

MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2022
VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING
3:30 P.M.

Colleton County Government
109 Benson Street
Walterboro, SC 29488

Present: Henry Hiott, Gary Brightwell, Kisha Kinard, Zetoya Pinckney, Kaela Brinson, and Jon Carpenter are in attendance.

Call to Order: Ex Officio Kaela Brinson called the meeting to Order.

Election of Chairman

Gary Brightwell nominated Henry Hiott as Chairman of the ATAX Board, seconded by Kisha Kinard and approved 3-0.

New Business

A. ATAX Fund Balance

Chairman Hiott: Where we are with the fund balance?

Mr. Carpenter: Last year the county received \$40,001.67 that went into the ATAX fund that is to be directed and used by the committee. Previously we had \$14,855.18, which is line item 7, this is from previous years collections from the State Accommodations Tax. That amount has set there and collected a small amount of interest, \$131.38, which was granted to the fund. So, as of the county's fiscal year, June 30th, 2021, there was \$54,988.23 that was available to be distributed by the committee.

Chairman Hiott: What is the deadline? Are these funds use it, or lose it?

Mr. Carpenter: Yes, we have not had a committee active. We have talked to the state and they generally like to have the previous year's amount spent within the next fiscal year, or at least year marked such as if the money was given to an organization and they may or may not have spent it, but there is a plan to spend it. The biggest thing is by the end of this fiscal year, June 30th, 2022, the \$40,001.87 that we received last year should be spent or a plan to spend, or we run the risk of having to give it back to the state.

B. ATAX Project Balance

Ms. Brinson: There are no current projects at this time.

Chairman Hiott: When was the last time the ATAX Board spend any money on projects?

Mr. Carpenter: It has been prior to 5 years.

Chairman Hiott: The current balance of \$50,000, is that something we have accrued in the past year or past five years?

Mr. Carpenter: The \$40,000 is what we have picked up in the past year, and the previous 4 years we have picked up very little if any. The way this works is the first \$25,000 remains with the county and supports overall county operations, and anything over gets distributed. Prior to this last year we had not collected anything over the \$25,000 in accommodations tax.

Chairman Hiott: The last time this board did meet, were there any projects that were on the radar?"

Ms. Brightwell: I think we are all kind of new to this board.

Ms. Brinson: I am not aware of any, and we do not have any current projects.

Chairman Hiott: I am sure this money has to be spent for specific purposes, do we know what those constraints are for us?

Ms. Brinson: there are guidelines on our applications, and I also linked the state guidelines on our website. They basically state that we would need to directly benefit an increase in tourism here in Colleton County, which is explained as individuals over 50 miles traveling to Colleton County. Any and all projects would have to benefit us in that way. There are limitations on the type of projects, we have listed those categories on our application.

Chairman Hiott: I will open this up to the rest of the board, does anyone know of any needs that we have at this time that could benefit from this fund?

Ms. Brinson: Keep in mind that these do have to be non-profit organizations.

Ms. Brightwell: I have some experience when I was at the Museum in applying to the city's accommodations tax, but I have not had a chance to review the county's accommodations tax guidelines, but I am sure they are similar. Just some things to think about that have been funded in the past from a city stand point, the bike race. This brings people from over 50 miles away and increases hotel stays in the county. The fund has to be spent on a project that would bring individuals from over 50 miles away to come in and patronize a business or something in Colleton County.

Chairman Hiott: I am sure there are several places in town that could use the money like the museum, The Artisans Center, and the rice festival.

Ms. Brightwell: These organizations do have to apply and come up with a plan to spend the money, it is not arbitrarily given. They would have to come up with a plan that would bring individuals into the county and there is some reporting in that.

Chairman Hiott: Maybe we can reach out to the Press and Standard and let them know that we do have some money. Do we already have a process for individuals to apply?

Ms. Brinson: Yes, on our county page we do have an application which can be found at www.colletoncounty.org/atax. I have sent this to the Press to announce on their social media outlet and I have posted it to the announcements on the county website.

Chairman Hiott: Stated that everyone on the board should review the guidelines provided on the website.

C. ATAX Yearly Report

Chairman Hiott: This was reviewed earlier in the meeting when we discussed fund balance.

D. 2022 Accommodations Tax Advisory Board Meeting Schedule

Chairman Hiott: Do our by-laws tell us how often we are to meet?

Ms. Brinson: Since it has been so long since we have had a board, we will have to adopt a new set of by-laws. Just to keep this in mind, our deadlines moving forward for applications are March 31st and September 31st. I know that this year is a little bit different since we are just organizing an advisory board again. We will be reviewing applications twice a year.

Chairman Hiott: We need to meet sometime in April after we have received applications, so that we can make our decisions before the June deadline.

Ms. Brightwell: Is there anything prescribed stating just how close we can be to that deadline?

Ms. Brinson: Not to my knowledge. I have not read that there is any time frame to meet after receiving an application.

Ms. Brightwell: Stated that with the city the projects would have to be presented to council. Is this something that you foresee us having to do?

Ms. Brinson: Stated that the process would be that the applicant(s) would need to present the project to the board so that if there is any questions they would be addressed at this time. After this this the projects would then go to County Council for their approval of the project.

Ms. Pinckney: Asked, "If we do not get applications in as fast as we think we may then what are the next steps for meeting and advertising to get the word out about this opportunity."

Ms. Brinson: Stated if anyone has any ideas please let me know. Of course we have word of mouth, getting this information out there to individuals. I can also run another ad in the newspaper and on the Press & Standards social media page.

Everyone agrees social media is the best way to get the word out there.

Ms. Brinson: Stated going back to line item “4” letter “d”, meeting schedule. Do we want to try and set meetings?

Mr. Hiott: Stated that he would like to look at setting another meeting in February, early March. I propose Thursday, February 17th at 3:30 p.m.

Everyone agreed on the above stated time.

Ms. Pinckney: Asked about all the guidelines being provided online.

Ms. Brinson: Stated they are all listed on our website at www.colletoncounty.org/atax

Chairman Hiott discusses a more set meeting schedule being listed in the bylaws.

Ms. Brinson: Stated that the board needs to discuss virtual meetings versus in person meetings.

The board all agrees to continue virtual at this time.

Chairman Hiott: Asked if we would be meeting to approve applications as they come or after the given deadline.

Ms. Brightwell: Stated that she believes there is guidelines in place for the procedure on approving applications.

Ms. Pinckney: Stated that there are guidelines for applicants, but are there guidelines for the advisory board to approve applications.

Ms. Brinson: Stated there are guidelines given by the state. I will email those out to everyone.

Chairman Hiott: Stated if there are not any other comments or questions then we can adjourn.

Adjournment

Chairman Henry Hiott moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Brightwell seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

This ___ day of March, 2022.

Kaela Brinson, Clerk to Council