

Consultant to prod Bluffton residents to be mindful of the waterways

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The town of Bluffton wants its residents to get better at picking up after their dogs and pumping out their septic tanks.

But changing people's behavior to help the environment won't be easy, marketing consultant Eric Eckl told state and local officials gathered Tuesday at Town Hall.

So he hopes to help the town find "words that work" to inspire the community.

The founder of Water Words That Work LLC, a company based in Falls Church, Va., Eckl and his team have helped create environmental advocacy campaigns for governments and nonprofit groups around the country. The company won a \$40,000 contract with Bluffton, paid for by a grant from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, to educate septic-tank users and pet owners. The campaign is part of the town's effort to restore the May River that is funded by the \$1 million state grant.

Kicking off the strategic planning was Eckl's workshop titled "More Than a Message: Planning a Campaign for Results You Can Measure." Town officials and representatives of DHEC, the Beaufort-Jasper Water & Sewer Authority and Coastal Conservation League attended.

"The signature weakness of the conservation community is preaching to the choir," Eckl said.

Environmental advocates must expose residents to a message, get them to think about it and then encourage them to take small steps that will lead to big ones, he said.

Later Tuesday, a steering committee gathered to come up with logos, slogans and materials aimed at accomplishing those goals.

The Water Words That Work team will be responsible for the advertisements, brochures, mailings and website that spread the message.

The pet-waste campaign should begin in May, and the one for septic owners will start in June, town natural resources manager Kim Jones said.

Those campaigns will be tracked and evaluated in the fall.