

## **ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**August 27, 2020**

The Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee meeting of August 27, 2020 was conducted as a video conference and was simultaneously made available to the public via YouTube live stream, all in keeping with practices adopted to address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting called to order at 1:00 p.m. by the Committee Chair, Sue Ingram. A quorum of the members attended the meeting. Other Committee members attending were – Randall Buck, Joe Pontuti, Ron Schildge, Stuart Spisak and Patsy Zanetti. Councilman Barry Goldstein also participated in the meeting.

Chair Sue Ingram turned the meeting over to the Town Administrator. Town Administrator Cronin introduced Barry Goldstein, who has been assigned the role of Town Council liaison to the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee.

The Town Administrator stated that he has begun working on the 2021 draft budget and he showed the 2021 State Accommodations Tax Fund Summary on the screen. He first recapped how the gross amount of State Accommodations was divided, with the first \$25,000 (in the Town's third quarter) and 5% of each check going into the Town's General Fund. The balance is divided into 30% that is to go to a tourism/advertising type entity, in our case, the Charleston Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau (CACVB), and 65% is used by the Town for tourism related expenditures. For the other three quarters of the year, the State Accommodations Tax is divided up with 5% going to the Town, 30% to the CACVB and 65% that the Town uses for tourism related expenditures. The Accommodation's Tax Advisory Committee gives Town Council recommendations on how the 65% amount should be spent.

Due to the pandemic, the Town amended their 2020 budget and the projected amount for this year was reduced from a total of \$143,000 to \$76,400. For 2021, we are estimating that the Town will receive a total of \$120,000 in State Accommodations Tax and the amount available for the Advisory Committee's recommendations is projected to be \$61,750. The total of all the requests received by the Town is \$128,750. The Town Administrator noted that Town Council held a budget workshop on August 18 and their recommendation was for the Advisory Committee to base their recommendations on anticipated revenue of \$61,750.

Town Administrator Cronin explained that Charleston County has notified the Town that they would not be disbursing any County Accommodations Tax in the last half of 2020 nor the first half of 2021. It is uncertain when the County will resume distributions. Since the Town has been using County Accommodations Tax for Beach Patrol, the Town will have to budget more coming from State Accommodation's Tax and their General Fund in 2021 and will have to

continue to do so. At the Budget Workshop, Council stressed that Town Council's highest priority was to maintain the current level of Beach Patrol.

Chair Sue Ingram asked representatives for the organizations requesting Accommodations Tax funds for 2021 to begin their presentations.

- **Bohicket Merchant's Association** – Tim Stearns, representing the Bohicket Merchant's Association, stated that he would like to withdraw their request for \$15,000 considering the Town's budget and the limited amount of State Accommodations Tax funds available for 2021.
- **Bohicket Marina & Marketplace** – Beau Anderson and Kaitlyn Harris, from Bohicket Marketplace & Marina, presented a request for \$15,000 for the Bohicket Invitational Billfish Tournament. The date for the tournament will May 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and would be the first event in the South Carolina Governor's Cup Billfish Series. The Marina expects to host approximately 50 fishing boats coming from up and down the east coast.
- **Alan Fleming Tournament Committee/Club at Seabrook Island** – Debbie Pickens, who is chair for the 2021 Alan Fleming Senior Clay Court Tournament, presented a request for a contribution of \$15,000. The Alan Fleming Tournament Committee cancelled the 2020 event since there was no safe way to proceed with the tournament and most of the players would not commit until late September. The budget for the 2021 event is \$74,063, compared to a budget of \$62,625 in 2020. The increase is primarily due to safety precautions that will be taken to hold the tournament safely.
- **Turtle Patrol Tourist Information** – Bill Nelson, Treasurer of the Turtle Patrol, requested a contribution of up to \$2,000 to purchase t-shirts for the members of the Turtle Patrol. Mr. Nelson stated that a key part of the Turtle Patrol's mission is to inform the public to gain their support in protecting the Loggerhead turtles. The t-shirts, worn by members of the group, makes them easily identifiable so that visitors to Seabrook Island can ask questions or observe members in nest support activities. He remarked that some visitors even ask when the Loggerhead turtles nest so that they can visit Seabrook Island during that time.

