

# Memo



**To:** Mayor and Council  
**From:** Shirley A. Freeman, Director of Finance/Administration  
**Date:** August 6, 2015  
**Subject:** Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Recommendations

Town of Bluffton  
 20 Bridge Street  
 PO Box 386  
 Bluffton, SC 29910  
 843.706.4500  
 843.757.6720 (fax)

**Recommendation:** In accordance with the grant process, the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee met on August 4, 2015, to review the quarterly grant applications. The following are the recommendation for funding for this quarter.

Requesting Organization	Amount Requested	Amount Recommended
Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce	\$ 20,000	\$ 3,250
BHPS - Heyward House Historic Center	\$ 75,000	\$ 25,000
Historic Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Lowcountry Golf Course Owners Assoc.	\$ 7,500	\$ 7,500
May River Theatre	\$ 15,000	\$ 7,500
Old Town Bluffton Merchants Society - Annually \$48,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 12,000
Society of Bluffton Artists	10,700	6,000
<b>Total for the Quarter</b>	<b>\$ 160,200</b>	<b>\$ 81,250</b>

A report of previously funded grants and minutes are attached for your convenience. When comparing the State and Local Accommodations Taxes collections for the quarter ending June 2015 show 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter revenue is about \$118.15 less than last year 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

After receipt of the State funds today, a total of \$130,828.36 is available for distribution; deductions were taken for the March 31, 2015 approved grants. distribution by Town Council. The committee

**State ATAX**

Remaining from Previous Quarters	\$ 19,857
Heyward House Visitor Center	(25,000)
4th Quarter Revenue	77,874
5% to General Fund	(3,894)
30% to HHI-Bluffton Chamber	(23,362)
Pending State Correction	-

<b>Total State ATAX Funds for Distribution</b>	<b>\$ 45,475</b>
--	------------------

**Local ATAX**

Remaining from Previous Quarters	\$ 23,242
4th Quarter Revenue	110,088
8% to Visitor's Convention Bureau	(8,807)
Disaster Recovery Designation	(1,101)
38% to Town's CIP	(38,068)

<b>Total Local ATAX Funds for Distribution</b>	<b>\$ 85,353</b>
--	------------------

FY 2015 ATAX Grant Report  
8/4/2015

FY 2015 Grant Requests	Amount Requested	Advisory Committee Recommendation	Town Council Approved	Source of Funding	Paid FY 2015	Paid FY 2016	Remaining	Grant #
<b>Applications Received June 30, 2014</b>								
Celebrate Bluffton, Inc - extension granted to 5/1/16	\$ 2,660	\$ 2,660	\$ 2,660	Local ATAX	\$ 1,885		\$ 776	L014
Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival, Inc	\$ 23,000	\$ 23,000	\$ 23,000	Local ATAX	\$ 23,000		\$ -	L004
Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce - Boiled Peanut Festival 8/2014	\$ 15,730	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,000	Local ATAX	\$ 6,000		\$ -	L013B
NIBCCA	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ -					NA
Old Town Bluffton Merchants Society - Annual Request \$48,000	\$ 48,000	\$ 10,883	\$ 10,883	Local ATAX	\$ 10,883		\$ -	L002
<b>Total Grants for 1st Quarter Payments</b>	<b>\$ 114,390</b>	<b>\$ 42,543</b>	<b>\$ 42,543</b>		<b>\$ 41,768</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 776</b>	
<b>Applications Received September 30, 2014</b>								
Bluffton Historical Preservation Society - Annual Request \$100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	State ATAX	\$ 99,747		\$ 253	S001
Old Town Bluffton Merchants Society - Annual Request \$48,000 (2nd Req)	\$ 37,117	\$ 37,117	\$ 37,117	Local ATAX	\$ 37,117		\$ -	L002
<b>Total Grants for 2nd Quarter Payments</b>	<b>\$ 137,117</b>	<b>\$ 137,117</b>	<b>\$ 137,117</b>		<b>\$ 136,864</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 253</b>	
<b>Applications Received December 31, 2014</b>								
Farmer's Market of Bluffton - Annual Request \$34,000	\$ 34,000	\$ 7,149	\$ 7,149	Local ATAX	\$ 7,149		\$ -	L005
The Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce - The Taste of Bluffton	\$ 28,787	\$ 7,149	\$ 7,149	Local ATAX	\$ 5,328		\$ 1,821	L013T
<b>Total Grants for 3rd Quarter Payments</b>	<b>\$ 62,787</b>	<b>\$ 14,298</b>	<b>\$ 14,298</b>		<b>\$ 12,477</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 1,821</b>	
<b>Applications Received March 31, 2015</b>								
USGA Jr Amateur Championship	\$ 20,000	\$ 13,000	\$ 16,000	Local ATAX			\$ 16,000	L015
Society of Bluffton Artists	\$ 15,000	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,000	Local ATAX	\$ 2,000		\$ 5,000	L007
Farmer's Market of Bluffton - Annual Request \$34,000 (2nd Req)	\$ 26,851	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,000	Local ATAX	\$ 6,697		\$ 303	L005
Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce - Boiled Peanut Festival 9/2015	\$ 12,500	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,000	Local ATAX	\$ 5,378		\$ 1,622	L013B
Lowcountry Tourism Commission & Lowcountry Visitors Center & Museum	\$ 13,900	\$ 6,000	\$ -	Local ATAX			\$ -	L009
<b>Total Grants for 4th Quarter FY2015 Payments</b>	<b>\$ 88,251</b>	<b>\$ 37,000</b>	<b>\$ 37,000</b>		<b>\$ 14,075</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 22,925</b>	
<b>Total FY2015 Grants</b>	<b>\$ 402,545</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>		<b>\$ 205,183</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 25,775</b>	
Bluffton Historical Preservation Society - Annual Amount	100,000	25,000	25,000	State ATAX				S001
<b>FY2016 Grant Total</b>	<b>\$ 402,545</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>		<b>\$ 205,183</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 25,775</b>	

