

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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Town of Bluffton's Building Safety Office Rated in the Top 10% of the State By A National Insurance Organization for Commercial Properties and the Top Third for Single Family Homes Inspections; Rating Indicates Town Property Owners Are Protected By Structural/Safety Standards

A nationwide provider of insurance data information, Insurance Services Office, has audited the Town of Bluffton's Building Safety Office and placed the office in the top 10% of effectiveness for enforcing building safety standards in South Carolina. This audit, referred to as the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule, occurs every 5 years on a voluntary basis. This is the Town's first audit since the Building Office was established in 2009.

Shawn Leininger, the director of the Town's growth management department, said this grading is important because this is a benefit for Town homeowners which many are unaware.

"The Town's building inspectors are holding contractors to safety and structural standards during the building process. For the most part, this is a benefit to homeowners and business owners which is unseen, unheard and, many times, unknown," Leininger said.

"The motto of a building inspector is 'If we do our job right, nothing happens,'" George Owens, Bluffton's chief building official said, "If the job is done right, people and properties are less likely to incur injuries or damages due to safety and structural standards being upheld. The Town's building inspectors provide checks and balances for the contractor and the homeowner at every stage of the build."

The audit referred to as the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS) is a nation-wide program which assesses and grades building codes, building plan review, effectiveness of inspections as well as office operations and procedures and how those procedures mitigates losses from natural hazards.

The Town of Bluffton scored a classification of 3 for commercial and industrial properties and a classification of 4 for single family properties. The highest score is a 1 for both categories. Only 14 of 142 South Carolina communities have achieved a rating of 3 for commercial and industrial properties. No community in South Carolina has received a classification better than a 3 for commercial properties.

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For single family homes, Bluffton's Building Safety Office rates in the top third of the state for building review and inspections. The office achieved a rating of 4 out of 10; with 1 being the highest. Only 40 out of 120 communities have scored 4 or better in this category.

Owens said since the audit was administered this fall, the town's residential inspectors have earned new professional certifications which will most likely enhance the overall residential rating during the next audit.

"The audit of Bluffton's Building Safety Office confirms it is one of the best in South Carolina for protecting buildings against hazards." Leininger said. "That should bring confidence to the Town's property owners because building inspectors are their advocates during every stage of the building process."

Leininger said there are many examples of how the building inspection process advocates for the Bluffton home and business/property owner. Below are examples of how inspections have benefited Town homeowners.

#### Specific Examples:

- An inspector discovered a homeowner's front and rear decks were six inches lower than the grade around the house which could result in a flooding problem. Once discovered, the contractor was required to install a drainage system to redirect any surface water from under the porch.
- Inspectors discovered a garage, which was being built in a flood zone, didn't have flood-resistant materials. The garage floor is more than five feet below the flood zone. This issue was discovered in time for the contractor to order the flood-resistant materials. This corrective action resulted in a garage able to withstand a flood.

#### Daily Plan Reviews & Inspections:

- Inspectors ensure homeowners' windows, doors and garage doors are built and installed according to the amount of wind that a geographical area may receive. Inspectors ensure each of those products have the rating (i.e. designed pressure) to withstand hurricane-strength winds in specific geographic areas.
- Inspectors review all building plans prior to construction to ensure the construction plans meet all structural, electrical, mechanical and fire codes. The same inspectors also examine the construction work during the build to ensure the work is completed according to approved plans and building codes.