

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

German grocer's expansion includes Pawleys store

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A German-based grocery chain is planning to build a store at Pawleys Island as part of its expansion into the U.S. market. Lidl is seeking a zoning change to allow construction of a 33,000-square-foot store on Highway 17 at Petigru Drive. The site is across the street from the

Publix store that opened in 2015.

Lidl will be the sixth supermarket in the area and the fourth from the North Causeway to the South Causeway. If that puts people in mind of a restaurant row or a motor mile for grocers, they aren't too far off, said Rob Salvinio, research economist at Coastal Carolina University. "They're looking for where consumers are driving," he said. "There are only

so many intersections. They try to get to the best corner."

The 4.8-acre site was rezoned as a "flexible design district" by Georgetown County in 2015 to allow multiple uses including two fast-food restaurants. It allows over 35,000 square feet of commercial space. The owners, Jody Tamsberg and Guerry Green, have asked to have grocery store added to the list of uses.

"It's a 33,000-square-foot grocery store wanting to go there," said Boyd Johnson, the county planning director. "It was enough for us to say it was a major change." That will require a public hearing, scheduled for July 20 before the Planning Commission, and three readings from County Council.

A traffic study for the mixed-use development showed that

the major impact would be on the southbound side of Highway 17 at the project's entrance, where it would be one step removed from "bumper-to-bumper" at peak times. But the Lidl plan would do away with that entrance. Access would be from Petigru Drive, Johnson said.

While he believes the grocery store may bring more traffic than

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A day at the beach turned upside down | "I was never very good at gymnastics," says Chrissy Hunter. She found the beach at North Litchfield a forgiving surface to practice handstands during a visit from Virginia last week. She does the exercise as part of cross-fit training.

OFFSHORE OIL

SODA leader testifies before Congress against drilling plans

BY NIKKI BEST
COASTAL OBSERVER

A leader of the effort to block oil and gas drilling off the South Carolina coast went toe-to-toe with House Republicans in testimony Wednesday before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources.

Peg Howell of North Litchfield was one of five witnesses at an oversight hearing held to evaluate offshore oil and gas development on the outer continental shelf. She was the only witness for the minority.

Howell was invited by the Democratic members of the House committee on Natural Resources at the suggestion of Oceana, a global conservation group. Her professional experience as a "company man" on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico and

activism with Stop Offshore Drilling in the Atlantic (SODA) were factors in her invitation.

This hearing was spurred by three federal actions: Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's July 6 order to decrease waits in the process for offshore oil and gas leasing permits, President Trump's executive order in April implementing an "America-First Offshore Energy Strategy" and the June 30 announcement that public comment was opening for a new five-year, 2019-24, offshore oil and gas leasing program. The proposed five-year plan would replace the Obama administration's 2017-22 program upon completion.

The subcommittee has 13 Republicans and 10 Democrats. None are from South Carolina.

Howell introduced her testimony in a five minute speech



House Committee on Natural Resources

Peg Howell, right, testifies before Congress on Wednesday.

and submitted longer written remarks for the record. She told the subcommittee about the dangers of offshore drilling, oil leaks, that the United States is already the dominant supplier of oil in the world and that "seismic airgun blasting is not harmless."

"The toughest part was the frustration in hearing people not

provide accurate information and to not be able to respond to that," she said after the hearing. "I kept making notes in front of me of things I wanted to say, but you can only speak when spoken to and that was frustrating."

Rep. Scott Tipton, a Colorado Republican, asked Dr. James

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TOURISM | Jennifer Norman

For new director, research is easy to find

BY NIKKI BEST
COASTAL OBSERVER

For Jennifer Norman, the tourism industry was a choice.

After her second child was born, Norman took time off from a job and an industry that was shrinking. When she was ready to go back to work, her old job as a photo editor didn't exist anymore. So she made a decision to work for the government.

In reality it was more than that. Norman had divorced and heeding the advice of her former father-in-law, she began searching for a new career. Talking to people, traveling and using the advertising skills she already had, tourism seemed like the logical choice. "It encompasses all the things I love," Norman said.

In 2003, a welcome center position came open in Coweta County, Ga., and she applied. But she didn't get the job. "So I called the lady back and told her, you made a mistake. I'm your girl," she said. The hiring manager was impressed and gave Norman's application another look, she said. She got the job.

Fast forward 14 years and Georgetown County has its latest tourism director. She's been



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Jennifer Norman started work as tourism director last week.

on the job a week and, "So far, so good," she said. "I'm really excited. I'm ready to dive into it."

Norman replaces Lauren Joseph who left the position in February to work at Brookgreen Gardens. She was hired by the Chamber of Commerce, which

provides staff services to the county's Tourism Management Commission.

Norman will fill the same role with the Pawleys Island Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee, which handles tourism marketing for the town.

Among the factors that enabled Norman to move from Anderson to Georgetown was the support from her husband Bill Norman, a professor at Clemson who specializes in tourism, her daughters and stepdaughter, scattered between Georgia and the Carolinas, and the response she got when they held a family meeting about the position. "We're going to live here, we're going to keep our house in Anderson. You guys are going to be at college. Can we make this work," she said. "Fully when we said beach, they said, we're in."

She's still learning all the background of her new job, but isn't a stranger to Georgetown County. She spent some time here in the past with her husband as he did research and conducted focus groups on working waterfronts through S.C. Sea Grant. As he said in a speech a couple of years ago, "This is my favorite place."

Because Norman is a tourism practitioner and her husband is a professor of the subject, it seems like Georgetown County got a two-for-one deal, but that's not quite the case. "I think we make each other better," she said. His

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town will take quest for ruling to next level

BY CHARLES SWENSON
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The town of Pawleys Island has decided that a bad ruling is better than no ruling in its effort to defend a state permit to allow construction of a groin in front of the public parking lot on the island's south end. Town Council this week asked its attorney to go over the head of the Administrative Law Court judge who heard the case in November 2013 but has yet to issue a ruling.

In March, Town Attorney David DuRant wrote Judge Phillip Lenski to request a either a ruling or status conference on the case. He got a reply on March 31 from the judge's law clerk saying "the order will be done and out next week." No order was filed.

"Write to the next level above him," Council Member Sarah Zimmerman told DuRant. Other members agreed.

DuRant said he will contact the chief judge of the Administrative Law Court, Ralph K. Anderson III. "I'll probably hear something within two weeks," DuRant said afterward. He has been reluctant in the past to press the court on the theory that the town might not get the ruling it wants. But he told the council last month he hasn't has a case in over 30 years in practice that took this long to decide.

Georgetown County received a permit in 2012 to build a 205-foot-long rock and concrete groin in front of the parking lot, which it owns. It initiated the project in 2008 saying the structure is needed to protect the parking lot from erosion. While new groins are generally prohibited, state law allows them to be built to protect public facilities that are threatened by erosion.

The Coastal Conservation League and local chapters of the Sierra Club and League of Women Voters challenged the permit.

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