

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Finance & Administration Department



MEETING DATE:	September 09, 2025
PROJECT:	Consideration of Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations for Quarter Ending June 30, 2025
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 Organization	Amount Requested	Amount Recommended
Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: Project Face-Lift (Tabled from prior quarter)	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Coastal Conservation Association: 2024 Conservation Weekend	10,000	10,000
Society of Bluffton Artists: FY2026 Getting the Word Out-Part 2	40,000	40,000
Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival: 2025 Arts & Seafood Festival	80,000	80,000
Campbell Chapel Community Development Ministry: Historic Campbell Chapel Restoration and Rehabilitation	109,000	109,000
Campbell Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church: 162 nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church	10,000	10,000
Historic Bluffton Foundation: Fall Tour of Homes	6,500	6,500
Total for Quarter Ending June 30, 2025	\$ 275,500	\$ 275,500

BACKGROUND:

In accordance with the grant process, the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee (ATAC) held a meeting on August 19, 2025 to review the quarterly applications. There were seven (7) applications to review and make recommendations of funding to Town Council.

Funds Currently Available for Distribution:

When comparing the State Accommodations Tax collections for the quarter ending June 2025 to the same quarter of last year, the revenues are down \$21,624 or approximately 4.5%, but overall, for fiscal year 2025, revenues were up \$56,203 or 5.1%.

Total estimated State Accommodations Tax funds currently available for distribution are \$657,128 as outlined in the following chart:

State ATAX	
Remaining from Previous Quarters	\$ 422,317
3 rd Quarter Revenue	435,462
First \$25k to General Fund*	N/A
5% to General Fund	(21,773)
30% to DMO	(130,639)
15% to Town of Bluffton – Housing	(65,319)
Lapsed Grants	17,080
Total State ATAX Funds Remaining for Distribution	\$ 657,128

* 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 requests \$20,000 to support advertising and promotion and facilities for civic and cultural events expenses for the Phase III refurbishing of the MC Riley Commemorative Garden and Wall.**

- The site was erected in 2002 at the former Black High School site and includes a SC Historical Roadside Marker.
- Annually, the association hosts a Blue and Gold Dinner Banquet or an All-Classes Reunion Tailgate Picnic at the MC Riley Park.
- This request is approximately 28% of Phase III's \$72,000 budget.
- Total visitors for prior alumni events were approximately 25%.
- Eligible "tourism-related expenditures" include:
 - "Advertising and promotion of tourism" is budgeted at \$3,500 radio and mailer communication of the facility revitalization.
 - "Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events" is budgeted at \$27,710 for additional flag poles, wrought iron fencing, extended oyster tabby concrete flooring, a bronze cast iron plate with the names of all MC Riley graduates, and a lighting system for nighttime illumination.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$20,000 presented in the chart below:

MC Riley Commemorative Garden and Wall Refurbishing – Phase III	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (approx. 27.8% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 3,500		\$ 3,500
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	27,710		16,500
Public Facilities:	-	*	-
Municipality and County Services:	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation:	-	*	-
Project Expenses:	40,790		N/A
Total	\$ 72,000		\$ 20,000

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance

N/A – Not Applicable

☐ **Coastal Conservation Association requests \$10,000 to support advertising and promotion of tourism for Celebrating Conservation Weekend in Bluffton.**

- This event is scheduled to be held September 19-21, 2025 in Old Town Bluffton.
- Approximately 30% of attendees were from out of town for the 2024 event.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” \$10,000 recommended.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$10,000 presented in the chart below:

Celebrating Conservation Weekend in Bluffton	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (approx. 11% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 10,000		\$ 10,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	20,000		
Public Facilities:		*	
Municipality and County Services:		*	
Tourist Transportation:		*	
Project Expenses:	60,095		N/A
Total	\$ 90,095		\$ 10,000

N/A – Not Applicable

☐ **Society of Bluffton Artists is requesting \$40,000 in support of the Getting the Word Out Project Part 2 from September 1, 2025 through August 31, 2026.**

- The total budget for the project is \$226,705 with approximately 5.7% or \$40,000 being requested.
- This request is from September 2025 through August 2026 to align with the organization’s fiscal year, which begins September 1.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” budgeted at \$40,446 for print and digital advertising as well as social media ads, eblasts, mailers, flyers, and posters.

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

SOBA – FY2026 Getting the Word Out	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (approx. 5.7% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 40,446		\$ 40,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	-		-
Public Facilities:	-		-
Municipality and County Services:	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation:	-	*	-
Project Expenses:	186,259		N/A
Total	\$ 226,705		\$ 40,000

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

□ **Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival Inc. requests \$80,000 to support advertising and promotion, facilities for civic and cultural events, municipal and county services, public facilities, and tourist transportation service expenses for the 2025 Arts & Seafood Festival.**

- This year's event takes place over nine days held October 11-19, 2025.
- This year's request is 35% of the \$229,700 budget.
- Total visitors for the 2024 festival was approximately 40%.
- Eligible "tourism-related expenditures" include:
 - "Advertising and promotion of tourism" is budgeted at \$79,000.
 - "Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events" is budgeted at \$10,000 for rentals.
 - "Public facilities" is budgeted at \$10,500 for parking, trash, and additional restrooms.
 - "Municipality services" is budgeted at \$11,000 for additional security.
 - "Tourist Transportation" is budgeted at \$5,000 for shuttle expenses.

