



Town of Hilton Head Island **TOWN MANAGER UPDATE**

An Update from Town Manager Steve Riley 7/29/2020

Good afternoon Hilton Head Islanders and Guests,

Since the spring, the Hilton Head Island Bluffton Chamber of Commerce has hosted a weekly teleconference call to help our business and community leaders understand the widespread impact of COVID-19. We hear updates from experts, legislators and officials representing S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, the U.S Chamber of Commerce, the Beaufort County School District, the Town of Hilton Head Island and Bluffton, and many other organizations.

Here's what we learned on today's call:

- There are 598 clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics happening in the United States, including 15 in South Carolina. Of those, 25 are in a developmental stage, with two entering final stages of development.
- State Education Superintendent Molly Spearman is reviewing re-opening plans for school districts. Plans range from in-person and virtual instruction to a hybrid. Since March, school districts have provided 22 million free meals for students. This will change at the start of the school year so please be sure to check with your school regarding its meal program, attendance policies and other plans. Locally, the Beaufort County School District has announced Sept. 8 as the date our public schools will start the new academic year.
- Hilton Head Regional Healthcare CEO Jeremy Clark said there are 16 patients with COVID-19 hospitalized at Hilton Head Hospital and Coastal Carolina Hospital. Their data indicates that the number of positive cases have started to flatten. The hospital is doing about 1,000 COVID-19 tests a week at no cost to individuals; the hospital's test does require a physician referral.
- Chernoff Newman, a South Carolina-based marketing agency, conducted a survey to gauge consumer sentiment around COVID-19. According to results, more than 70 percent of consumers in South Carolina indicate they are OK with following the rules and doing what's necessary to slow the coronavirus' spread, including wearing a mask. They also place a high value on the safeguards businesses are putting in place to protect customers and others who pass through their doors



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Town Receives \$1.7 Million in Accommodations Tax Payment for Fourth Quarter of Fiscal Year 2020

We got a welcomed surprise this week with the receipt of a \$1.7 million Accommodations Tax (ATAX) payment for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020 that ended June 30th. This represents tax collected for April, May and June activity. We expected a much different outlook, given that short-term rentals were temporarily halted, beach and community parks were closed and many other businesses were shuttered for the COVID-19 pandemic response. This total compares to \$2,517,294 for the same quarter last year.

Our collections reflect that the demand to visit the Island is strong. For the entire fiscal year, we collected \$6,490,405, which is only 5.7% less than last fiscal year's amount of \$6,880,027. The ATAX collections demonstrate the resiliency of the Town's economic engine, and point toward getting back to normal under the current circumstances. ATAX dollars are allocated to our designated marketing organization and a number of organizations in our community.

2021 Accommodations Tax Grant Applications and Grant Applicant Workshop

Our grant application for calendar year 2021 accommodations tax (ATAX) grant funds will be available online at 8 a.m., Monday, August 3, at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov. The Town's Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee will hold a virtual meeting and applicant workshop at 9 a.m., Thursday, August 13, 2020. Details on how to participate in the workshop and submit questions will be provided in the near future.

We're Watching the Weather

Potential Tropical Storm Nine is brewing in the Atlantic Ocean and we are just outside of the five-day error cone. The cone represents the probable track of the storm. Our emergency management team is keeping a close eye on the storm and will provide necessary updates. This is a good reminder that we are well into hurricane season. We always advise residents to make sure they have an evacuation plan in place. You can visit the hurricane page on our website, which contains a wealth of information on planning and preparation. With the coronavirus pandemic still looming, it is extremely important to know how you will evacuate and have your plans in order. Also, make sure you are signed up with our e-subscription service to receive emergency alerts from the Town of Hilton Head Island.

COVID-19 Cases and Information

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (scdhec.gov/infectious-diseases/viruses/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19) maintains the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19 in South Carolina and in our community. You can also find information on our COVID-19 hub page at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov/COVID19.