

ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE

STAFF REPORT

Department of Finance & Administration



MEETING DATE: November 18, 2025
 SUBJECT: Farmer's Market of Bluffton: 2026 Market Season
 PROJECT MANAGER: Shannon Milroy, Budget & Procurement Manager

Summarized below is the application from the Farmer's Market of Bluffton for Accommodations Tax grant dollars in support of their 2026 Market Season.

Total Budget, per application: \$172,775

Requested Amount: \$66,500

Percentage of Request^: 38%

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

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Budget per Category (based on Budget Form)		Budget per Category (based on Budget Form), corrected as needed
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$54,000		\$54,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	7,500		12,500**
Public Facilities	5,000	*	-
Municipality and County Services		*	
Tourist Transportation		*	
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	106,275		106,275
Total	\$172,775		\$172,775

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

Budgeted Expenses Summary, based on submitted Line-Item Budget Form:

Advertising & Promotion:

Total Budget: \$54,000

- Local and regional magazine ads, billboards, social media, email/text blasts, posters/signage, graphic design and web hosting.

Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:

Total Budget: \$7,500**

- Heyward House/Martin Family Park rental for market overflow is \$15,000 annually but half that total is donated in-kind for a net expense of \$7,500 per year
- The remaining \$5,000 is for support with rental of tents, tables, chairs, cones, etc.

Public Facilities

Total Budget: \$5,000

- Funds budgeted for Facility Support is moved to "Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events" on the chart above.

Other/Ineligible Project Expenses:

Total Budget: \$106,275

- Salaries and labor, accounting services, merchandise, insurance, administrative costs, as well as entertainment, equipment storage, and office space, which is donated in-kind.

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

Amount Requested	Advertising (15)	Festival / Event (5)	Bluffton Event (5)	Tourism Draw % (5)	Benefit to Tourism (5)	Self-Sufficiency % (5)	Total of 40 possible	Comments
\$66,500	9	5	5	4	5	4	32	

Advertising: Approximately 81% of requested funds will be spent on advertising, which will include ads in CB2/CH2, The HHI/Bluffton Sun, Sun City Sun, and Local Life. An ad will also run in the HHI/Bluffton Vacation Planner.

Festival/Event: Weekly event held every Thursday to attract and provide for tourists; in 2026, will be held from January 8th to December 17th

Bluffton Event: Held in Old Town Bluffton at Martin Family Park with overflow space provided at the Hayward House Common Grounds.

Tourism Draw %: Approximately 75%; data is collected informally by taking sample verbal zip code surveys at different times and different seasons when volunteers are available.

Benefit to Tourism: Market Day, held each Thursday, brings tourists from across the region who also explore local shops, restaurants and Bluffton's historic charm.

Self-Sufficiency % (Financial Need): Requesting approximately 38% of the total budget. Additional revenue streams include in-kind services and donations, contracted and daily sponsorships, vendor fees, table/tent rentals, merchandise sales and an AgSouth grant.

Previous Funding Amounts

Fiscal Year	Requested Amount	% of Budget	Advisory Committee Recommendation	Town Council Approved	Expended	Lapsed	Comments
2025	\$55,300	38%	\$55,300	\$55,300	\$20,971	n/a	2025 Market Season not yet complete; expenses thru August
2024	\$55,300	38%	\$55,300	\$55,300	\$32,360	\$22,940	Final Report Submitted
2023	\$50,500	40%	\$50,500	\$50,500	\$34,360	\$16,140	Final Report Submitted

Accommodations Tax Committee Recommendations and Comments:

The Committee recommends funding \$66,500 for the 2026 Market Season.

TOWN OF BLUFFTON ATAX GRANT APPLICATION SCORING SHEET

Entity: Farmer's Market of Bluffton

Project: 2026 Market Season

Project Type: Event/Festival

Scoring Category	Points Possible	Points Awarded
ADVERTISING	15	
Part 1: Five (5) points possible. Based on how much of the requested funds go toward advertising.		
0% of funds go toward advertising	0 points	
1% - 20% of funds go toward advertising	1 point	
21% - 40% of funds go toward advertising	2 points	
41% - 60% of funds go toward advertising	3 points	
61% - 80% of funds go toward advertising	4 points	
81% - 100% of funds go toward advertising	5 points	
Part 2: Ten (10) points possible. Based on where the advertising is placed.		
None of the funds go toward advertising	0 points	
Local newspapers/periodicals and electronic advertising (ex. Island Packet, The Bluffton Sun)	2 points	
Local guides/periodicals specifically geared toward tourists with a shelf life of more than 30 days	4 points	
Larger regional publications and electronic marketing within 100 miles (ex. Charleston or Savannah news outlets)	6 points	
Newspapers/periodicals/electronic marketing to large, metropolitan areas outside of 100 miles away (ex. Atlanta, Charlotte, Washington, D.C., Chicago)	8 points	
Nationally distributed newspapers/periodicals/electronic marketing (ex. USA Today, NY Times, Southern Living Magazine)	10 points	
TOURIST FACILITIES	15	
Higher point value given based on anticipated ratio of tourists to locals		
FESTIVAL/EVENT	5	
Higher point value given to requests for festivals or events		
Length of event/festival should be considered. Is it an all-day event versus a two-hour event? Multi-day event?		
BLUFFTON EVENT	5	
Higher point value given to events held within the town limits of Bluffton and/or spanning multiple locations		
TOURISM DRAW	5	
0% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected information	0 points	
1% - 20% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected info	1 point	
21% - 40% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected info	2 points	
41% - 60% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected info	3 points	
61% - 80% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected info	4 points	
81% - 100% of attendees are tourists based on historical or projected info	5 points	
BENEFIT TO TOURISM (LOCAL ECONOMY)	5	
Higher point value given to events that encourage overnight stays and/or have local business participation		
SELF SUFFIECIENCY	5	
100% of budget from ATAX request	0 points	
80% - 99% of budget from ATAX request	1 point	
60% - 79% of budget from ATAX request	2 points	
40% - 59% of budget from ATAX request	3 points	
20% - 39% of budget from ATAX request	4 points	
1% - 19% of budget from ATAX request	5 points	
MISCELLANEOUS	10	
Only use if applicant does not qualify as a festival/event		
Group Average Point Total (out of a possible 40 points)		0
Group Average Percentage		