



COUNTY COUNCIL OF BEAUFORT COUNTY
Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department

Beaufort County Government Robert Smalls Complex
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The regular meeting of the Beaufort County Planning Commission (hereinafter “Commission”) was held at the Beaufort County Council Chambers on Thursday, July 9, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Ed Pappas, Chairman
Mr. Pete Cook
Mr. Jon Henney
Mr. Gene Meyers
Mr. Glenn Miller
Mr. Chuck Newton

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. Dennis Ross
Ms. Cecily McMillan, Vice Chair
Ms. Gail Murray

STAFF PRESENT:

Ms. Kristen Forbus, Long Range Planner
Mr. Robert Merchant, Planning Director
Mr. Kevin Sullivan, Transportation Planner

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Pappas called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Chair Pappas led those assembled in the pledge of allegiance.

REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES: The May 4th and June 1st meetings were approved with no objections.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: Chair Pappas asked if there were any non-agenda related citizen comments. There were none.

ACTION ITEMS:

CONSIDERATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (CDC): SECTION 5.3.20 (APPLICABILITY), 4.2.20 (STANDARDS FOR FREE STANDING ACCESSORY BUILDINGS/ STRUCTURES), AND 10.1.190 (S DEFINITIONS)

Mr. Merchant presented the text amendment changes that were made including references to semitrailers, buffers, and hazardous materials. Mr. Miller asked about nefarious actions regarding shipping containers and if it would be considered a code violation. Mr. Merchant stated any offenses under the code are enforced by the Code Enforcement Department and result in civil penalties with fines. If not resolved, the issue will go before the magistrate. Mr. Newton asked how applicants would know about the rules and penalties. There was discussion about disclosing to applicants rules and ordinances on permits.

The lifespan of a permit was discussed. Mr. Merchant stated that the lifespan is two years to construct and then it does not expire once construction has been completed.

Mr. Henney stated he had no added suggestions. Mr. Millers stated that the reference to “hazardous materials” should be “hazardous waste”.

Chair Pappas opened the meeting for public comment.
There was no public comment.

Mr. Henney made a motion to recommend approval of CONSIDERATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (CDC): SECTION 5.3.20 (APPLICABILITY), 4.2.20 (STANDARDS FOR FREE STANDING ACCESSORY BUILDINGS/ STRUCTURES), AND 10.1.190 (S DEFINITIONS) with the condition that the language regarding hazardous waste was addressed. It was stated that the amendment met standards 1,2,3,5,6,7. Mr. Cook seconded. The motion passed 6-0.

CONSIDERATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (CDC): DIVISION C.4 (BUCKWALTER PARKWAY)

Mr. Merchant stated that access management is an effective tool to maximize the use of roads and safety as it addresses lights and spacing of intersections. Appendix C of the CDC codified individual corridors as an extra step to ensure regulation; Buckwalter being one of them. Regarding the implementation of the proposed plans, the County would follow stormwater and wetland regulations. Mr. Merchant explained that there is a common balancing act with impervious surface coverage and ensuring safety and access for County roads.

Mr. Sullivan stated that the Buckwalter Parkway Access Management Plan is already in place and that these amendments are merely further updates since it was last updated in 2021. Updates occur as determined by staff and public feedback.

Mr. Sullivan gave a presentation. He stated that the original plan came out in 2007. It was then revised in 2021.

Mr. Pappas raised concern about concurrency and whether wetlands would change plans. Mr. Sullivan stated that wetlands could change the plans. He stated that wetlands would be a separate step during the development permit, but, currently, the connections agent a good development. Mr. Pappas suggested adding the new LATS numbers of traffic volumes.

Consultant, Jennifer Bihl, stated that the Access Management Plan looks at signals and is reviewed periodically. She stated that the LATS numbers might not necessarily change the signal locations. Cross connections and mobilities of the corridor were emphasized.

Mr. Henney ensured that the dotted lines were not planned roads but rather concepts.

There was then discussion about lengths between lights and federal warrants. Ms. Bihl emphasized the importance of connectivity within developments.

Mr. Newton asked if the plan considered present conditions or future developments. Mr. Sullivan stated future development is considered in the process.

Mr. Newton asked if there has been coordination with the town of Bluffton. Mr. Sullivan stated that Buckwalter is under authority of Beaufort County and that there is ongoing coordination.

There was further discussion of ¾ access.

Mr. Henney brought up environmental concerns. Ms. Bihl ensured that environmental impacts are also part of the review process.

There was discussion on how signals are coordinated and programming.

Chair Pappas opened the meeting for public comment.

There was no public comment. However, comments were sent via email. They are attached.

