

ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

November 14, 2018

The Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee met on November 14, 2018, and was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Committee Chair, Sue Ingram. Other members in attendance included Randall Buck, Jim Eisenhauer and Joe Pontuti. Town Administrator, Joe Cronin, and Town Clerk, Faye Allbritton, also attended.

Since Councilman John Wells was not able to attend and give introductory remarks, Town Administrator Cronin began presentations for the Town's requests for State Accommodations Tax funds.

Mr. Cronin presented the following requests for the Town of Seabrook Island:

- **Funds to be used for beach patrol services in the amount of \$40,000.00.**

- Beach patrol services are anticipated to be provided by Island Beach Services, LLC (IBS), under contract with the Town of Seabrook Island, and funds will be used to pay 30% of the total contract price for those services.
- Presence of the beach patrol will provide visitors a sense of wellbeing knowing that US Lifeguard Association certified patrol members, trained in basic first aid, are readily available in the event of an emergency.
- The beach patrol will also provide a safe beach environment by rendering assistance to those in need, calling for assistance, as necessary, from appropriate law enforcement entities, enforcing the Town's beach ordinances and responding to requests for assistance from beach goers.
- IBS provided patrol services in the Town of Seabrook Island during 2017 and 2018 as well as the Town of Kiawah Island.
- They will provide services for code enforcement, water rescue, and general assistance to beach goers during peak tourist seasons.
 - March 9, 2019 – March 30, 2019: Weekend Days Only
 - March 31, 2019 – September 3, 2019: Daily
 - September 6, 2019 – September 29, 2019: Weekend Days Only
- Members of IBS will be commissioned by the Town as code enforcement officers. In the event a custodial arrest is required, law enforcement services will be provided by Charleston County Sheriff's Deputies. Any expenses so incurred will be paid for under existing contracts with Charleston County.
- During the above time period, Seabrook Island experiences a high concentration of tourism activity, approximately 66% of those using the beaches.
- It is expected that total number of beach visits during peak travel season will well exceed 100,000 in 2019.
- Accommodation Tax funds will pay for 66% of cost of providing this service.
- Total cost of beach patrol contract proposed to be funded below:

State ATAX (requested)	\$40,000.00
County ATAX	\$60,000.00
General Fund Beach Patrol	<u>\$29,808.00</u>
Total	\$129,808.00

- **Funds to be used for Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration in the amount of \$20,000.**
 - Purpose of this event is to provide fireworks and associated services for a July 4th celebration in the Town of Seabrook Island.
 - Primary goals are to encourage tourists to visit and stay in Seabrook Island during the July 4th holiday in a safe, accessible and welcoming environment; provide an opportunity for visitors to observe the holiday inside the town limits rather than traveling outside the Town to watch fireworks displays in other areas, thereby keeping disposable spending at local accommodations and restaurants; and to support other events and activities taking place in the Town during the holiday week.
 - The location of the fireworks display on the grounds of the Seabrook Island Club has proved a superior location with excellent viewing opportunities and adequate facilities to serve the large number of attendees.
 - Date of fireworks display will be July 3, with a rain date of July 5.
 - Estimated total attendance is 4,400, total tourist attendance of 2,860 (65%), tourist/visitor dollars to community \$572,000.00.
 - Total budget for event is below:

Fireworks display	\$16,500.00
St. Johns Fire Dept. & Charleston County	\$ 2,000.00
Sheriff's Office personnel for safety	
Transportation & other event logistics	<u>\$ 1,500.00</u>
Total	\$20,000.00

- **Funds for Charleston Regional Visitors Guide Full Page Ad in the amount of \$10,000.**
 - The purpose of this request is to purchase a full-page color advertisement in the 2019 Official Charleston Area Visitors Guide, which is published annually by the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB).
 - The Guide has a total annual distribution of 650,000 copies and is distributed primarily through direct inquiries (by mail), local hotels & concierge desks, Charleston Area Visitor Centers, meeting, convention & tour groups, SC welcome centers, travel agents, Charleston international Airport & cruise ship terminal.
 - The Town will also be highlighted on the CVB's website at www.charlestoncvb.com
 - The goal is to generate additional tourism in the Town of Seabrook Island by advertising and promoting the Town as a destination to current and prospective visitors to the Charleston region.
 - The advertisement will be visible to current and prospective visitors to the Charleston region for the entire year.
 - It is estimated to produce approximately 100 visitors with \$140,000.00 to the community.

