

# Discretionary Grants Committee

## Regular Meeting

March 18, 2026 – 12:00 PM

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Seabrook Island Town Hall, Council Chambers  
2001 Seabrook Island Road  
Seabrook Island, SC 29455



## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Faulkner called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm.

### ROLL CALL

**Committee Members Present:** Patrick Faulkner, Chairman; Barbara Montagu-Pollock, Scotty Jones, Tom Abbott, Larry Phillips

**Town Staff Present:** Joe Cronin (Town Administrator), Amber Howard (Finance Director), and Peter Wiggins (Town Clerk).

### FOIA STATEMENT

The Town Clerk confirmed that the meeting was advertised in compliance with the requirements of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act. Agendas were posted and furnished to news media and all others requesting notification.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**February 18, 2026**

*Mr. Phillips motioned to approve the minutes of February 18, 2026, seconded by Mr. Jones.*

**Mr. Phillips' motion was APPROVED unanimously.**

### ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

#### **Discretionary Grants Program Guidelines**

Chairman Faulkner presented the new Grant Guidelines as amended and approved by Town Council. He stated there were some amendments made by the Town Council before final passage. He stated that language was added at the end of "Project Eligibility" to address grants that may be awarded to applicants that are not located on Seabrook Island.

Mr. Abbott asked if Backpack Buddies fell under this added language.

Chairman Faulkner stated there was not a discussion on Backpack Buddies specifically, but there was a discussion about organizations that were not on Seabrook Island. He stated that as the committee begins to receive applications, those applicants can be measured against the new language.

Mr. Wiggins stated that Barrier Island Free Medical Clinic could fall under the new language as well.

Chairman Faulkner stated that there was another conversation about a requirement that applicants attend both the committee and council meeting.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock stated she was unsure of the process from the time the committee recommends approval or denial of an application, through the time when the council approves or denies the application. She stated she was unsure of a scenario where the committee would recommend approval but still require the applicant to attend the council meeting for final approval.

Chairman Faulkner stated the committee will recommend approval or denial to the council, but the council would still require the applicant to appear before them to answer any questions they might have.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee that the applications will come in on a rolling basis, so the committee will have the opportunity to review applications in advance of the meeting.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked if the groups would be competing against each other for grant funding.

Mr. Cronin stated the competition would be between the applicant and their consistency with the grant guidelines, as well as the clock (calendar year). He stated that if an applicant waits until later in the year, there may not be much money left in the grants budget.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked when the committee would begin reviewing applications.

Mr. Cronin stated staff will have the application ready in the next week. He stated that the applications received in advance of the April meeting will be included on the agenda for that meeting. He stated there could be no applications or there could be multiple received by the due date.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked if the committee usually waits to make funding decisions, so all funding is not awarded to the first few organizations that apply.

Mr. Phillips stated that applications are judged against the established criteria rather than judging one application against another. He stated that in his experience there are usually one or two applications per meeting rather than ten per meeting.

Mr. Abbott asked if all applications are forwarded to Town Council regardless of the recommendation given by the committee.

Mr. Cronin stated yes, unless an applicant fails to attend the committee meeting, in which case their application will be deemed withdrawn.

Mr. Phillips asked if there is an appeal process if an application is recommended denied by the committee.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee they are only a recommending body. Mr. Cronin stated there was an applicant in 2025 that was recommended denied by the committee, but that presented their application to the council and was approved.

Mr. Phillips asked if that scenario should be communicated to the applicants, so they know there is an appeals process. He stated the process as it is worded in the guidelines does not appear to be clear.

Mr. Abbott asked if the applicant gets a copy of the recommendation before the council meeting.

Mr. Cronin stated the applicant will be present at the committee meeting. He stated they will leave the meeting fully aware of the committee's recommendation.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked if Town Council will prioritize the applications.

Mr. Cronin stated that Town Council will prioritize the applications.

Mr. Abbott proposed implementing a scoring system where applications are scored on a 1-100 scale. He proposed that any application that is scored over 80 is approved and anything under 80 is recommended denied.

Chairman Faulkner asked when the committee would see the applications for the first time.

Mr. Wiggins stated that the entire committee will see the applications at least 72 hours before the meeting with the agenda packet.

Mr. Abbott proposed that the 100-point scoring system would follow the approved Evaluation Criteria, 20 points for Public Benefit, and 10 points each for the remaining criteria: Alignment with Program Purpose, Organizational Capacity, Project Feasibility and Work Plan, Budget and Cost Effectiveness, Measurable Outcomes, Community

Impact and Engagement, Project Sustainability, and Compliance and Accountability.

Mr. Phillips stated he would recommend against a scoring system and use a simple, yea or nay vote.

