

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Finance & Administration Department



MEETING DATE:	June 10, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration of Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations for Quarter Ending March 31, 2025
PROJECT MANAGER:	Natalie Majorkiewicz, CGFO, CGFM Director of Finance & Administration

REQUEST:

Town Staff requests Town Council to consider the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee's (ATAC) recommendations for grant awards as presented below:

Requesting Organization	Amount Requested	Amount Recommended
Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: MC Riley Park Project Face-Lift (Phase III)	\$ 20,000	Tabled
Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra: 2025 Bluffton Concerts	48,781	48,781
Historic Bluffton Foundation: FY2026 Heyward House Museum Operations	50,000	50,000
Town of Bluffton: Sarah Riley Hooks Cottage Restoration	257,304	257,304
BlacQuity SC: 2025 Roots & Rivers Festival	27,000	27,000
Bluffton MLK Observance Committee: 10 th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival Weekend	23,000	23,000
Total for the Quarter	\$ 426,085	\$ 406,085

BACKGROUND:

In accordance with the grant process, the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee (ATAC) held a meeting on May 20, 2025 to review the quarterly applications. There were six (6) applications to review and make recommendations of funding to Town Council.

Additionally, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce presented the FY2025 recap and FY2026 Marketing Plan.

Funds Currently Available for Distribution:

When comparing the estimated State and Local Accommodations Tax collections for the quarter ending March 2025 to the same quarter of last year, the revenues are up \$14,757 or approximately 9.3%.

Total estimated State Accommodations Tax funds currently available for distribution are \$828,402 as outlined in the following chart:

State ATAX	
Remaining from Previous Quarter	\$ 682,349
3 rd Quarter Revenue	174,184
First \$25k to General Fund*	N/A
5% to General Fund	(8,709)
30% to DMO	(52,255)
15% to Town of Bluffton – Housing	(26,128)
Lapsed Grants	58,961
Total State ATAX Funds Remaining for Distribution	\$ 828,402

* First \$25k taken in 1st Quarter of Fiscal Year and Not Applicable (N/A) to the remaining quarters.

Funds Requested for Distribution:

☐ **Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association requesting \$20,000 in support for MC Riley Park Project Face-Lift (Phase III).**

- This is the first request by this organization
- A representative from Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association did not attend the scheduled ATAC meeting, therefore ATAC voted to table the application.

The committee voted to table the request:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ 3,500		\$ -
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	27,710		
Public Facilities	-		
Municipality and County Services	-	*	
Tourist Transportation	-	*	
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	23,900		
Total	\$ 55,110		Tabled

❑ **Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra requested \$48,781 to support advertising and promotion of tourism and facilities for civic and cultural events for the 2025 Bluffton Concerts.**

- There are two events scheduled; one on October 16, 2025 during the Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival in Martin Family Park and a Holiday Pops concert held on November 29, 2025 at St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church.
- The October concert is free to attendees and the November performance will offer reasonably-priced tickets.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” is budgeted at \$18,021.
 - “Facilities for cultural events” is budgeted at \$29,339 for stage and tent rentals.
 - “Public Facilities” is budgeted at \$1,422 for Port-o-Lets rental.

The committee voted to recommend a total award of \$48,781 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ 18,021		\$ 18,021
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	29,339		29,339
Public Facilities	1,422		1,421
Municipality and County Services	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	49,646		
Total	\$ 98,427		\$ 48,781

❑ **Historic Bluffton Foundation (HBF) requests \$50,000 to support the Heyward House Museum for fiscal year 2026 (July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026).**

- The request of \$50,000 is the limit for operational expenses for facilities.
- This year’s request is for operations associated with the Heyward House Museum as Town of Bluffton Welcome Center services have moved to the Squire Pope Carriage House.
- Total visitors for FY2025 are projected to be 29,000 with approximately 87% being from out of town.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” is budgeted at \$81,180 for the year.
 - “Facilities for civic and cultural vents” is budgeted at \$628,800 for the year.
 - “Municipality and County Services” is budgeted at \$3,940 for trash and security services.