<b>APPLICATIONS ANNUAL SUMMARY FOR FY2015:</b>								
Bluffton Historical Preservation Society	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	State ATAX	\$ 99,747	\$ -	\$ 253	S001
Old Town Merchants Society - Annual Request \$48,000 (2 submissions)	\$ 48,000	\$ 48,000	\$ 48,000	Local ATAX	\$ 48,000	\$ -	\$ -	L002
The May River Theatre Company	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L003
Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival	\$ 23,000	\$ 23,000	\$ 23,000	Local ATAX	\$ 23,000	\$ -	\$ -	L004
The Farmers Market of Bluffton - Annual Request \$34,000 (2 submissions)	\$ 34,000	\$ 13,149	\$ 14,149	Local ATAX	\$ 13,846	\$ -	\$ 303	L005
Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L006
Society of Bluffton Artists	\$ 15,000	\$ 6,000	\$ 7,000	Local ATAX	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000	L007
HHI-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce (Outdoor Billboard Campaign)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L008O
HHI-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce Recreation Co-Op Program	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L008R
HHI-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce (Southern Living Campaign)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L008S
Lowcountry Tourism Commission & Lowcountry Visitors Center & Museum	\$ 13,900	\$ 6,000	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L009
Palmetto Bluff Preservation Trust, Inc. (Sculpture Art Park)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L011
PALS Dixie Softball	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	L012
Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce - Boiled Peanut Festival	\$ 28,230	\$ 12,000	\$ 13,000	Local ATAX	\$ 11,378	\$ -	\$ 1,622	L013B
Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce - Taste of Bluffton	\$ 28,787	\$ 7,149	\$ 7,149	Local ATAX	\$ 5,328	\$ -	\$ 1,821	L013T
Celebrate Bluffton, Inc - extension granted	\$ 2,660	\$ 2,660	\$ 2,660	Local ATAX	\$ 1,885	\$ -	\$ 776	L014
USGA Jr Amateur Championship	\$ 20,000	\$ 13,000	\$ 16,000	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 16,000	L015
NIBCCA	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ -	Local ATAX	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	NA
<b>Total FY2015 Grants</b>	<b>\$ 338,577</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>	<b>\$ 230,958</b>		<b>\$ 205,183</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 25,775</b>	

ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
AUGUST 4, 2015

Chairman Anthony called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Other committee members present were Gardner, Reichert, and Britt. Hampson and Wood were absent. Staff in attendance was as follows: Director of Finance Freeman, Assistant Director of Finance Greathouse, and Town Clerk Lunceford.

