

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

County takes up ordinance to require masks

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County Council this week joined the debate over whether masks should be required in businesses and other public spaces to slow the spread of COVID-19.

"There are lot of people asking us to do something," Council Chairman John Thomas said. He isn't sure how much the county can do. "You cannot regulate stupid. People are stupid out there."

An ordinance up for review during an emergency online meeting today would cover supermarkets, pharmacies, retail stores and restaurants (when not



County Council Chairman John Thomas said masks will be hard to enforce.

Charles Swenson/
Coastal Observer

eating). Similar ordinances have passed in North Myrtle Beach, Charleston, Columbia and Greenville. Georgetown City Council will also take up a mask ordinance today. Confirmed cases of COVID-19

in the state rose from 12,148 on June 1 to 36,297 on June 30.

Confirmed cases in Georgetown County grew from 76 to 458 in the same period.

Within the last week, the county closed the central magistrate's office and traffic court because an employee tested positive for COVID-19. The school district closed Georgetown Middle School after three employees tested positive.

Parades and fireworks displays have been cancelled for the Fourth of July.

Dr. Gerald Harmon, vice president of medical affairs for Tidelands Health, suggested that people celebrate the Fourth of

July at home this year. He said this weekend will be "pivotal" in efforts to slow the spread of the virus.

The number of COVID-19 patients at Waccamaw Community and Georgetown Memorial hospitals increased from three to 40 in the last two weeks.

"Even if you don't feel ill, it's vital you take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 because you could be infected and transmit the virus to others without realizing it," Harmon said. "If we all do our part, we can get this situation under control."

Gary Weinreich, a member of Preserve Murrells Inlet who has

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Defund the police? It isn't what you think

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Officer Joe Riotto writes tickets for illegal parking on the south end of Myrtle Avenue.

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Even without a parade, the town of Pawleys Island will be a busy place on the Fourth of July. Its four full-time and four part-time police officers will all be on duty.

But the Town Council is debating whether to cut back its police department during the rest of the year. A survey of property owners conducted as part of its strategic planning process found opinions are divided.

While "Defund the Police" has become a slogan associated with the death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis, for Pawleys Island it is part of the discussion of how a town without a municipal property tax pays for a growing list of projects that property owners say are essential.

"I would never be an advocate for no more police force," Council Member Guerry Green said at a strategic planning retreat last month.

But he pointed out that the

largest portion of the town's operating budget goes to the police department. In the current budget, police account for \$450,000 out of \$947,500 earmarked for the town's operations.

Public safety ranked fourth out of 11 items property owners were asked to rank in a survey of top issues. There were 263 responses. Maintaining the beach ranked first, followed by low taxes and mitigation of flooding.

Comments included with the rankings called for police to

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LAND USE

Developer makes pitch for county tech park as apartment complex

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Property at Pawleys Island once envisioned as a high-tech park is being considered for high-density residential development. The proposal from Graycliff Capital Development is under review by Georgetown County Council.

"We're struggling with what do we do with that property," Council Chairman John Thomas said, adding that he opposes the plan.

The 14.5 acres on Petigru Drive was bought by the county Economic Development Alliance in 2016 for \$950,000. The non-profit alliance supports the county Economic Development office. It planned to partner with Mercom, a company that develops networks and security systems for government and business, to create a tech park.

Mercom renovated a former plant nursery on an adjacent tract and planned a 20,000-square foot facility at the park to accommodate a growing workforce. Instead, the firm laid off most of its staff and underwent a restructuring in 2018.

The county shifted its marketing toward an office park, but the idea was the same: create a development that will create jobs.

"Our vision for the property was that it would be a job hub," said Brian Tucker, the county Economic Development director. "That's why we acquired the property."

Last week, the alliance board forwarded a proposal to County Council from Graycliff, which is willing to pay \$1.38 million for the property provided it can build no fewer than 200 residential units.

Graycliff developed the Litchfield Oaks apartments, which it later sold, and the Waterleaf apartments in Murrells Inlet. The county earlier this year approved 143 units on 19.4 acres in the second phase of Waterleaf. The mix of two- and three-bedroom units was estimated to generate 1,040 daily traffic trips.

"We don't have the infrastructure to support that," said Jerry Rovner, an alliance board member, who said he opposed the Graycliff proposal when it was first submitted last October. "I got the board to agree."

Since then, the alliance has begun to make payments on a loan from Santee Cooper that funded the purchase. "That was the impetus to do something," Thomas said.

The property is zoned as a "planned development" with offices, lodging, shops and a restaurant. The county would have to change the zoning to allow an apartment complex.

No plan has been submitted, said Boyd Johnson, the county planning director. But he noted that the state Supreme Court has ruled that planned developments must contain a mix of uses.

"Whatever happens there is going to take months and months

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SANDY ISLAND | Holding back the Waccamaw

Bulkhead completed, residents ask county for help on other projects

BY JOSHUA FORD
COASTAL OBSERVER

Eighteen months after Hurricane Florence caused severe erosion at the boat landing on Sandy Island, work was set to begin on a bulkhead project to repair the damage.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened and Gov. Henry McMaster closed all the state's boat landings.

The county got permission from the sheriff's office to do the work, but ran into issues with getting the supplies.

"It took a couple of weeks for the sheeting to get here even though it was in stock and readily available," said James Coley, engineering and capital projects planner for the county.

And as with anything connected to Sandy Island, located between the Waccamaw and Pee Dee rivers, there is always an issue with transportation.

"Everything has to be barged over here. Every boat, every turnbuckle, every plate has to come across the river," Coley said. "So if you forget anything, it's basically a three-hour trip to get one nut or one bolt."

Coley returned to the island this week to show off the finished work to county officials, including new administrator Angela Christian.

Sandy Island residents brought the erosion issue to the county's attention after the hur-

ricane in 2018. The county then applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Emergency Watershed Protection Program.

The county received the grant for 75 percent of the cost and began work in March.

"The Waccamaw River floods all of the time and the island started eroding severely," Coley said. "So what we've done is we put in a wall in front of where the erosion was taking place. ... Basically we're holding everything back together and preventing the erosion from starting back."

The bulkhead, which is made of vinyl, spans 300 linear feet and has a 50-year life expectancy. Sand covers the main side of

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Administrator Angela Christian is greeted by Charles Pyatt on her first visit to Sandy Island.

Joshua Ford/
Coastal Observer

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Last voyage of the Grundoon: Sailboat that arrived on Litchfield Beach with the wind leaves on a trailer. **SECOND FRONT**

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