From: menzapaul@aol.com
To: [Forbus, Kristen](#)
Cc: [Howard, Alice G.](#); [Tabernik, Anna](#); [Dawson, Gerald](#); [Bartholomew, David](#); [Glover, York](#); [Passiment, Joseph](#); [Cunningham, Logan](#); [Brown, Paula](#); [Lawson, Mark](#); [Reitz, Thomas](#); [McElynn, Lawrence](#)
Subject: Beaufort County Planning Commission Agenda Packet -July 9, 2026 Item 8
Date: Tuesday, July 7, 2026 4:19:46 PM
Attachments: [Natl Wetlands Inventory Fish and Wildlife Service.pdf](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Please report any suspicious attachments, links, or requests for sensitive information to the Beaufort County IT Division at 843-255-7000.

Ms. Forbus,

I am providing comments/questions regarding the June 29, 2026 Memo from Robert Merchant to Planning Commission on text amendments to the Community Development Code. **Please forward to the Planning Commission members so they are informed and vote no and allow for my comments to be addressed prior to any County Council reading.**

Review Standards for the Amendment for which COUNTY COUNCIL shall use to weigh the adoption of this amendment

This entire section is wordy statements with NO FACTS OR DATA. Some statements conflict with the [BIHL Engineering Report](#). I will only note these as examples:

Number 1 – “The amendment promotes safe and efficient movement of people and goods, encourages coordinated land development, and supports implementation of access management principles intended to protect public investments in transportation infrastructure.” If land development was properly coordinated, there would be no need to update the access management.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO SPECIFIC CRASH FREQUENCY DATA ON THIS ROADWAY – NOT EVEN QUALITATIVE MEASURES OF LEVEL OF SERVICE TO ADDRESS SAFETY. In fact the objective appears to be more focused on business incentives. From the [BIHL Engineering Report](#), page 15:

“Studies have shown that implementing access management techniques along a roadway can increase free-flow and travel speeds as well as decrease the number of accidents that can occur. Access management plans have also shown in some cases to be economically beneficial for businesses as well.”

Considering the major causes of crashes in BC are behavioral based including failure to yield and excessive speed, providing more opportunities to speed appears contradictory. More important, there is ABSOLUTELY NO MENTION of the [Safety Action Plan](#) recommendations or the [Bluffton Parkway Corridor Study](#) recommendations for intersection improvements. Please explain how this amendment package provides any data regarding improving safety that the County Council should consider?

Number 7 - “adoption of the amendment is not expected to create adverse environmental impacts” - that may be accurate for the bureaucratic process of amendment adoption, but inconsistent with implementing multiple new roadways and new development areas particularly commercial development in watersheds in which wetlands have already been destroyed, new wet areas created because they essentially become the drainage point for developed areas, and for which the extent of impervious surfaces far exceed values (10%) that are demonstrated to impact

water quality and have already impacted water quality. The memorandum ignores and does not correctly include recent documents including the Bluffton Parkway Corridor Study and the May River Project Report. Lastly, there is no mention of the impact of more roads and development on the Federal MS4 permit that requires a reduction of pollutants, not simply public outreach activities to pick up after your pet and ineffective BMPs with no inspections or enforcement.

The proposed amendment includes only the description of the short and long term strategies BUT NOT THE FINDINGS in the Corridor Study. In particular for the DUPLICATE BLUFFTON 5B, the Corridor Study concludes it is INFERIOR to the intersection improvements and the road widening of the parkway. The Study states:

“In addition to ROW needs associated with constructing a new roadway, the proposed alignment crosses multiple wetland areas identified by the National Wetlands Inventory as Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands, with pockets of Freshwater Emergent Wetlands. Potential impacts to these environmental resources and the overhead utility easement were not assessed in this planning-level study and will be further evaluated during future engineering phases if the project moves forward.”

I have provided USEPA and other state references including SC that specify, once the impervious cover exceeds 10 percent, water quality is impacted. The 2025 May River Project Report states:

“The greatest impervious cover among all the basins is 48% as of 2021. In the context of previously established thresholds that relate to various levels of degradation of downstream habitats (Holland et al. 2004), 63 of the 208 subbasins contain greater than 10% impervious cover with 29 of those also containing greater than 20% impervious cover and another 14 of those containing greater than 30% impervious cover.”

Forested wetlands “decreased from 26.3% to 23.6% (4,820 to 4,307 acres) from 2001 to 2021, representing a loss of 513 acres of forested wetland habitat in the May River Watershed.” It is disconcerting that that report which took 2 years to finalize is still not available on the website. Moreover, see comments on Figure 9.