Introduction of New Committee Members:

Anthony introduced new committee member Sam Britt. He also stated new committee member Courtney Hampson was out of town.

Election of Officers, per By-Laws, 1<sup>st</sup> meeting after July the following officers must be elected, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary:

**Reichert nominated Anthony as Chairman. Britt seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Anthony nominated Gardner as Vice-Chairman. Reichert seconded. The vote carried unanimously.**

**Reichert nominated Lunceford as Secretary. Britt seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

Committee Approval and Recommendation to Town Council on Applicant's Requests as follows:

1) **Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce – Requesting \$20,000:**

Larry Holman, President/CEO, Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce, and Liz Mitchell, Marketing Consultant, stated this is a marketing project including print magazine and internet advertising, chamber website, social media and the Beaufort County Guide to Gullah Geechee Heritage. We market Bluffton as part of the culture of Beaufort County. We feature a one page on our website of Experience Bluffton and an ad in the Pathfinders magazine with a distribution of 100,000. The entire project is designed to generate increase tourism to Bluffton, especially as a key historic destination and the larger project marketing the Gullah culture of Beaufort County. The 25,000 printed guides will be larger next year with 40 pages and will be distributed in SC welcome centers, local and neighboring visitor's centers, airports, CIAA and NCAA tournaments. This guide will also be published in digital format and available for download from the chamber's website. Other sources of funding are Beaufort County and ad sales. The Committee stated their concerns on their budget and having no tracking of tourism stats.

**Reichert moved to grant the Chamber \$7,500. Anthony seconded. The vote was 2 in favor and 2 opposed. After discussion regarding the redundancy of what is done by our HHI/Bluffton Chamber and not listing all the Bluffton sites such as the Garvin House, the Motion failed. (Continued)**

1) **Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce – Requesting \$20,000 - Continued:**

**Britt moved to grant the Chamber \$3,250 to cover the advertising for the Town of Bluffton. Gardner seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

2) **Bluffton Historical Preservation Society (Heyward House Historic Center) – Quarterly funding of \$25,000 of Annual Request of \$75,000:**

Katie Epps, Director of the Heyward House Historic Center, gave an overview. The Heyward House serves as the Welcome Center for the Town of Bluffton. Through their marketing and social media efforts plus a partnership with other local organizations, the Heyward House has become known as the “the place to start” when exploring the Town. The requested funds are used for operations of the Heyward House including capital improvements. The Heyward House has seen significant growth since the beginning of this fiscal year due to social media, visibility, activity, and connectedness and is known as the “Place to Start”. The gift shop has been revamped, added tours, increased educational programs, and staff members mail out packets that contain maps, real estate information, and brochures from businesses as part of their efforts to increase self-sustainability. Daily statistics are collected from a guest sign-in book.

**Britt moved to grant the Society their quarterly request of \$25,000. Reichert seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

The Committee recommended for the Society not to be required to make a presentation on the next Fiscal Year quarters but to continue with their reports for Committee/Staff review. Note: Presentation Attached.

3) **Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival – Requesting \$20,000:**

Mary O’Neill, President, stated that the whole project is designed to increase tourism to Bluffton through the week-long festival which is promoted to out of towners, through various venues including printed advertisement, radio, TV spots, chamber vacation planner, web site, chamber newsletter and other specific out of town targeted market pieces such as direct mailing, SC Living, Southern Living, and Essential Guide. This festival was recognized as a great destination venue by the Southeast Tourism Society as one of the top 20 events in the southeast as well as a must see for 2015 by National Geographic Traveler. They conduct surveys every year at the Festival to measure the effectiveness of the promotions with using the USCB’s Hospitality Management Department and have also joined with the Chamber to conduct iPad surveys again using USCB students. (Continued)

3) **Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival – Requesting \$20,000 - Continued:**

Other sources of funding are vendor fees, sponsors, merchandise sales, event admissions, and Beaufort County ATAX funding.

