

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Finance & Administration Department



MEETING DATE:	December 10, 2024
PROJECT:	Consideration of Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations for Quarter Ending September 30, 2024
PROJECT MANAGER:	Natalie Majorkiewicz, CGFO, 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 Organizations	Requested Amount	Recommended Amount
Farmers Market of Bluffton: 2025 Expenses	\$ 55,300	\$ 55,300
The New Bluffton Worship: Christmas Eve Under the Stars	28,810	25,100
Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out	27,000	27,000
Congregation Beth Yam: Second Annual Bluffton Hannukah Celebration	2,980	2,830
Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum	40,000	40,000
May River Theatre, Inc.: Advertising & Royalty Funding for 2025 Season	42,826	42,826
Total for the Quarter	\$196,916	\$193,056

BACKGROUND:

In accordance with the grant process, the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee (ATAC) held a meeting on November 19, 2024 to review the quarterly applications. There were six (6) applications to review and make recommendations of funding to Town Council.

ATAC voted and unanimously approved the 2025 calendar to include the time applications are due from noon to 5 pm on the due date.

Additionally, staff provided options to update the current scoring sheet and methods for the committee to review.

Funds Currently Available for Distribution:

When comparing the State Accommodations Tax collections for the quarter ending September 2024 to the same quarter of last year, the revenues are up \$14,368 or approximately 5.6%.

Total estimated State Accommodations Tax funds currently available for distribution are \$697,140 as outlined in the following chart:

State ATAX	
Remaining from Previous Qtr.	\$ 574,689
1 st Quarter Revenue	269,901
First \$25k to General Fund*	(25,000)
5% to General Fund	(12,245)
30% to DMO	(73,470)
15% to Town of Bluffton – Housing	(36,735)
Total State ATAX Funds Remaining for Distribution	\$ 697,140

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

Funds Requested for Distribution:

❑ Farmers Market of Bluffton requests \$55,300 to support advertising and promotion of tourism and facility support for the weekly Farmers Markets.

- The total budget for the project is \$147,600 with approximately 37.5% or \$55,300 being requested.
- The Markets will be held every Thursday from January 9, 2025 through December 18, 2025 at Martin Family Park.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$43,200 for newspaper, magazines, social media, newsletter, and text alerts expenses.
 - “Facilities for Civic & Cultural Events” budgeted at \$20,000 in support for market overflow rental fees at the Heyward House, tents, chairs, safety signage, and other expenses to facilitate the markets for visitors to safely enjoy.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$55,300 as presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$43,200		\$43,200
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	20,000		12,100
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	84,400		N/A
Total	\$147,600		\$55,300

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

❑ **The New Bluffton Worship is requesting \$28,810 in support of the Christmas Under the Stars Project with ATAC recommending \$25,100.**

- The total budget for the project is \$46,410 with approximately 61.8% or \$28,810 being requested.
- ATAC recommended below the requested amount due to ineligible expenses.
- The event will be held at Oyster Factory Park the evening of December 24, 2024.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$11,000 for banners, postcard mailers, social media posts, and newspaper and magazine ad expenses.
 - “Facilities for Civic & Cultural Events” budgeted at \$14,100 in support for rentals for stage, tent, and chairs.
 - “Municipality and County Services” budgeted at \$960 for security at the event, which will be covered by Local ATax funds.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$25,100 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$11,000		\$11,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	14,100		14,100
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	960	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	20,350		N/A
Total	\$46,410		\$25,100

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

❑ **Society of Bluffton Artists is requesting \$27,000 in support of the Getting the Word Out Project.**

- The total budget for the project is \$233,195 with approximately 11.6% or \$27,000 being requested.
- This request is from January through August 2025 to better align with the organization’s fiscal year, which begins September 1.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$27,000 for The Bluffton Sun, Bluffton Today, Local Life Magazine, Explore Bluffton, Bluffton Guide, LowCountry Weekly, and VisitBluffton.org as well as social media ads, spots on radio and WHHI-TV, flyers and posters expenses.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$27,000 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$27,000		\$27,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	-		-
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	206,195		N/A
Total	\$233,195		\$27,000

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

□ Congregation Beth Yam is requesting \$2,980 in support of the Second Annual Bluffton Hannukah Celebration Project with ATAC recommending \$2,830.