Section 3.2.1 Study Area Roadways (BIHL Engineering Report)

Several errors regarding posted speed limits, i.e. Fording Island Road the speed limit is not a consistent 55 mph, nor is the speed limit 35 mph along Bluffton Pkwy from Buck Island Rd to Buckwalter Pkwy.

Figure 9 (BIHL Engineering Report)

-Extensive tan colored area is identified as “other” in legend – What is “other” as my print from the National Watershed Inventory (ATTACHED) indicates EXTENSIVE WETLANDS in the same area and NO TAN COLORED AREAS?

-What is the point of providing a figure with such a significant portion of so-called other with no explanation and appearing to obscure wetlands?

-No north arrow

-No scale

-Road name label is cut off and only "parkway" is shown for a road which intersects Buckwalter Parkway and would be a road of interest

-Source identification with acronyms only and insufficient

The Beaufort County Planning Department needs to also review applicable Green Space Applications/Approvals with the appropriate Beaufort County representatives for consistency with any covenants/restrictions.

Lastly, USEPA in 2013 published Our Built and Natural Environments: A Technical Review of the Interactions Among Land Use, Transportation, and Environmental Quality. MORE THAN 13 YEARS AGO, South Carolina was specifically called out over and over again and not in a positive way as a leader in:

-highest percentage increase in developed land

-largest percentage increase in impervious area

-increased land disturbance resulting in decline in biological integrity

Section 3.1. 4 describes the effects of roads on the environment including habitat loss and species decline, degradation of water quality from chemical pollutants (metals, volatile organic compounds, Polyaromatic hydrocarbons (found in May River sediments), pesticides, particulates, etc. The increased runoff impacts stream channels causing erosion of the banks and increased flow velocities contributing to flooding and depletes natural cycles to replenish groundwater.

<https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/our-built-and-natural-environments.pdf>

Despite the lessons learned elsewhere, development plans in Beaufort County and the municipal entities continue to be implemented without a single boring to assess soil conditions, without a single analytical result to assess water quality, without a comprehensive assessment of depletion of natural resources, without a thorough evaluation of impacts to utility capacity and demand, without a review of educational needs, etc. When there are reviews such as the Traffic Impact Study for the Novant Hospital, the COUNTY DOES NOT INCLUDE ALL THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS, only the one being considered and NO consideration for multiple hospitals and medical offices in a common intersection during an emergency or major storm event. Did anyone notice the traffic that lasted HOURS as a result of a fatal collision on Route 278? It is unclear which if any development plans were considered for signalization and justification for the 1500-foot spacing. Have the HOA communities and businesses been informed and allowed to comment?

The time to raise the bar with the planning process is long overdue – less jargon and politics, more real science, engineering, and accountability.

Carmen Avon Manning

From: [Joy](#)
To: [Forbus, Kristen](#)
Cc: [Howard, Alice G.](#); [Tabernik, Anna](#); [Dawson, Gerald](#); [Bartholomew, David](#); [Glover, York](#); [Passiment, Joseph](#); [Cunningham, Logan](#); [Brown, Paula](#); [Lawson, Mark](#); [Reitz, Thomas](#); [McElynn, Lawrence](#)
Subject: Comments on upcoming Planning Commission meeting July 9 item #8
Date: Wednesday, July 8, 2026 12:29:59 PM

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Hi Kristen,

Could you please forward this email to the Chairman and members of the planning commission for them to read before the planning commission meeting tomorrow July 9th.

Thank you in advance,

Sincerely,

Joy Coe

July 8, 2025

To: The Planning Commission

County Council Members

From: Joy Coe and other Concerned Citizens in Bluffton

Re: Item #8 Planning Commission Meeting Thursday July 9, 2026 (CONSIDERATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (CDC): DIVISION C.4 (BUCKWALTER PARKWAY))

Dear Chairman Pappas and Members of the Planning Commission,

As I may not be able to attend the meeting, please accept this letter in opposition to the proposed text amendments to Division C.4 of the Community Development Code regarding the Buckwalter Parkway Access Management Plan Update. The staff report asserts that these changes satisfy the necessary review standards; however, a thorough review of the agenda packet reveals that the proposed changes fail to meet Standards 1, 6, and 7.

I urge the Commission to deny or defer this request based on the following points:

1. Failure to Meet Standard 7: Adverse Impacts on the Natural Environment

The amendment claims it will not result in adverse environmental impacts, yet the plan introduces 14 new cross-connectivity roadways along the corridor. Constructing 14 additional road segments will inevitably lead to clear-cutting, vegetation removal, and severe disruption of local wildlife habitats, not to mention large-scale destruction of wetlands.