**Reichert moved to grant the Festival \$20,000. Gardner seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

4) **Lowcountry Golf Course Owners Association (LGCOA) – Requesting \$7,500:**

Jim Uremovich, Head Professional of Old South Golf Links, and Cary Corbett, President of LGCOA, gave an overview. The Lowcountry Golf Course Owners Association represents 31 golf courses in the Lowcountry area, 11 of which are located in Greater Bluffton. Their goal as an Association is to drive stay and play golf vacation traffic to the area using ATAX marketing dollars. This particular project is the expansion of our Golf Channel advertising campaign. Our marketing efforts and use of Golf Channel continue to show a tremendous impact on both rounds of golf and room nights booked. They rely on the partners to reports back on the success of the requests they receive from us. Some partners have greater technologies to track actual revenue while others simply report our leads have definitely increasing their business.

Other sources of funding are \$12,000 from the Hilton Head-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce and \$7,500 from LGCOA.

Committee stated even though there are only 2 golf courses in the Town limits, the LGCOA advertisements on national TV would draw tourists to the Town.

**Anthony moved to grant the LGCOA \$7,500. Britt seconded. After discussion on the positive draw for tourist to the whole area, the motion carried unanimously.**

5) **May River Theatre – Requesting \$15,000:**

Application was for two productions and other cost exist for the general organizational. Jennifer Green, President, and Tara Warthen, Treasurer, stated that they were requesting assistance in offsetting part of production expenses for their last 2 shows of their 14<sup>th</sup> season. Funding will be used towards all productions expenses, including royalties, which have to be paid three months in advance of production, and marketing costs. The May River Theatre attracts patrons from Hilton Head and Bluffton, as well as the surrounding areas in Beaufort, Jasper and Chatham counties. Tourist tracking is done when tickets are purchased. A great number of these patrons are also visiting Bluffton restaurants, shops, and galleries. (Continued)

5) **May River Theatre – Requesting \$15,000 – Continued:**

Other sources of funding are ticket sales, patron contributions and advertising revenue. The Committee had concerns on their budget showing a profit. The Theatre stated they had upfront expenditures that were not reflected on their P&L statement.

**Reichert moved to grant the Theatre \$15,000. Gardner seconded. After expressions of concerns regarding the over funding because of a short term cash flow issue for productions that are budgeted to make a profit. The vote was 2 in favor and 2 opposed. Motion failed. Britt moved to grant the Theatre \$7,500. Gardner seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

6) **Old Town Bluffton Merchants – Quarter funding of \$12,000 of Annual Request of \$48,000:**

Mary O’Neil, Past President, stated the request is for their general advertising and marketing campaign promoting Old Town Bluffton as a great destination for visitors including the promotion of Old Town Bluffton events and for necessary police support. Tracking of tourists stats are done by the Chamber survey, zip codes collection, and Merchant and Heyward House guest log books.

Other sources of funding are membership dues and fundraisers.

**Anthony moved to grant the Merchants \$12,000. Reichert seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

7) **Society of Bluffton Artists – Requesting \$10,700:**

Larry Hughes, Treasurer, and Marian Sanders, President, gave an overview. The Society has had an increase of 25% in membership for a total of almost 170. The request will be toward the execution of a professionally produced pilot marketing and advertising designed to enhance our position as a leading regional destination campaign destination visual arts gallery and learning center within the Lowcountry Funds will be applied for various on-line and print mediums targeting vacation planners, drive markets, and on-line sites. They have a measurable impact on the visitor economy by geo-targeting GA, NC, and SC. Tourist tracking is done by a guest register and sales receipts show at least 15,000 visitors of which at least 50% are tourist.

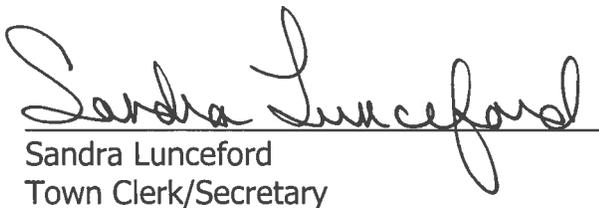
Other sources of funding are SOBA members and sponsors.