The committee voted 6-0 with Parker recusing to recommend a total award of \$80,000 presented in the chart below:

Historic Arts & Seafood Festival - 2025	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (approx. 35% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 79,000		\$ 70,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	10,000		1,000
Public Facilities:	10,500	*	4,200
Municipality and County Services:	11,000	*	2,000
Tourist Transportation:	7,000	*	2,800
Project Expenses:	112,200		N/A
Total	\$ 229,700		\$ 80,000

* Based on percentage directly related to tourist attendance

N/A – Not Applicable

□ **Campbell Chapel Community Development Ministry is requesting \$109,000 in support of phase 3 of the restoration and rehabilitation of the Historic Campbell Chapel.**

- The overall project is broken down into five phases and this request is for phase 3 that consists of exterior removals and restoration budgeted at \$694,493.
- Total project costs budgeted at \$2,115,313 have been adjusted for inflation and the need to address new construction issues/discoveries since the original budget created in 2023 assisted by the project architect, James O. McGhee and Landmark Preservation LLC.
- Additional support of \$375,000 is being requested from Beaufort County for this phase.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events” is budgeted at \$694,493 with \$109,000 being requested in support.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$109,000 presented in the chart below:

Restoration of the Historic Campbell Chapel – Phase 3	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (15.7% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ -		\$ -
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	694,493		109,000
Public Facilities:	-	*	-
Municipality and County Services:	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation:	-	*	-
Project Expenses:	-		N/A
Total	\$ 694,493		\$ 109,000

N/A – Not Applicable

□ **Campbell Chapel AME Church is requesting \$10,000 in support of the 162nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church.**

- The conference is a weekend event held September 17 – 20, 2025 at the historic Campbell Chapel AME Church in Bluffton.
- The event is expected to draw approximately 1,000 participants and a minimum of 150 hotel rooms have been reserved.
- This request is approximately 12% of the conference’s \$80,300 total budget.
- Eligible “tourism-related expenditures” include:
 - “Advertising and promotion of tourism” is budgeted at \$9,600 for posters/banners/signage, printing and distribution of materials.
 - “Public facilities” is budgeted at \$2,000 for parking at three locations.
 - “Municipality services” is budgeted at \$6,000 for additional security.

The committee voted unanimously to recommend a total award of \$10,000 presented in the chart below:

162nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (12% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 9,600		\$ 7,000
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	-		-
Public Facilities:	2,000	*	2,000
Municipality and County Services:	4,000	*	1,000
Tourist Transportation:	-	*	-
Project Expenses:	62,700		N/A
Total	\$ 80,300		\$ 10,000

N/A – Not Applicable

❑ **Historic Bluffton Foundation (HBF) requests \$6,500 to support the Fall Tour of Homes event.**

- The one-day event will take place on Saturday, October 4, 2025.
- The tour will include various homes located within Old Town Bluffton starting at The Heyward House.
- This is the inaugural event with 300 attendees anticipated.
- The request is approximately 40% of the event's \$16,250 budget.
- Eligible "tourism-related expenditures" include:
 - "Advertising and promotion of tourism" is budgeted at \$4,500 for digital and print ads, flyers, and social media.
 - "Facilities for civic and cultural vents" is budgeted at \$3,500 for tables and chairs.
 - "Public Facilities" is budgeted at \$400 for trash.

The committee unanimously voted to recommend a total award of \$6,500 presented in the chart below:

Fall Tour of Homes	Total Budget		Recommended ATAX Grant (40% of project budget)
Advertising and Promotion of Tourism:	\$ 4,500		\$ 4,500
Facilities for Civic and Cultural Events:	3,500		2,000
Public Facilities:	400	*	-
Municipality and County Services:	-	*	-
Tourist Transportation:	-	*	-
Project Expenses:	7,850		N/A
Total	\$ 16,250		\$ 6,500

NEXT STEPS:

Town Staff will notify organizations of award amount and requirements.

SUMMARY:

Below are the applications received for quarter ending June 30, 2025 and ATAC's recommendation for each:

Requesting Organization	Amount Requested	Amount Recommended
Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: Project Face-Lift (Tabled from prior quarter)	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000
Coastal Conservation Association: 2024 Conservation Weekend	10,000	10,000
Society of Bluffton Artists: FY2026 Getting the Word Out-Part 2	40,000	40,000
Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival: 2025 Arts & Seafood Festival	80,000	80,000
Campbell Chapel Community Development Ministry: Historic Campbell Chapel Restoration and Rehabilitation	109,000	109,000
Campbell Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church: 162 nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church	10,000	10,000
Historic Bluffton Foundation: Fall Tour of Homes	6,500	6,500
Total for Quarter Ending June 30, 2025	\$ 275,500	\$ 275,500

ATTACHMENTS:

1. ATAC draft meeting minutes from August 19, 2025
2. Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: Project Face-Lift Phase III Grant Application
3. Michael C. Riley High School Alumni Association: Project Face-Lift Phase III ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
4. Coastal Conservation Association: Celebrating Conservation Weekend in Bluffton Grant Application
5. Coastal Conservation Association: Celebrating Conservation Weekend in Bluffton ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
6. Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out FY2026 Grant Application
7. Society of Bluffton Artists: Getting the Word Out FY2026 Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
8. Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival: 2025 Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival Grant Application
9. Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival: 2025 Historic Bluffton Arts & Seafood Festival ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
10. Campbell Chapel Community Development Ministry: Historic Campbell Chapel Restoration and Rehabilitation Project Grant Application
11. Campbell Chapel Community Development Ministry: Historic Campbell Chapel Restoration and Rehabilitation Project ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
12. Campbell Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church: 162nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church Grant Application
13. Campbell Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church: 162nd South Carolina Conference of the AME Church ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
14. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Fall Tour of Homes Grant Application
15. Historic Bluffton Foundation: Fall Tour of Homes ATAC Staff Report and Scoring Sheet
16. Previously Funded Grant Listing
17. Recommended Motions