Chairman Faulkner stated he was more inclined to agree with Mr. Phillips' suggestion of a yea or nay vote. He stated that once the town Council receives the committee's recommendation, they will be voting up or down as well. He stated that if the committee takes Mr. Abbott's suggestion, Town Council may have questions for the committee related to why applications were scored in a particular way. He stated if the committee uses this scheme, the Town Council discussions of grant applications could become lengthy.

Mr. Abbott stated if the committee uses a yea or nay vote, the committee would not be providing feedback to the applicant regarding which criterion were met and which ones were not met. He continued by stating that if the committee were to commit all its funds early in the year, they may not be able to fund a good project later. He stated it behooves the committee to communicate to the applicants what they did well on their application and establish a framework so that money is reserved for good projects rather than projects that are of lesser value.

Mr. Phillips stated that the committee will make its recommendation to council and within 30 days, the council will approve or disapprove. He stated council will not wait five months and evaluate applications against the merits of other applications.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock stated it was too bad the committee did not have one deadline for all applications instead of the current, rolling deadline.

Chairman Faulkner stated he liked that idea and the committee should consider that change for 2027. He stated that the current process is a first come, first served policy that was not created by the current committee, but inherited.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee that the Discretionary Grant Program was created when groups from around Seabrook Island would come to the Town requesting money for brochures or T-shirts. He stated these groups would approach the Town at irregular intervals throughout the calendar year. He continued by stating that the grants program was created to formalize these requests. He stated that the Community Promotions and Engagement Committee and later, the Environment and Wildlife Committee considered these grant applications.

Mr. Jones stated he liked the idea of keeping the process simple, but in the interest of educating the applicants, the committee should strive to be transparent when awarding grants and to communicate why applicants were selected over other applicants. He stated the easiest way to accomplish this is to keep the Evaluation Criteria simple, while at the same time scoring the applications against the criteria.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked about the possibility of more requests for funding being received than funds the town has available to distribute. She asked about the possibility of groups that have been awarded funds regularly, being crowded out by newer applicants.

Mr. Phillips stated he could not recall a group that regularly applies for funding that has an expectation they will be awarded funds.

In summarizing the last few comments, Chairman Faulkner stated that the committee is uncomfortable with the current policy of grants funding being awarded on a first come, first served basis. Chairman Faulkner asked if the committee wanted to change that policy for 2026.

Mr. Cronin stated that if this was the will of the committee, the guidelines would need to be amended and returned to council for approval.

Mr. Abbott stated that rather than having a first-come, first served policy, the committee could adopt a scoring system with a threshold set high enough where there will still be grant funding remaining throughout the year.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee they could approve grant requests for less than the amount requested.

Mr. Jones stated that if applicants score lower under the proposed scoring system, their lower score could be reflected in approving the request for less than the amount requested.

Mr. Wiggins, attempting to answer an earlier question from Ms. Montagu-Pollock, stated there are groups on Seabrook Island that are dependent on the grants program to account for a large portion of their budget. He stated there are groups that are currently waiting on the town to post the grant application. He closed by stating that the groups that are more reliant on grant funding will most likely be the first organizations to apply.

Mr. Jones stated that in the case of Backpack Buddies, they have a \$100,000 budget, of which \$20,000 comes from the Seabrook Island

Hunger Awareness Foundation, and whatever may come from the Town. He stated that he anticipates most of the applications that the committee will consider are groups more similar to Backpack Buddies that have larger budgets.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock asked if the Town could hold applications until approximately five are received so the applications could be judged against one another.

Chairman Faulkner stated as soon as the committee makes its recommendation, Town Council takes up the application at their next meeting.

Mr. Cronin stated that, provided the guidelines do not change from year to year, staff could notify interested groups that the Town will accept applications beginning in December, and first review would be in January or February of the following year. He stated that this might give the committee the opportunity to review \$30,000 worth of grant requests at their first or second meeting of the new year.

Chairman Faulkner asked if the committee would like to work with staff in an effort to open the grant season in December with the goal of accepting grant applications in January or February of 2027.

Mr. Abbott recommended delaying this decision. He stated it was his wish to see how the new criteria work with this year's grant applications, and if the committee is satisfied with the way the grant program is progressing for 2026, the committee can revisit the decision then. Mr. Abbott closed by stating this could be a great aspiration.

Chairman Faulkner asked the committee if they would like to leave the current practice of first-come, first served, as is.

Mr. Abbott stated he didn't like calling the policy, first-come, first served, but rather "rolling acceptance".

Chairman Faulkner asked if the committee would like to institute a weighted scoring system similar to the system proposed earlier by Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jones stated that the weighted scoring system was a possibility, or the committee could let each individual create their own scoring system. He stated his priorities might be different from others on the committee.

The committee reviewed a previous grant application.

Chairman Faulkner stated by looking at the application, he would be unable to determine how to rank the criteria based on the organization's proposal.