The Town Administrator presented the following applications from the Town:

- **Town of Seabrook Island Beach Patrol Services** – The Town is asking for \$60,000 to go toward Beach Patrol in 2021. The Town feels that the beach is the primary driver for bringing visitors to Seabrook Island. Members of the Beach Patrol are not only trained and certified lifeguards but assist with law enforcement issues, assist with injured wildlife, enforce ordinances relating to any type beach rules, etc. The Beach Patrol are in place from April 1 through September 30 and the Town currently spends about \$138,000 on the Beach Patrol contract. Total cost for Beach Patrol for 2021 is estimated

to be \$145,000 with \$60,000 coming from State Accommodations Tax, \$5,000 from the balance left in County Accommodation's Tax and \$80,000 from the General Fund.

- **Town of Seabrook Island Fourth of July Celebration** – Town Administrator Cronin stated that the Town currently partners with the Seabrook Island Club to host this event with the intended goal of bringing visitors to Seabrook Island during this period. It is usually a popular and well attended event. The Town pays for the fireworks (\$16,500), services of policemen and firemen and shares the cost for shuttles, to and from the event, with the Seabrook Island Club. The Town paid a deposit of \$8,250 for the 2020 fireworks, which were cancelled because of the pandemic, and this deposit will be carried over to 2021 and the Town will just be required to pay the balance for the fireworks in 2021. The amount being requested from State Accommodations Tax is \$11,750. The event is planned for July 3, 2021, with a rain date of July 5, 2021.
- **Town of Seabrook Island Dolphin Education Program** – This application is for the continuation of the Dolphin Education Program and the request is for \$10,000. This program began several years ago, at the request of the Federal Government, because of an incident where individuals were harassing the dolphins while the dolphins were strand feeding at Cap'n Sams Inlet. This is a unique behavior and Seabrook Island is one of the few places where this behavior can be seen. Tourists come to the island for the sole purpose of seeing the dolphins strand feed. The Town Administrator stated that a film crew, who are filing a documentary on unique and unusual things about wildlife, will be visiting Seabrook Island and Kiawah Island in the next couple of weeks to film dolphins strand feeding as part of their southeastern episode. Since this documentary will be broadcast to a world-wide audience, it will likely produce more interest in seeing this behavior.

The presenters were excused so that the Committee could determine their recommendations for Town Council.

- **Alan Fleming Tournament Committee/Club at Seabrook Island** – Request \$15,000  
Ron Schiledge made a motion to approve \$12,500 toward the 2021 Alan Fleming Tournament. Patsy Zanetti seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Turtle Patrol Tourist Information** – Request \$2,000  
Stuart Spisak made a motion to approve \$2,000 for Turtle Patrol t-shirts. Patsy Zanetti seconded the motion. Joe Pontuti suggested that, since this was the first year the Turtle Patrol had applied for money and there was less money, perhaps the amount recommended should be less. Ron Schiledge added that they did have other sources for obtaining funds and Bill Nelson, who made the presentation, said the group would appreciate whatever the Town was willing to give them. Stuart Spisak amended his motion to approve \$1,000 to the Turtle Patrol. Patsy Zanetti seconded the motion. The motion carried with one person voting against the motion.

- **Bohicket Marine & Market Place- Billfish Tournament** – Request \$15,000  
There was discussion about the amount to be recommended, with Joe Pontuti suggesting \$5,000 and Patsy Zanetti suggesting \$10,000. Randall Buck made a motion to approve \$7,500. Stuart Spisak seconded the motion. The motion carried with one person voting against.
- **Town of Seabrook Island Dolphin Education Program** – Request \$10,000  
Randall Buck made a motion to approve \$10,000 for the Dolphin Education Program. Stuart Spisak seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Town of Seabrook Island Fourth of July Celebration** – Request \$11,500  
Randall Buck made a motion to approve \$4,000 in hopes of getting the Seabrook Island Property Owners Association and the Seabrook Island Club to help with the cost due to the Town's budget constraints for 2021. Stuart Spisak seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Town of Seabrook Island Beach Patrol Services** – Request \$60,000  
Stuart Spisak moved to approve \$26,750 for Beach Patrol Services. Patsy Zanetti seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.

Sue Ingram, Chair of the Committee, stated that the Town Administrator would let her know when a meeting should be held in 2021 so that he has the Committee's recommendations before the budget is finalized. Town Administrator Cronin noted that, in 2021, the process would start about two months earlier because of the Town election being held in November.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Faye Allbritton, Town Clerk