



SMALL TOWN, BIG BEACH™

**DATE:** November 6, 2023

**ISSUE:** The City of Gulf Shores received \$13,430,351.00 in RESTORE funding to construct a new state-of-the-art Eco Center facility on City property adjacent to Gulf Shores High School. The project is currently under construction and scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2024. Since 2018, the City has established an effective public/private partnership with the Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability (Center), a non-profit 501C(3) organization, to develop and establish environmental education programs to be housed at the new facility based on Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ambassadors of the Environment program.

Now in its fifth year of operation, this non-profit has developed and implemented programs in partnership with Gulf State Park, Valor Hospitality, Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism, the Coastal Alabama Business Chamber, and other relevant entities. The Center has accomplished important fundamental objectives for the project including the establishment of critical partnerships, the development of marketing and outreach programs, and representation at multiple regional industry conferences.

The Center has also worked extensively with Gulf Shores City Schools over the last several years to provide enrichment programming including Pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> grade field trips to the GSP Learning Campus, GSES Virtual Academy STEAM classes, GSMS Beyond the Bell after school programs, and 5 weeks of summer camps for GSES and GSMS students. Building on this successful relationship, City staff would like to engage the Center to provide management and supplemental services including facility operations, fundraising and development, and recreational and education programming at the new facility through a long-term management agreement.

**BACKGROUND:** In 2010 the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill had a devastating impact on the Gulf Shores tourism economy. The effects of the spill clearly demonstrated the connection between a healthy environment and our local economy and quality of life. In an effort to become a more resilient community, the City of Gulf Shores developed a long term plan, The Vision 2025 Plan for Sustainability, that identified five areas of focus critical to community success. One of those focus areas identified was the relationship between the City and Gulf State Park's Restoration Project that included a new Lodge and Conference Center, Learning Campus, Interpretive Center, enhanced trail system, and ecological restoration efforts.

This major revitalization project presented a fantastic opportunity for collaboration between the City and GSP to create a unique ecotourism and environmental education facility that will bring students, teachers, tourists, business groups, and academic groups from around the country to participate in activities that support ecotourism and sustainability, and promote the stewardship of our natural resources.

The City of Gulf Shores was awarded \$13,430,351.00 in RESTORE funding by the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council to design and construct a new facility on City-owned property located adjacent to Gulf State Park and Gulf Shores City Schools. The facility, named the Gulf Coast Eco Center, will house programs that utilize access to the Gulf State Park Learning Campus, as well as sites throughout the State Park and surrounding region. The facility will be designed and operated in coordination with Gulf Shores City Schools, Gulf State Park, Valor Hospitality, Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism, research universities, environmental education groups, industry partners, and local business groups.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Authorize Mayor to execute proposed management agreement with the Center to provide management and supplemental services for an **eight-year term**, with an option to renew for an additional eight-years, in an **amount not to exceed \$300,000/year** based on the following terms and conditions:

**Key Points of the Agreement** - This Management Agreement is proposed for an 8-year initial term, with an option to renew for an additional 8 years. The responsibilities of the parties are summarized below.

### **Center**

The Center shall manage and operate the day-to-day activities of the Facility, and provide the following programs and services:

#### **Programs;**

- a. Cousteau's Ambassadors of the Environment Program
- b. field study programs for Gulf Shores City Schools,
- c. summer camps and other recreational youth programs,
- d. adventure and ecotourism programs,
- e. public workshops and classes,
- f. community festivals and events
- g. trainings and certifications,
- h. conferences and summits.

#### **Services:**

- a. manage use of Facility between key partners and programs,
- b. coordinate custodial and maintenance of Facility with City and GSCS,
- c. develop, coordinate, and promote annual schedule of programs and calendar of events,
- d. prepare an Operations Manual,
- e. provide an annual audit,
- f. provide an annual budget and budget reports,
- g. provide programming insurance,
- h. coordinate use of the facility for meetings and rentals.



**City**

The City shall maintain and repair the Facility, and furnish the following services:

- a. utilities: power, water, sewer
- b. police services,
- c. fire and rescue services,
- d. hurricane preparedness, hurricane protection panel installation, removal, and replacement for the Facility
- e. maintenance and repair of Facility infrastructure.
- f. landscape and horticultural services.
- g. facility insurance.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS** – As proposed in the City’s FY 2024 Budget, the annual costs to the City shall include:

a. Annual payments for services provided by the Center	<b>\$300,000</b>
b. Increased PW maintenance staffing/equipment/expenses	<b>\$100,000</b>
c. Increased facility insurance costs (estimated)	<b>\$15,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$415,000/yr</b>

Payments to the Center in an amount not to exceed \$300,000/year for these services will be budgeted as part of the City’s Annual Budget beginning in FY 2024 and will continue through the term of the agreement.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION:** In 2015 the Council approved (Reso No. 5587-15) a proposal (\$14,500) from Watershed Architectural firm to develop the conceptual site plan and estimated construction costs for the “Ambassadors of the Environment” Program. In 2018 the Council approved (Reso No. 6033-18) a proposal (\$25,000) from Travis Langen, Environmental Education Consultant, for program development related to the establishment of the non-profit “Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability”. In 2018 the Council approved (Reso No. 6074-18) a proposal (\$300,000) from the Center for program development and implementation. In 2019 the Council approve (Reso No. 6225-19) a proposal (\$150,000 from the Center for program development and implementation. In 2019 the Council approved Reso No. 6148-19 authorizing a grant agreement with ADCNR for design of the Eco Center in the amount of \$1,020,723. In 2022 The Council approved Reso No. 6554-22 authorizing a grant agreement with ADCNR for construction of the Eco Center in the amount of \$12,409,728.

**DEPARTMENT:** Executive

**STAFF CONTACT:** Dan Bond

**ATTACHMENTS:** Exhibit A – Eco Center Facility, Exhibit B – Programming Overview.



SMALL TOWN, BIG BEACH™

Post Office Box 299  
Gulf Shores, AL 36547