

A Six Point Plan to Fix Chamber Abuse.

First, let me be clear. I am opposed to anyone starting a new organization to compete with our current Hilton Head Island/Bluffton Chamber. I believe the easiest and right solution for our community is to fix what we have. This means having a Chamber “**by the members and for the members**”— a true, democratically run Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) such as the new Bluffton-only Chamber that is being correctly run like a Chamber.

Visit them at BlufftonChamberofCommrce.com

Here are my 6 suggested steps:

1. No More “Buddy Board.”

Stop having an appointed board. Replace an elected board with term limits, with nominations from all members. The current “buddy board,” run by insiders (I’ll scratch your back, if you’ll scratch mine) must end.

2. Redraft New By-Laws

Current bylaws were written to allow abuses and limit member rights. We must have complete transparency for all members. Chamber mission must be to serve all members, not just the “chosen few.”

3. Separate the Chamber and the Convention & Visitors Bureau.

90% of other municipalities separate their chamber and CVB because missions and objectives are different. This will stop current co-mingling of funds and many of the abuses. A Chamber for our community should have 3-4 employees max, with an executive director salaried at \$60,000 to \$75,000 max. Note that the SC Hospitality Association has 4 employees for the entire state, with an executive director salaried at \$90,000 ~ an appropriate fee for our CVB director. (Two jobs filled, two families fed, for less than half of what we are paying our current Chamber CEO).

4. Terminate Excesses

Terminate excessive salaries like the \$400,000 pay package for one employee that requires dues from 1,000+ members to cover. Terminate ventures that directly compete with local companies. Terminate contracts with non-local and out-of-state vendors, and stop over-stating membership totals.

5. Return to being “non-profit,” and not a “for profit” organization.

Stop violating IRS 501(c)(6) tax codes. Don’t create revenue streams for Chamber benefit at the expense of local companies. Don’t produce anything except membership materials, “business after hours,” “business expo’s” and other such activities that help support local business members. Chamber websites should be local directories, FREE to members, not selling expensive ads to members that further compete with and drain local ad budgets thereby hurting media company chamber members.

6. Chambers shouldn’t be “for profit” organizations.

The separate CVB (as Designated Marketing Organization) must only use monies it receives from bed taxes, grants and membership dues to market Hilton Head Island and not operate as a “for profit” media company with 26 employees.

The Chamber’s hiring of out-of-town attorneys to blatantly refuse FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) transparency requests speaks volumes about these problems and abuses. Thanks for your continued support, and understanding of the importance of fixing our Chamber. Please keep sending your emails of support to SpeakUp@StopChamberAbuse.com. Write to your council members and local editors. **And, take me at my word. I will not stop until every rock is turned over . . . every abuse brought to light.**

Skip Hoagland