

# COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

## Council sends rezoning back to planners

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

While neighbors outlined concerns about density, traffic and stormwater that would follow approval of a proposed development at Waverly and Kings River roads, leaders of a community group told County Council those details are only a distraction.

"A zoning ordinance cannot be changed without a showing of public necessity," said Cindy Person, a leader of Keep It Green. "We don't have to get deep into the weeds about the details of the plan or the amended plan to answer that threshold question."

That question will now be posed to the Planning Commission, which failed to make

a recommendation on the project in August. County Council voted this week to remand the request for a zoning change. It could come before the commission in November.

Waverly and Kings was initially proposed as 14 townhouses in three buildings on 3.3 acres at the intersection. The property's current zoning would allow six single-family lots. Opposition led Bruce Watts, who designed the plan, to change it to 10 duplex units in five buildings before it came up for review by the council.

The duplexes and a single access road will occupy 1.9 acres. The remaining 2.4 acres, which include a stormwater retention pond, will be placed in a conservation easement, Watts said.

"The environmental impact that we're doing is a lot less than if we were to clear-cut six lots," he said.

Keep It Green members oppose any increase in the number of units, and point to the goal in the county's future land-use plan to limit new residential development on Waccamaw Neck.

Council Chairman John Thomas moved to deny the request to rezone the site as a "flexible design district."

"The overriding issue on Waccamaw Neck is density," Thomas said.

He failed to get a second.

Council Member Steve Goggans, whose district includes the property, moved to

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## UTILITIES

### Santee Cooper agrees to talks with HOAs on street lights

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Communities that pay a monthly fee for street lights could see a savings if Santee Cooper agrees to let them buy the light fixtures and poles. Officials at the state-owned utility have told property owners they are willing to talk about a change in policy since the Georgetown County Council chairman asked the state attorney general for an opinion on the issue.

"Most HOAs have looked at this line item and thrown up their hands," said Doug Decker, a resident of Heritage Plantation, where he serves on the homeowners association board. "The others are oblivious."

The utility leases poles and fixtures to retail customers in Georgetown, Horry and Berkeley counties. Decker, who had a career in the energy industry with Johnson Controls, calculated that the monthly lease payments exceed the cost of the equipment after the initial three-year contract.

Using that formula, a single pole and fixture leased over 25 years would have cost the customer about \$2,500 more than the actual cost of equipment.

One community in Carolina Forest in Horry County pays \$1.3 million a year because it has the most elaborate fixtures offered, he said. When that community asked about buying poles and fixtures last year, a Santee Cooper representative said leasing was the only option, unless the association wanted the equipment removed entirely.

Santee Cooper said that as part of state government, it was unable to sell assets without declaring them surplus.

"It all stems from Carolina Forest," said state Sen. Stephen Goldfinch, who has been working with the associations. "I do think there are some concessions that can be made."

John Thomas, the Georgetown County Council chairman, asked the state attorney general's office this month for an opinion about Santee Cooper's ability to sell poles and fixtures.

"Heritage and other HOAs brought to my attention that they've been paying over time for the equipment," Thomas said.

He got a call from Ray Pinson, the utility's manager of local government affairs, to say that Santee Cooper's position had changed.

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## ENVIRONMENT

### Feds at odds with state over seismic test permits

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Without a plan to lease portions of the Atlantic coast for oil and gas drilling there can be no permits issued for seismic surveys, the state attorney general told the U.S. District Court this week.

That puts the state at odds with the federal government, which claims that President Trump's decision this month to extend a moratorium on oil and gas leases until 2032 didn't impact its ability to issue permits to companies that use air gun arrays to locate potential sources of oil and gas under the ocean floor.

The state, local governments - including the town of Pawleys Island - and conservation groups have challenged federal approvals for seismic survey permits.

After the president's decision, Judge Richard Gergel asked attorneys for the federal government to explain how that affected the pending suit over seismic permits.

The presidential memorandum "has no legal effect on the status of the applications to conduct seismic surveys," Justice Department attorneys said in a filing on Monday.

"The state disagrees," Attorney General Alan Wilson replied on Wednesday.

With the president's order to bar oil and gas leases, "any seismic testing would be clearly unnecessary and would serve no purpose," according to the state's filing. "While the President's Memorandum does not say 'no seismic testing' expressly, is certainly does so impliedly."

The suit over seismic testing, filed in 2018, has been in "a holding pattern," said Amy Armstrong, head of the S.C. Environmental Law Project. With Trump's announcement, attorneys debated the impact.

It is further complicated by the fact that the federal authorizations at the heart of the suit are due to expire on Nov. 30. They can be extended for a year, but Armstrong said she hasn't heard whether that will happen.

Peg Howell, a leader of the citizens group Stop Offshore Drilling in the Atlantic, said she believes the testing can be done before 2022, the date when the moratorium will be extended.

"We have not been protected by the moratorium," Howell said.



EDUCATION | Schools go hybrid

### Virtual gives way to reality

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

It took nearly two weeks, but Georgetown County students and teachers were finally reunited inside classrooms on Monday.

Superintendent Keith Price said principals from across the district told him the first days went really well.

"I think everyone is happy to be at this point," Price said. "Everyone understands that being able to come back in person really is a privilege right now. It's something that we shouldn't take for granted and our students have just been wonderful. Our teachers have embraced it and it's been a great week so far and I hope it continues."

William Coleman, a second-grader at Waccamaw Elementary School, was so excited he said his head was going to explode.

The district moved into its hybrid phase this week, which has students separated into two groups and inside classrooms two days a week and learning virtually two days a week.

It was an unusual return to classes because parents and guardians were not allowed



Above, Madeline Johnson takes her sister Cecilia to pre-K on the first day of in-person classes at Waccamaw Elementary. Left, Jimmy Weiss, a pre-K student, was the first to arrive Monday. His dad, Brad, adjusts his face mask.

Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

inside school buildings.

Waccamaw Elementary teachers and Jim Edwards, the school's resource officer, were

stationed outside to escort the children to their classrooms. Some parents parked their cars

SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 3

### District extends hybrid phase as virus numbers fall

It's the hybrid life for Georgetown County students, until at least Oct. 16.

Although the COVID-19 numbers from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control continue to decrease in the county, Superintendent Keith Price announced Tuesday that the

district will stay in its hybrid phase for weeks five (Oct. 5-9) and six (Oct. 12-16).

The county's incident rate, which is based on 100,000 people, is at 87.7. It needs to be 50. Last week it was 124.4.

The county's percent positive rate, which needs to be 10 percent or less, is at 11. Last week, it was

17.4.

"We're very, very close," Price said. "We're moving the right direction so I feel very good about where we're going right now."

Once the county hits the magic numbers, schools can reopen to students five days a week.

- CHRIS SOKOLOSKI

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Doug Decker created a formula for groups to calculate savings.