

# COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

## Town will push legislation to allow tax for beach work

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The town of Pawleys Island will seek to change state law in order to raise money for beach renourishment through a property tax. Town Council this week hired a law firm to draft the measure. It will have to decide whether it wants to champion a bill itself or hire a lobbyist.

The town hopes to start work this fall on a project with the Army Corps of Engineers to place up to 1.2 million cubic yards of

offshore sand on the beach from the island's south end to an area near Third Street on the north end. A 1.4 mile section on the south end qualifies for federal funds, but the town has to agree to pay half the cost of five renourishment projects over the next 50 years to maintain that beach.

Town Council also wants to continue funding beach renourishment for other parts of the island that don't qualify for federal funds.

The town estimates it will need to raise \$7 million to \$9 mil-

lion over the next 10 years to fund its share of ongoing renourishment for the south end. The town currently dedicates 80 percent of its local accommodations tax to beachfront management. That raises about \$400,000 a year.

Pawleys Island has no municipal property tax. Under state law, the town would have to seek approval from the legislature to implement one.

After meeting last week with Theodore DuBose, an attorney with Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd who specializes in public

finance, Town Council members said they favor his proposal to amend the state law to allow local governments, with an approved beach renourishment plan, to levy a property tax to fund it. That would avoid the limits state law sets on the tax rate for government operations.

The proposal would also allow the town to raise money before the project, rather than borrowing money and paying it back with interest.

"You start putting money in the bank," Council Member

Guerry Green said. "You can put restrictions on it."

A committee was created this winter to look at a range of options for raising money. A business license was ruled out as too hard to implement. A proposal to charge for parking left the committee deadlocked. The idea also drew objections from people who live on the mainland.

The committee also considered a proposal for a new public access on leased land in the middle of the island. The access

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### SCHOOLS

## District adds to tax increase as other staff get pay raises

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

To balance its 2020 budget, the Georgetown County School District is considering a 5.9 mill increase which would bring in an extra \$1.7 million a year.

Earlier this year the district projected a \$2.1 million deficit in 2020. With budget cuts, it was able to decrease that estimate to \$1.1 million.

Last month, school board members discussed a 4.5 mill increase that would have added about \$1.4 million to the budget.

But at that time the board also tasked finance director Lisa Johnson with balancing the budget.

"We've worked very hard to bring you a balanced budget," Johnson told the board this week when she presented a draft of the new budget.

State law limits the ability of local government to raise property taxes using a formula that combines the federal Consumer Price Index and the percentage of population growth. For the Georgetown County School District, that was 3.1 percent of 3.4 mills. But state law also allows local government to add any increases from the last three years that it didn't implement. That means the district can draw on the 1.1 mills it didn't use in 2017 and the 1.6 mills it didn't use in 2018.

A 5.9 mill increase would bring the tax rate to 115.6. That's equal to \$693.60 for commercial property or second homes valued at \$100,000. Owner-occupied homes are exempt from property tax for school operations.

"We haven't had one for awhile," Board Member Mike Cafaro said. "I think at this time it's just necessary."

Board Member Richard Kerr said he was "reasonably happy" with where the budget ended up.

"We felt like at this point if we're going to have a millage increase, let's not take baby steps, let's do it all at once," Kerr said. "I'm never happy with a tax increase but sometimes it has to happen."

The proposed 2020 budget is \$91.5 million, an increase of \$3.9 million over the current budget.

The new budget includes \$1.77 million to cover a 4 percent increase for teachers' salaries and fringe benefits and an increase in the salary for a new teacher. Some teachers will get a bigger

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Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

### Waiting for the skies to clear

More than 3 inches of rain fell over the area in the last week, according to the National Weather Service. The daily drenching from passing showers has residents and visitors looking for the end of the rainbow that will herald clear skies. The break in the weather was forecast to start today, with clear skies continuing through the weekend.

### OFFSHORE DRILLING

## State reviews federal permit for seismic tests

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A month before a restriction on funding for state review of offshore oil and gas projects takes effect, the Department of Health and Environmental Control is preparing a response to a permit that will allow seismic testing.

WesternGeco applied in 2014 for a federal permit to conduct geological and geophysical surveys off the Atlantic Coast. The permit was denied when the Obama administration removed the Outer Continental Shelf from a five-year oil and gas leasing program.

The permits were revived when the Trump administration reopened the review of the leasing program in 2017.

Seismic surveys use an array of airguns towed behind a ship and fired at 10 second intervals for months at a time to determine if undersea geological formations are likely to contain oil or gas.

The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has asked DHEC to certify that WesternGeco's plan is consistent with the state's Coastal Zone



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A Hands Across the Sand rally against offshore drilling at North Litchfield last month included a message about seismic tests. State Rep. Lee Hewitt, at left, is among those who oppose state certification of a permit for the tests.

Management Program. The state is required by federal law to adopt the program.

The company, a subsidiary of the international oil services firm Schlumberger, said it is. "The proposed survey complies with the enforceable policies of South Carolina's approved management program and will be conducted in a manner consistent with that program," the company wrote DHEC's

director in March. It notes that the state's review is limited to "fisheries and sea turtle effects."

State Rep. Lee Hewitt of Murrells Inlet told DHEC the seismic surveys are not consistent.

"In the last year, commercial fishermen in ports adjacent to and in the district landed nearly 1 million pounds of snapper-

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### LAND USE

## New plan for vacant tennis club looks like the old one

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The new developer of the former Litchfield Racquet Club has submitted a plan for houses on the property that has changed little from the one the former developer withdrew last month.

The plan calls for 32 single-family homes on lots of 4,600 square feet. The 8.5 acres are part of a "planned development" and now the site of 17 clay tennis courts and a clubhouse.

"I was somewhat surprised," Boyd Johnson, the county planning director, said. "I thought they were working on something different."

The plan differs only in minor details from the one submitted to the county in May by Wimbledon Village LLC, whose principal was Trey Smith. That was Smith's second plan for the property, which he had an option to buy from Founders Group.

Smith's first plan showed 108 one-bedroom apartments. It was withdrawn before the Georgetown County Planning Commission could hold a hearing.

A "planned development" is a unique zoning district. Changes to the use, density or boundaries of the development have to be reviewed by the commission and approved by County Council.

The racquet club development was approved in 1987 for 25 duplex units along with the tennis courts, which date to the 1960s. Three single-family homes were built. There are 14 duplex units under construction by AmeriBuilt Homes of Myrtle Beach.

Smith submitted a plan for single-family development at the racquet club in May, but withdrew it a week later. REI Land Co. now has the option on the property. It is part of AmeriBuilt Homes.

In the new plan, "the lot layout is identical," Johnson said. "It's certainly high density."

The lot size is smaller than the minimum allowed in any other zoning district (5,000 square feet

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**Space for kids to blossom:** The Dolphin Garden at Waccamaw Elementary receives a makeover.

SECOND FRONT

**Recycling:** Without change to the process, town's recyclables will end up in the landfill. That will have to wait until after summer.

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**Transitions:** Pawleys Island native takes charge of Marines on Okinawa.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A sign opposing the zoning change sits across the street from the vacant tennis facility.