

Chamber Lawsuit Filed

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What My Recent Lawsuit Is Seeking to Uncover.

Although I didn't attend last night's "Chamber Ball", my company is indeed a dues paying member of The Hilton Head Island/Bluffton Chamber of Commerce. And, as such, it would only seem right that as a "member in good standing" I should have access to inspect how my organization is being operated.

Yet, after expressing my concerns for over a year about certain Chamber policies, and its alleged "non-profit" status; as well as its secretive executive committee meetings, and

how it continues to misuse and mingle the public funds it receives from South Carolina Accommodations Tax (ATAX) revenues and Parks Recreation & Tourism (PRT) funds, I have been repeatedly and vehemently rebuffed. (Plus, I'm discovering that I'm not the only member to be treated so arrogantly.) Therefore, being a person of stubborn upbringing, I have pushed forward into the courts with a formal request as is my right under South Carolina Law and its Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The Chamber attorneys from Charleston (there are no qualified lawyers locally???) have pushed back. They base their argument on a claim our Chamber is not "public" under the definition, but merely a "contractor" acting on behalf of local townships – and therefore not subject to FOIA. Yet who is going to believe that ruse when the Chamber in a self-incriminating manner itself calls its V&CB a "division" (not a separate entity). The SC Code (30-4-20/c) is quite clear. It doesn't mince words when it defines a "public body" as: "*any organization . . . supported in whole or in part by public funds or expending public funds . . .*"

Little doubt, it's smoke and mirrors by Chamber Chiefs, because they do have much to hide!

Here are a few of the things things I'm trying to uncover:

1. When were the bylaws changed to allow an appointed board with no term limits? By who?
2. Total cost and breakdown of all 26 employee salaries and what percentage is allocated to "public funds."
3. How did Bill Miles' CEO pay package reach \$400,000 plus gratis golf club memberships and family trips overseas?
4. Who decided to use consultants, agencies and web companies in New York, Canada and elsewhere when there is ample talent locally?
5. How was it decided to generate chamber revenue for its own pockets in direct competition with local chamber members? How much money is being generated from this abuse?
6. What's the real story behind the \$600/sq.ft. construction costs of the Welcome Center?
7. What are the revenues from all chamber programs and how is the money then being used?
8. How much of Hilton Head's ATAX money is co-mingled for Bluffton?

Once more I thank you for your growing support and your understanding that *we must fix our chamber for the overall good of our community*. It must separate from the V&CB to have clean hands. 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, and every abuse brought to light.

Skip Hoagland