspectors, finance staff, human resources and municipal court staff.

The original building was constructed in 1928. The building has been the town’s only school (i.e. elementary through high school), then a high school, a middle school and a town hall. A fire destroyed the building in 1963. Former Mayor Emmett McCracken said the fire was ignited by the coal-fire furnace. In a year, the structure was rebuilt while Bluffton students were taught at local churches. Council members Larry Toomer and Fred Hamilton both attended Bluffton High School in the building together in the seventies.

“This building has walked through our personal and political history together,” Councilmember Fred Hamilton said. “After de-segregation, Larry and I attended high school together and now we are together as elected officials in this building, decades later. This building is special to many of us as it has had many roles, just like we have had through our lifetime.”

Mayor Pro Tempore Larry Toomer echoed these sentiments.

“As our community has changed, the roles of this building have changed however its mission – to serve this community – has been constant.” Toomer said. “I am honored to be a part of this project which prepared this building to continue its legacy of public service.”

In addition to the being the central hub of local government operations, the Charles E. Ulmer Theatre, home of the May River Theatre, and Calhoun Station, a thrift store, will continue to reside in Town Hall.

“This is the public’s building. I believe Bluffton’s new Town Hall is a wonderful first impression to those who are considering moving their businesses and families here,” Council member Harry Lutz said. “We hope our community continues to treasure this location and it will continue to be a gathering place for all who live and do business here.”

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