

Panel advances town, county stormwater agreement

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By [Richard Brooks](#) BLUFFTON TODAY

Accord would unite county, municipal water quality efforts.

A Beaufort County proposal to coordinate stormwater efforts with the town of Bluffton moved forward Wednesday.

A draft intergovernmental agreement was approved unanimously by the Beaufort County Stormwater Management Utility Board.

The draft agreement closely parallels one proposed for the town of Hilton Head Island and recommended by the board for approval by the County Council Natural Resources Committee.

The proposed agreements would provide for cross-jurisdictional consistency in stormwater management regulations to prevent pollutants from being washed into Lowcountry waterways.

The agreements would require participating municipalities “to adopt something that would maintain and restore designated water uses,” according to county Stormwater Manager Dan Ahern.

“It implies total volume control,” Ahern said.

Recent scientific studies show that the total volume of stormwater runoff is a factor in water pollution even if the runoff isn’t polluted.

The scientific findings indicate that too much fresh water dilutes a saltwater creek or river to the point that the salinity no longer kills fecal coliform bacteria.

If recommended by the Natural Resources Committee and adopted by the County Council, the respective municipal councils would consider participation as well.

“It could be adopted (by the county) as early as September,” Ahern said.

The agreements would define “the roles and responsibilities and financial relationships” between the county and municipalities on stormwater fee rates and use of revenue for the enhancement of water quality.

Stormwater management costs would include infrastructure acquisition, construction, maintenance, operation and regulation.

“The intergovernmental agreement with the town of Hilton Head is going to Natural Resources on July 26,” said Rob McFee, county infrastructure engineer.

“The town of Bluffton draft is modeled very heavily on the town of Hilton Head work with a very minor change that deals with reporting back to the county,” McFee said. “The documents are almost identical.”

Ahern said intergovernmental agreements with Beaufort and Port Royal are in the works but are currently tied up in the form-based code adoption process.

“Ultimately, some of the issues that Port Royal and Beaufort have are different from Bluffton and Hilton Head,” McFee said.

“We’ve overcome legitimate concerns with infill, which I understand was the stumbling block,” he said.

“We don’t need to be in lockstep,” he said. “We can get a lot more done together than we can separately.”