While viewing a grant application of a group that helps injured wildlife on and around Seabrook Island, Mr. Cronin stated that the group was asked how many times they respond to injured wildlife on Seabrook Island. Mr. Cronin stated the group really didn't have an answer to that question. Mr. Cronin stated that the group assured the Town last year that if they were called to help an injured animal on the island, they would respond.

Chairman Faulkner asked the committee, based on the applications they just viewed, if they should apply some criteria to a subjective approval of grant applications, or institute a scoring system.

Ms. Montagu-Pollock stated that based on the applications that were just presented, she could not apply the criteria.

Mr. Jones stated that although voting is a binary decision, yes or no, if each committee member wanted to quantify the criteria leading up to a yes or no vote, they could do that for their own benefit.

*Chairman Faulkner motioned to institute a binary voting system, with each committee member free to apply the Evaluation Criteria leading to a yes or no vote, seconded by Mr. Phillips.*

Mr. Abbott stated there has been some discussion about the committee communicating its preference for one application over another. Should the committee convey, along with their recommendation to the Town Council, a graded preference such as "Highly Recommend" or "Recommend", or something similar.

Mr. Cronin stated that if the committee would like to institute something similar to Mr. Abbott's proposal, this graded preference would need to be decided on and in place in time for the committee's April meeting. He stated to do this, the committee may need to have a Special Called meeting between now and the April meeting to solidify what is being proposed. He stated that if the committee does not want to meet, staff may need to push the application due dates back.

Chairman Faulkner stated he did not want to push the application due dates back. Chairman Faulkner asked if the committee would allow him to communicate the wishes of the committee, similar to Mr. Abbott's graded preferences proposal, at the final grant applications approval at the Town Council meeting.

Mr. Phillips stated that historically, after the committee recommends approval or denial, and the grant amount, the committee's portion of the approval process is concluded. He stated that he was unsure if the committee needed a three-point system in addition to their usual recommendation.

Mr. Abbott stated that it would be beneficial to include the committee's graded preference in case Town Council denies a grant request that the committee believed in strongly. He stated if this were ever the case, the committee could have a conversation with Town Council regarding why they disagreed with the committee's recommendation.

Chairman Faulkner stated that he had a similar conversation with Town Council at their prior meeting. He stated he fought for the Discretionary Grants Committee related to the Town Council wordsmithing the grant guidelines. However, he stated to the committee this was not a road down which they wanted to go.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee that it is the prerogative of Town Council to disagree with the recommendations of the committee.

**Chairman Faulkner's motion was APPROVED unanimously.**

*Mr. Abbott motioned to attach a graded preference of "Highly Recommend", "Recommend", and "Reject" to the committee's recommendation. (Motion died for lack of a second.)*

Mr. Jones asked if the committee reserves the right to amend the grant amount, and if the committee does reserve the right to amend the amount, how would that weigh into the committee's recommendation.

Mr. Abbott stated he viewed the dollar amount as an issue separate from his graded preference proposal.

Mr. Cronin reminded the committee that if an organization was approved for lower than the project amount, the project may not be viable.

Mr. Jones stated that in the instance described by Mr. Cronin where a project may not be viable for an applicant if an applicant is awarded anything less than the requested amount, the committee could simply vote the application up or down. However, he continued by stating that for a group like the Backpack Buddies, their budget is large compared to what they could be awarded from the town.

Mr. Cronin stated a majority of the groups that apply are relatively small, and their proposed projects are dependent on grant funding. He stated there is a risk of a smaller group being approved for less than the full amount, and the project not being completed. He stated in this case, there may be funds that have already been committed by Town Council, and because the project cannot be completed due to the funding shortage, those funds end up not being spent. Mr. Cronin closed by stating these are questions that should be asked of the applicants before making a recommendation.

Mr. Abbott asked if the reason the Town Council was spending so much time on these applications, was they were not getting sufficient information from the committee so that they could trust the committee's recommendation, or was there pure politics involved.

Mr. Cronin stated in his experience, Town Council defers to the committee's recommendation. He stated if there is a departure from the committee's recommendation, it is usually related to groups that are outside the town limits.

Mr. Abbott stated that based on the information he has seen, one of the issues with which he will grapple is using town funds for pure charity.

Mr. Cronin stated each applicant must demonstrate the public benefit of their proposal.

**ITEMS FOR ACTION**  
**2026 Meeting Calendar**

Mr. Wiggins informed the committee that Chairman Faulkner requested, for the remainder of 2026, that the meeting start time be moved up to 10:00 am. He stated the committee will retain its original meeting dates.

*Chairman Faulkner motioned to move the meeting time up to 10:00 am for the remainder of 2026, seconded by Mr. Jones.*

**Chairman Faulkner's motion was APPROVED unanimously.**

**COMMITTEE COMMENTS**  
**April Meeting Date**

After a brief discussion, the committee agreed to move the next meeting date to April 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 9:00 am.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, Chairman Faulkner declared the meeting adjourned at 1:25 pm.

Peter D. Wiggins II, MPA  
Town Clerk