- **Funds for Dolphin Education Program in the amount of \$10,000.00.**
 - Seabrook Island is one of the few locations in the southeast where Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphins are known to strand feed on a regular basis and the ability to see dolphins strand feeding in their natural environment continues to draw visitors to the Town of Seabrook Island. This activity has generated a significant amount of exposure at both the regional and national level, including coverage on the National Geographic Channel and other major media outlets.
 - Primary goals and objectives for this project are to maintain environments that encourage dolphins to continue strand feeding without interference or disturbance from tourists and residents; provide educational outreach on and near beaches where dolphins are known to strand feed, as well as distribution of materials to visitors and residents throughout the

Seabrook Island Community and collect data to better understand this unique strand feeding behavior.

- The above data will allow the Town to monitor the impact of human activity on dolphin behavior, provide better protection of the dolphin's natural habitat, and ensure that strand feeding remains an experience that visitors to Seabrook Island may continue to experience.
- Expected attendance January-March 2019: 450; April-September 2019: 2,730; October-December 2019: 460 for a total of 3,640 (Based on 15 visitors per day in peak months and 5 visitors per day in off-peak months). Education activities will be at their highest during the peak tourist season (April-September), and lower during the off-peak season (October-December).
- The program will enhance visitor and tourist trade by encouraging visitors to safely and responsibly view strand feeding dolphins; protect an environment which encourages strand feeding by minimizing human interaction, interference and harassment during important foraging activities; preserve this extremely unique viewing experience for tourists; and allow Seabrook Island to become leaders in this conservation effort.
- Implementation of an educational program will involve monitoring the beach during peak times for strand feeding, observing and recording dolphin behavior, and informing tourists and residents about the proper way to maintain a safe viewing distance.
- Education materials will be available and provided to local residents and businesses, both directly and at local events on Seabrook Island.
- Educational services will be provided by the Lowcountry Marine Mammal Network (LMMN) under contract with the Town of Seabrook Island. LMMN currently manage a similar program with the Town of Kiawah Island.
- Additional support such as Sheriff's Deputies and Beach Patrol Enforcement may be required during the provision of educational services if dolphin monitors observe disruptive or illegal activities. Any such expenses will be paid for under existing contracts with Charleston County and/or Island Beach Services

Action Taken:

- **Funds to be used for beach patrol services** – Randall Buck moved to recommend a contribution of \$40,000 to be used for Town's beach patrol (Island Beach Services, LLC). Joe Pontuti seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Funds to be used for Fourth of July fireworks celebration** – Jim Eisenhauer moved to recommend a contribution of \$20,000 for July fireworks. Randall Buck seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Funds to be used for Charleston Regional Visitors Guide full-page ad** – Joe Pontuti moved to recommend a contribution of \$10,000 for a full-page ad in the Charleston Regional Visitors Guide. Randall Buck seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- **Funds to be used for Dolphin Education Program** – Randall Buck moved to recommend a contribution of \$10,000 to be used for the Dolphin Education Program. Jim Eisenhauer seconded the motion and the vote to approve was unanimous.

The committee determined a date will be set in early September of 2019 for the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee to meet to hear all requests for Accommodation Tax funds for the year 2020.

The Committee Chair will contact the Charleston Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau and request they attend the September meeting of the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee to learn about their marketing efforts for the Town of Seabrook Island.

Respectfully submitted,
Faye Allbritton, Town Clerk