Figure 9 in the agenda packet ("Wetlands along Corridor") completely obscures substantial portions of critical land by labeling large swaths simply as "Other," providing no ecological context or explanation as to why this was done. Based on other maps of this area, much of this land is almost certainly wetlands, which seem to have been deliberately obscured to sway the decision making. Designing a major infrastructure policy around a map that fails to clearly identify wetland boundaries is reckless and directly contradicts the requirement to protect the natural functioning of the environment, particularly regarding storm-water management and wetland preservation.

2. Failure to Meet Standard 6: Logical and Orderly Development Pattern

The proposed connectivity network is redundant and structurally inefficient rather than logical. For example, the plan dictates three separate roads feeding directly into the future Willow Run development via connections from Cassidy Drive, Pinellas Drive North, and Pinellas Drive South. Forcing three distinct access points into a single development area is excessive, unnecessary, and represents a highly disorderly development pattern.

BL-01 Is already in the 2045 LATS long range transportation plan page 65 shown below, as well as at the bottom of the LATS TIP spreadsheet, and is a road from Buckwalter to Willow Run. This road is to be paid for by the Town of Bluffton per Stephanie Rossi at LCOG.

““BL-01” Buckwalter Frontage Connector from Buckwalter Pkwy to Willow Run New Location 0.70 miles”

Furthermore, the future north/south connector whose name has just recently changed with these text amendments to the planned north/south roadway is a road to be paid for by the developer of Willow Run as stated in the 9th amendment to the Buckwalter Development agreement and as such should not be part of this access management plan.

The plan decreases the recommended full-signal spacing from 2,000 feet down to 1,500 feet to accommodate 5 new traffic signals at key intersections, specifically at Berkeley Place Driveway #1/Pinellas Drive North, Mott Street/Parkside Drive, Innovation Drive, a future signal between Cross Schools and Shell Hall, and H.E. McCracken Circle North. This dense clustering of traffic lights is counterproductive to the goals of a major north-south arterial roadway. Most vehicular accidents occur at intersections and signalized access points; increasing the density of traffic lights along Buckwalter Parkway will multiply conflict points, degrade traffic flow, and actively compromise public safety rather than protecting it. This will also cause the speed limit to be lowered from 45 to 35 mph, again hindering traffic mobility.

3. Failure to Meet Standard 1: Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

In short, the amendment accelerates environmental degradation (via 14 new road connections and unverified wetland impacts) and compromises the operational capacity of a critical transportation corridor (via 5 new traffic lights and excessive cut-through roads into Willow Run, as well as several new RIROs namely just before Innovation Drive where a traffic light is

planned, and another to accommodate a development stage storage facility that already has access via the Lake Point traffic light). As a result, it objectively fails to further the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. It does not promote "safer efficient movement" or "orderly growth". Instead, it compromises long-term public infrastructure investments to accommodate the unchecked and unmitigated development ravaging this area and destroying our quality of life.

Additionally, the plan openly acknowledges that multiple existing and planned intersections along the corridor already fail to meet basic access management spacing guidelines. Moving the goalposts to normalize substandard spacing undermines the very purpose of the Community Development Code.

For these reasons, the findings in the staff report are invalid. How much impact are the connectivity roads going to have compared to the environmental destruction they will cause? Is this a wish list or an actual real needs list? These text amendments seem to have nothing to do with safety, quality of life, being good environmental stewards, but all to do with Beaufort county taxpayers funding excessive development. When are the developers going to pay for anything? I request that the Planning Commission vote to deny these text amendments until a transparent, comprehensive wetland delineation is completed and a realistic safety analysis is conducted regarding signal density.

Thank you for your time and your service to Beaufort County.

Sincerely,

Joy Coe and other Concerned Citizens in Bluffton

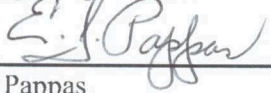
Mr. Henney made a motion to recommend approval of CONSIDERATION OF TEXT AMENDMENTS TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CODE (CDC): DIVISION C.4 (BUCKWALTER PARKWAY) with the condition that the County work with the Town of Bluffton during the process. It was stated that the amendment met standards 1,2,3,4,5,6. Mr. Meyers seconded. The motion passed 6-0.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Chair Pappas encouraged members to go through the amendment motions and how to make one. Mr. Newton asked how staff deals with public comments. Staff stated they are acknowledged and distributed. Mr. Merchant stated that there were two public workshops for the Comprehensive Plan and that the online survey will go live soon.

ADJOURNMENT: Chair Pappas adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

SUBMITTED BY: Kristen Forbus
Long Range Planner

 9/10/26

Ed Pappas
Beaufort County Planning Commission Chairman