



Via Email:

Lowcountry Ferry, LLC
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July 10, 2024

Michael Moore
Beaufort County Administrator
Beaufort County Government Robert Smalls Complex
100 Ribaut Rd
Beaufort, SC 29901-1228

Dear Mr. Moore,

Congratulations on your new position. I hope your stewardship is a blessed one and your family settles comfortably into the beautiful Lowcountry. Public service must be demanding and rewarding, so thank you for your letter of July 3, 2024 regarding the sufficiency of Lowcountry Ferry's vessels, which I view as an opportunity to share some context, history, and information. To date it marks the first attempt by Beaufort County to solicit any input from me on these issues since signing the Contract, so I can understand how a group of organized, vocal residents from Daufuskie Island preferring the prior system, in conjunction with the Island Packet's choice of reporting, can generate pressure and steer conversations. However, I remain confident that I am and have been in full compliance with the contract.

As you correctly indicate, the contract calls for two (2) forty-passenger vessels, and we currently have three available to use for servicing this contract.

On December 10, 2023, County Council voted to approve two vessels to serve as the ferries: the Sol and the River Explorer. In my continuing effort to upgrade my fleet, and before signing the contract, I had identified the Manatee II, which is massively superior to the already-approved River Explorer and in place of it. However, the Manatee II would not arrive for three (3) weeks after signing the contract, the Ohana was then submitted to ensure the contract would not miss a trip and be fulfilled with County approval. The Ohana and SOL remain in service as backups and are identical in almost all regards to each other. The Ohana has run only four (4) days since the arrival of the Manatee in late January 2024.

In my still-continuing efforts to grow and improve my fleet, I have negotiated to purchase an upgrade to the SOL and Ohana. It is a Lowcountry treasure that has run these same routes and passengers in these same waters very recently. The Manatee II would remain in service on this contract and the new vessel would be up fitted once the County approves the submission. Since previous details of Lowcountry Ferry's bid leaked to a competitor, I hope to protect these opportunities for Lowcountry Ferry and the public. Accordingly, I am glad to discuss a method by which I can reveal these plans without compromising the opportunity. Less sensitive is the information that I have also been attempting to acquire the two vessels originally outlined in my bid for the last six months, the Palmetto Trader and Palmetto Merchant; unfortunately, both these vessels presently are still unseaworthy as deemed by the Coast Guard.

I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you about the things Lowcountry Ferry does for customers not required by the contract. We have made exceptions to rules or policies regarding the weight of cargo. We have charged reduced fares based upon circumstance or need. We have permitted animals contrary to our policies. We regularly assist people not just onto and off the vessel, but down the walkways. We run this business like we are trying to earn customer satisfaction and grow the offerings available to the public. We have installed an additional HVAC system in the Manatee II that people are extremely pleased with how cold it is.

Due to the necessity of protecting our plan from interference and possible attempts of sabotage, a confidential plan will be forthcoming and this letter was to ensure you received a response within the 7 day time frame allotted.

I would be grateful to have a conversation in person with you and I can come to you if it is easier to make that happen.

I also invite you out to our vessel for a trip over to Daufuskie Island and back. Please let me know when a good time for that would be and I would be happy to join you or meet after to speak with you about the long term goals we have with this project.

Thank you, and once again congratulations on your new position.

Respectfully,

Neil Turner
Lowcountry Ferry, LLC