The committee voted to recommend a total award of \$50,000 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ 81,180		\$ 50,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	628,800		
Public Facilities			
Municipality and County Services	3,940	*	
Tourist Transportation		*	
Operating Expenses	56,400		
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	244,400		
Total	\$ 1,014,720		\$ 50,000

❑ **Town of Bluffton requests \$257,304 to support the Saray Riley Hooks Cottage Restoration project.**

- This request includes salvaging as much historical building material as possible, demoing the remaining structure, and then construction of the cottage.
- This project is an approved Capital Improvements Program project for the Town of Bluffton and is estimated to be complete in April 2026.

The committee voted to table the request:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ -		
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	857,680		\$ 257,304
Public Facilities	-		
Municipality and County Services	-	*	
Tourist Transportation	-	*	
Visitors Centers	-		
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	-		
Total	\$ 857,680		\$ 257,304

❑ **BlacQuity is requesting \$27,000 to support the 2025 Roots & River Festival project.**

- This event to be held on September 6, 2025 at Oyster Factory Park from 2-8 pm.
- The 2024 event hosted visitors from Savannah, Charleston, Alanta, Jacksonville, Ohio, and New York that made up 54% of the attendees.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” is budgeted at \$19,650.
 - “Facilities for cultural events” is budgeted at \$2,800 for stage and tent rentals.
 - “Public Facilities” is budgeted at \$2,500 for Port-o-Lets rental.

The committee voted to recommend a total award of \$27,000.

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ 19,650		\$ 19,650
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	2,800		2,800
Public Facilities	2,500	*	1,670
Municipality and County Services	3,000	*	1,800
Tourist Transportation	1,200	*	1,080
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	5,100		
Total	\$ 34,850		\$ 27,000

❑ Bluffton MLK Observation Committee requests \$23,000 to support advertising and promotion of tourism, facilities for civic and cultural events, municipality services, and tourist transportation for 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Weekend.

- The annual festival kicks off with a BBQ, Blues & Boots event on June 6th followed by weekend events scheduled June 13 - 15, 2025 at various locations throughout Bluffton.
- The project is aimed at bringing overnight guests to the event with it being held over a weekend.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” is budget at \$15,100
 - “Facilities for cultural events” is budgeted at \$9,000 for stage and tent rentals.
 - “Public facilities” \$2,750 for sanitation and is based upon % of tourist attendance.
 - “Municipality services” \$1,600 for security based upon % of tourist attendance.
 - “Tourist transportation” \$400 based upon % of tourist attendance.

The committee voted to recommend a total award of \$23,000 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		Recommended ATAX Funds
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$ 15,100		\$ 15,100
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	9,000		7,900
Public Facilities	2,750	*	
Municipality and County Services	1,600	*	
Tourist Transportation	400	*	
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	18,500		
Total	\$ 47,350		\$ 23,000

NEXT STEPS:

Town Staff will notify organizations of award amount and requirements.

SUMMARY:

Below are the applications received for quarter ending March 31, 2025 and ATAC's recommendation for each:

Requesting Organization	Amount Requested	Amount Recommended
Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: MC Riley Park Project Face-Lift (Phase III)	\$ 20,000	Tabled
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Bluffton MLK Observance Committee: 10 th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival Weekend	23,000	23,000
Total for the Quarter	\$ 426,085	\$ 406,085

ATTACHMENTS:

1. ATAC draft meeting minutes from May 20, 2025
2. Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: MC Riley Park Project Face-Lift (Ph. III) Grant Application
3. Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: MC Riley Park Project Face-Lift (Ph. III) ATAC Staff Report
4. Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra: 2025 Bluffton Concerts Grant Application
5. Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra: 2025 Bluffton Concerts ATAC Staff Report
6. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum Operation Expenses Grant Application
7. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum Operation Expenses ATAC Staff Report
8. Town of Bluffton: Sarah Riley Hooks Restoration Project Grant Application
9. Town of Bluffton: Sarah Riley Hooks Restoration Project ATAC Staff Report
10. BlacQuity SC: Roots & Rivers Festival Grant Application
11. BlacQuity SC: Roots & Rivers Festival ATAC Staff Report
12. Bluffton MLK Observance Committee: 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival Weekend Grant Application
13. Bluffton MLK Observance Committee: 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival Weekend ATAC Staff Report
14. ATAC Scoring Table Rating Matrix
15. Previously Funded Grant Listing
16. Recommended Motions