**Britt moved to grant the Society \$10,700. Reichert seconded. The Committee stated their concerns on the Society drawing a sufficient amount of tourists. The vote was one in favor and 3 opposed. Motion failed. (Continued)**

- 7) **Society of Bluffton Artists – Requesting \$10,700 - Continued:**  
**Anthony moved to grant the Society \$7,000. Britt seconded. The vote was 1 in favor and 3 opposed. Motion failed.**  
**Gardner moved to grant the Society \$6,000 for ½ of the Digital Marketing Campaign. Reichert seconded. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Total funds allocated were \$81,250.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

  
Sandra Lunceford  
Town Clerk/Secretary

Good evening. My name is Katie Epps and I am the Director of the Heyward House Historic Center, which is owned and operated by the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society. Since 2000, the Heyward House has served as the Official Welcome Center for Bluffton. We have provided tourists and local citizens with information about our regional history, culture and sites while promoting local businesses, restaurants and special events. Phone calls are routinely received from those moving to the area or thinking about moving to the area. Staff mail out packets that contain maps, real estate information, apartment finders, and brochures from sites and businesses of the local area to those interested in moving to Bluffton. We have recently revamped both our websites, with our blufftonwelcomecenter.com website receiving a major overhaul.

Through our marketing and social media efforts plus our partnerships with other local organizations, the Heyward House has become known as “the place to start” when exploring the Town of Bluffton. Most of our visitors learn about us through word of mouth. Last fiscal year, the welcome center served 11,539 total visitors, almost 1000 more than the record set the previous fiscal year. Over 6,500 of the visitors came to the welcome center just to get information and maps. 82% of our visitors are from out of town.

Our gift shop had the highest revenue ever this past fiscal year and we are off to a fast start this year with almost \$600 in sales since July 1st. We saw a 22% increase in sales in FY 2013-2014 from previous years and we had an additional 11% increase this past fiscal year. Our locally made items and children’s items have become our best sellers. Our summer blowout sale is a great success. We are selling clearance merchandise that has been sitting on the shelves for too long, which will free up our limited space in FY2015/2016 to bring in more items that will sell even better and increase our revenue. We anticipate meeting our gift shop revenue goal this fiscal year.

Although special event revenue is down from last year, we were a staff of two for over four months and were focused on running the HHHC and Welcome Center. Now that we are fully staffed again, we will be working hard this coming year to meet and surpass our revenue goal for special events. We have at least one large fundraiser and four smaller events scheduled for the first half of FY2015/2016. In the last year we added several new events, including teas and film showings and increased our lectures and book signings from previous years.

Our children's series of summer programs has continued to be very successful and has provided connections to younger demographics in children, their parents and their teachers. Our docents and staff have also made a concerted effort to be visible in period costume for the weekly Bluffton Farmers Market, which brings both locals and visitors to us.

As part of our efforts to increase self-sustainability over the past year, we added two new tours to the existing tour offerings and we added a temporary exhibit at the Colcock-Teel House. The Living Portrait Tour and the Virtual Docent Walking Tour are technology based. These tours are enticing to families with school age children and visitors who want a new type of tour experience. At the Colcock-Teel House, we have a temporary exhibit called "Edwardian and Flapper: Garments of the Past" and it was very successful throughout the summer and will start again in October and go throughout the Winter.

Visibility, activity and connectedness are increasingly viewed as better metrics of growth/support for organizations like ours than just traditional 'membership'. Rack cards are delivered to hotels throughout Bluffton, Hilton Head, and Beaufort, along with the airport and welcome centers. We created a brochure instead of a rack card and they will be distributed later this month.

We reach out to organizations in the community once per month on average; we promote membership and volunteerism during all of our community events and educational programs and we have increased our local presence at community events. Through our membership drive during the last six months

we met our membership revenue goal for this past year for the first time in many years. We anticipate our membership to grow this coming fiscal year as we reach out to a larger variety of the local population.

Co-Director Jeff Fulgham has been organizing and digitizing the Caldwell Archives and has set up time two days a week for the public to access the archives, which is an invaluable asset to Bluffton's history.

He is diligently working to obtain private foundation grants and donations. He has been working with Representative Herbkersman to get state funding for the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society and the Heyward House from the State's "History and Archive" fund.

As the Welcome Center, the Heyward House has become the place to start for visitors looking to explore the history, shopping, and restaurants Bluffton has to offer. We encourage visitors to explore all of Bluffton, not just Old Town. Our goal is to have them go home and encourage their friends and family to make Bluffton **The Place** to visit. Thank you for considering our request.