

**ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES**  
**February 13, 2018**

The Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee meeting of February 13, 2018, was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by the Committee Chair, Sue Ingram. Other Committee members attending were: Randall Buck, Jim Eisenhauer, Joe Pontuti, Ron Schildge, and Patsy Zinetti.

Chairman Ingram declared a quorum was present and introduced John Wells, who is the Town Council liaison to the Committee. Councilman Wells explained that the Town of Seabrook Island has available state accommodation tax funds of over \$160,000. Requests to be heard at this meeting are for funding for projects the Town of Seabrook Island would like to perform in the 2018 fiscal year, and if approved the town's 2018 budget would be adjusted appropriately.

Councilman Wells introduced Joe Cronin, Town Administrator, to the committee and explained that Mr. Cronin would be presenting the requests to the committee. Mr. Cronin reported that the town recently received a payment of \$50,000 from Charleston County, an amount that had been paid to the county by the state, when it should have been paid to the town. These funds have been sitting in the accommodations tax funds with no anticipated usage. State Accommodation tax funds must be used within two years of receipt or they will be lost to the town, with a possibility of penalties from the state and a loss of accommodation tax funds in the future.

Question was asked of Councilman Wells and Joe Cronin as to whether or not there are any efforts being made by the Town of Seabrook Island to market/advertise the town outside of the activity by the Convention & Visitors Bureau. Councilman Wells replied there are no efforts in the budget at this time. Joe Cronin responded that he has been and continues to be in conversation with Councilman Crane about best practices for communications to those who might be interested in visiting and/or living on Seabrook Island.

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

- **Funds to be used for beach patrol services in the amount of \$125,208.00.**
  - Beach patrol services are anticipated to be provided by Island Beach Services, LLC (IBS) under contract with the Town of Seabrook Island.
  - IBS provided patrol services in the Town of Seabrook Island during 2017 as well as the Town of Kiawah Island.
  - They will provide expanded services for code enforcement, water rescue, and general assistance to beach goers during peak tourist seasons (summer break and the period of April – September).
  - Members of IBS will be commissioned by the town as code enforcement officers. In 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.
  - There will be 2 shifts of 4 people each with an overlap of shifts during highest daily peak times.
  - IBS will provide weekly reports of activities on beach.
  - 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 2018.

- 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)	\$75,208.00
County ATAX	\$40,000.00
General Fund Beach Patrol	<u>\$10,000.00</u> (+\$5,000.00 for ancillary expenses)
Total	\$125,208.00

- **Funds to be used for Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration in the amount of \$20,000.**

- Purpose of event is to provide fireworks and associated services for a July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration in the Town of Seabrook Island.
- Primary goals are to encourage tourists to visit and stay in Seabrook Island during the July 4<sup>th</sup> 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; 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, 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 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.
- 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.
- Program will begin April 1, 2018 and continue until December 31, 2018 with education activities 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 managed 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.

Councilman Wells and Joe Cronin were excused so that the Committee could determine recommendations to be made to Town Council.

Each request by the Town of Seabrook Island was considered separately:

- Randy Buck moved to recommend a contribution of \$20,00.00 for the Island Beach Patrol Services for Seabrook island for 2018. The motion was seconded by Ron Schildge and the vote to approve was unanimous.
- Joe Pontuti moved to recommend a contribution of \$20,000.00 for the Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration for 2018. The motion was seconded by Randy Buck and thee vote to approve was unanimous.
- Ron Schildge moved to recommend a contribution of \$10,000.00 for the Dolphin Education Program for Seabrook Island for 2018. The motion was seconded by Joe Pontuti and the vote to approve was unanimous.

It is the consensus of the committee that it would like to receive a report as to the actual efforts of the Convention & Visitors Bureau for marketing the Town of Seabrook Island.

The committee determined a date will be set in late April/early May for the Accommodations Tax Committee to meet to hear requests for Accommodation Tax funds for the year 2019.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sue Ingram, Chair  
Accommodations Tax Committee