- The total budget for the project is \$6,730 with approximately 44.3% or \$2,980 being requested.
- The event will take place on the evening of December 29, 2024 at Martin Family Park.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$800 for newspaper advertising in The Bluffton Sun and The Hilton Head Sun as well as social media posts expenses.
 - “Facilities for Civic & Cultural Events” budgeted at \$14,100 in support for rentals for stage, tent, and chairs.
 - “Municipality and County Services” budgeted at \$900 for security at the event, which will be covered by Local Atax funds.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$2,830 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$800		\$800
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	2,030		2,030
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	900	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	3,000		N/A
Total	\$6,730		\$2,830

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

❑ **Historic Bluffton Foundation is requesting \$40,000 in support of Heyward House Museum operations.**

- The total annual budget for the organization is \$599,600. Quarterly, the budget is \$149,900 with approximately 26.7% or \$40,000 being requested. Eighty thousand has been previously awarded in total for quarters 1 and 2 of fiscal year 2025.
- This request is for operational support from January 1, 2025 through March 31, 2025 for Heyward House Museum and not as the Town's Welcome Center.
- Eligible "tourism-related expenditures" include:
 - "Advertising and promotion of tourism" budgeted at \$12,000 for ads in local newspapers and magazines, regional magazines, social media posts, printing and walking maps expenses.
 - "Facilities for Civic & Cultural Events" budgeted at \$452,900 and includes:
 - Drawings, plans and construction structural repairs (\$248,600) as well as other facility repairs (\$20,300); a SC Parks Grant is budgeted as revenue for the structural repairs.
 - Operational expenses such as salary and benefits and repairs for the Heyward House Museum.
 - "Municipality and County Services" budgeted at \$2,800 for trash as well as security services.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$40,000 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$12,000		\$-
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	452,900		40,000
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	2,800	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	131,900		N/A
Total	\$599,600		\$40,000

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

❑ **May River Theatre, Inc. requests \$42,826 to support advertising and promotion expenses for the 2025 season.**

- The total budget for the project is \$135,536 with approximately 31.6% or \$42,826 being requested.
- There are five (5) main shows to include The Full Monty, Sheila's Island, Spring Awakening, Baskerville, and Reefer Madness.
- Four (4) supporting, one acts are planned, including Series of One Acts, a one act musical, Christmas show, and Rocky Horror shadow cast.

- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$26,085 for graphic design of advertisements and publication in Local Life, Pink and CH2 Magazines and The Bluffton Sun as well as creation of posters and rack cards expenses.
 - “Facilities for Civic & Cultural Events” budgeted at \$22,934 which includes royalties for each show.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$42,826 presented in the chart below:

Eligible Tourism-Related Expense Categories (per SC Code of Laws)	Total Budget for Category		ATAC Recommendation
Advertising & Promotion of Tourism or Arts and Cultural Events	\$26,085		\$23,592
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events	22,934		19,234
Public Facilities	-		-
Municipality and County Services	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation	-	*	-
Other/Ineligible Project Expenses	86,517		N/A
Total	\$135,536		\$42,826

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance. N/A – Not Applicable.

NEXT STEPS:

Town Staff will notify organizations of award amount and requirements.

SUMMARY:

Below are the applications received for quarter ending September 30, 2024 and ATAC’s recommendation for each:

Requesting Organizations	Requested Amount	Recommended Amount
Farmers Market of Bluffton: 2025 Expenses	\$ 55,300	\$ 55,300
The New Bluffton Worship: Christmas Eve Under the Stars	28,810	25,100
Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out	27,000	27,000
Congregation Beth Yam: Second Annual Bluffton Hannukah Celebration	2,980	2,830
Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum	40,000	40,000
May River Theatre, Inc.: Advertising & Royalty Funding for 2025 Season	42,826	42,826
Total for the Quarter	\$196,916	\$193,056

ATTACHMENTS:

1. ATAC draft meeting minutes from November 19, 2024
2. Approved 2025 ATAC Meeting Dates
3. Farmers Market of Bluffton: 2025 Expenses Grant Application
4. Farmers Market of Bluffton: 2025 Expenses ATAC Staff Report
5. The New Bluffton Worship: Christmas Eve Under the Stars Grant Application
6. The New Bluffton Worship: Christmas Eve Under the Stars ATAC Staff Report
7. Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out Grant Application
8. Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out ATAC Staff Report
9. Congregation Beth Yam: Second Annual Hannukah Celebration Grant Application
10. Congregation Beth Yam: Second Annual Hannukah Celebration ATAC Staff Report
11. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum Grant Application
12. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Heyward House Museum ATAC Staff Report
13. May River Theatre, Inc.: Advertising & Royalty for 2025 Season Grant Application
14. May River Theatre, Inc.: Advertising & Royalty for 2025 Season ATAC Staff Report
15. ATAC Scoring Table Rating Matrix
16. Previously Funded Grant Listing
17. Recommended Motions