

ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE

STAFF REPORT

Department of Finance & Administration



MEETING DATE: May 20, 2025
 SUBJECT: The Bluffton MLK Observance Committee: 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival
 PROJECT MANAGER: Shannon Milroy, Budget, Grants & Procurement Administrator

Summarized below is the application from the Bluffton MLK Observance Committee for Accommodations Tax grant dollars in support of advertising, facilities, security and tourist transportation for the 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival.

Total Budget, per application: \$50,000

Requested Amount: \$23,000

Percentage of Request^: 46%

^Includes up to 100% for Advertising & Promotion plus up to 50% of remaining expenses

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category, per budget form		ATAC Recommends 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

*Reimbursement will be based on the estimated percentage of tourists provided for

Budgeted Expenses Summary:

Advertising & Promotion:

Total budget \$15,100

- Design of ads, local and national radio, social media, posters/signage, website and influencers

Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:

Total budget \$9,000

- Rentals of tent, stage, chairs, sound and audio equipment

Public Facilities:

Total budget \$2,750

- Temporary restrooms and sanitation expenses

Municipality and County Services:

Total budget \$1,600

- Event Security

Tourist Transportation:

Total budget \$400

- For Shuttles/Trolleys

Other/Ineligible Project Expenses:

Total budget \$18,500

- Expenses related to catering, entertainment, and photography

Table Rating (Scores 0-5 with 5 satisfying the qualifications best, exception Advertising 0-15)

Amount Recommended	Advertising (15)	Festival / Event (5)	Bluffton Event (5)	Tourism Draw % (5)	Benefit to Tourism (5)	Self-Sufficiency % (5)	Total of 40 possible	Comments
\$23,000	11	5	5	3	5	3	32	

Advertising: Of the requested funds, approximately 66% is related to advertising and promotion. Advertising will run on WSAV, WTOG, WHHI, WJCL, iHeart Radio (targeted markets of Bluffton, HHI, Savannah, Atlanta, Charlotte, Columbia, Charleston and Jacksonville), 94.5 Gospel FM and via Black Southern Belle (web and social).

Festival/Event: The annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival kicks off June 6 with a BBQ, Blues & Boots event followed by a weekend of events the following weekend: Black Food Truck Friday on June 13, the Bluffton Juneteenth Festival on June 14 and the Gullah Brunch on June 15.

Bluffton Event: Festival events will occur at various locations across Bluffton including Oyster Factory Park, Buckwalter Park, May River Road and Ma Daisy's Porch.

Tourism Draw %: The event has grown from less than 100 attendees at the inaugural event in 2015 to 5,000-7,500 in 2024 with over 40% being tourists. Tourists have come from Savannah, Charleston, Charlotte, South Florida, California, Baltimore and the Canary Islands.

Benefit to Tourism: Because this festival spans a weekend, local hotels are booked while Bluffton shops and restaurants are patroned resulting in increased revenues across the town.

Self-Sufficiency % (Financial Need): The request is 46% of the total projected festival budget of \$50,000. Other sources of income include sponsorships, donations, vendor and registration fees as well as in-kind contributions.

Previous Funding Amounts						
Fiscal Year	Requested Amount	% of Budget	Advisory Committee Recommendation	Town Council Approved	Expended	Comments
2024	\$20,000	41%	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$16,908.32	Final Report Submitted; Final Reimbursement Request Received/Paid
2023	\$20,000	40%	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$13,571.26	Final Report Submitted; Final Reimbursement Request Received/Paid
2022	\$28,400	60%	\$21,774	\$21,774	\$16,881.30	

Accommodations Tax Committee Recommendations and Comments:

The Committee recommends funding \$23,000 for the 10th Annual Bluffton Juneteenth Festival.