



Town of Hilton Head Island ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING Thursday, April 23, 2026, 9:00 AM Minutes

Call to Order

Vice Chair Lesch called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Present from the Committee: Martin Lesch, Vice Chair; Cecile Eck; John Farrell and Dave Ferguson

Absent from the Committee: Thomas Dowling and Keith Schlegel, Chair

Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Ferguson made a motion to adopt. Ms. Eck seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Approval of the Minutes

Regular Meeting Minutes of November 6, 2025

Ms. Eck made a motion to approve. Mr. Farrell seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Special Meeting Minutes of March 31, 2026

Ms. Eck made a motion to approve. Mr. Farrell seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Unfinished Business

Consideration and Recommendation for Additional 2025 ATAX Grant Funding for HHI
Concours d'Elegance - Dave Byrd, Finance Director

Jon Carpenter, Assistant Finance Director, presented the agenda item on behalf of Finance Director Dave Byrd, who was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Carpenter explained that the request was a follow-up to the Committee's March 31, 2026, discussion regarding the Hilton Head Island Concours d'Elegance's request for additional 2025 Accommodations Tax (ATAX) grant funding. He noted that the Committee had requested additional financial information following the previous meeting and advised that Rick Sabol, Executive Director of the Hilton Head Island Concours d'Elegance, was present to discuss the supplemental information included in the meeting packet.

Rick Sabol, Executive Director of the Hilton Head Island Concours d'Elegance, addressed the Committee to present the additional information requested following the March 31, 2026, meeting. Mr. Sabol reviewed the event's current financial position and discussed the operational challenges that contributed to the request for supplemental funding. He informed the Committee that the organization was working to secure a multi-year sponsorship agreement to improve financial stability and reduce the likelihood for similar request in the

future. Mr. Sabol also outlined organizational changes intended to strengthen financial management, enhance strategic planning, expand marketing opportunities, and improve the event's long-term sustainability.

Committee members acknowledged the positive developments and congratulated the organization on working to secure a multi-year sponsorship. Members emphasized the importance of continued financial accountability and requested additional information regarding the operational and financial improvements being implemented. Discussion focused on understanding how expense reductions, management changes, and revised business practices would strengthen the organization's long-term financial position before future ATAX funding requests are considered.

The Committee also discussed the broader ATAX grant review process, noting the extensive review conducted during the March and April meetings and emphasizing the importance of clear communication between applicants, staff, and the Committee. Members expressed appreciation for the due diligence exercised throughout the review process and recognized the Committee's responsibility to ensure funding decisions are supported by complete financial information and remain consistent with the Town's grant policies.

Mr. Ferguson made a motion to recommend that the Finance & Administrative Committee deny the request for additional 2025 ATAX grant funding for the Hilton Head Island Concours d'Elegance. Ms. Eck seconded.

Vice Chair Lesch opened the floor for public comment.

Richard Bisi addressed the Committee in opposition to the request for additional ATAX funding. While recognizing the event's tourism and cultural value, he expressed concerns regarding the organization's financial sustainability and the precedent that approving additional funding could establish for future grant requests.

Motion carried 4-0.

New Business

Presentation of the FY27 Destination Marketing Organization Plan, Budget and Industry Metrics- Ariana Pernice, Vice President of the Visitor & Convention Bureau

Ariana Pernice, Vice President of the Visitor & Convention Bureau for the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, and Chase Odell, Director of Research, presented the proposed Fiscal Year 2026–2027 Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Marketing Plan, Budget and Industry Metrics. The presentation provided an overview of the Chamber's first year operating under the Town's new DMO contract and outlined the organization's strategic priorities, marketing initiatives, tourism performance, and contractual deliverables. Ms. Pernice reviewed the proposed marketing budget and explained that the plan was structured to align with the requirements of the new contract while supporting overnight visitation, sustainable tourism, and the continued economic impact of tourism on Hilton Head Island.

Ms. Pernice discussed the Chamber's integrated marketing strategy, which includes digital advertising, public relations, destination branding, meetings and group sales, visitor engagement, and promotional efforts designed to attract visitors throughout the year. The presentation highlighted ongoing enhancements to the HiltonHeadIsland.org website, improvements to customer relationship management tools, and the development of resources intended to better serve meeting planners, event organizers, and visitors. Chamber staff also reviewed public relations initiatives, destination accolades, and collaborative marketing opportunities related to major events and regional tourism efforts.

Mr. Odell presented tourism research and performance data, including visitor demographics, market trends, website analytics, campaign performance, economic impact metrics, and resident and stakeholder survey results. He explained that the research is used to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing efforts, measure visitor sentiment, and demonstrate the value of tourism to the local economy. The presentation also outlined new reporting measures intended to enhance transparency, improve accountability, and ensure compliance with the Town's contractual performance expectations.

Committee members discussed the proposed marketing plan and asked questions regarding budget allocations, research methodology, visitor and resident survey participation, event promotion, and opportunities to further support ATAX-funded organizations through the Chamber's marketing platforms. Members also discussed methods for measuring return on investment, evaluating campaign effectiveness, and ensuring that marketing initiatives continue to balance tourism promotion with the quality of life of Hilton Head Island residents.

Chamber staff responded to questions regarding performance metrics, reporting requirements, website accessibility for community organizations, and ongoing collaboration with local partners to maximize the effectiveness of future marketing efforts. Following discussion, the Committee expressed appreciation for the comprehensive presentation and the continued emphasis on data-driven decision-making, accountability, and strategic marketing.

Mr. Ferguson made a motion to forward to the Finance & Administrative Committee for approval of the Fiscal Year 2027 Destination Marketing Organization Plan and Budget. Mr. Farrell seconded.

Vice Chair Lesch opened the floor for public comment.

Richard Bisi addressed the Committee regarding the proposed Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Marketing Plan. Mr. Bisi expressed concerns about the transparency of the DMO selection process, the Committee's role in reviewing the use of Accommodations Tax funds, and the level of public discussion of tourism marketing expenditures and encouraged greater transparency and accountability in future tourism-related funding decisions.

Motion carried 4-0.

Public Comment - Non Agenda Items

Vice Chair Lesch opened the floor for public comment.
There was no public comment at this time.

Adjournment

**At 11:33 a.m., Ms. Eck made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Farrell seconded.
Motion carried 4-0.**

Approved: July 23, 2026

**The full recording and a transcript of this meeting can be found on the Town's website
at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov**