

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

COASTAL MONTESSORI

Charter board stays silent after firing new director

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

After four months on the job, Gene Nicastro is out as director of the Coastal Montessori Charter School.

The school's board terminated Nicastro's contract after discussing his 90-day review for three-and-a-half hours in executive session during a meeting on Monday night.



Gene Nicastro

The vote was unanimous. No reason was given although the board said in a statement it "would be in the best interest" of the school.

The board named Chip Henney, the school's long-time assistant director, as acting director. It's Henney's second stint in that position.

Tyler Easterling, chairman of the board, declined to comment on Tuesday.

Nicastro did not return a phone call seeking comment.

At last month's board meeting, several members said they wanted the school to have a plan in place to bring students back for in-person instruction. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students have been learning virtually since the beginning of the school year.

"Regardless of what the vote is, we're not ready to be back on Nov. 12," Nicastro told the board. "I feel like we're going to be a little bit short-staffed at that point."

The board approved extending the virtual program through Nov. 24, with a proviso that Nicastro bring two reopening plans to this week's meeting.

"I'll bring 10 options if the board wants me to, but I'm not going to say they're my recommendations," Nicastro said.

At Monday's virtual meeting, Nicastro told the board that the school's policy committee was still working on a reopening plan.

Coastal Montessori is a public school sponsored by the
SEE "CHARTER," PAGE 3



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Austin Bond, above right, with students outside the school board meeting. Below, the Rev. Mitchell Adger argues against adding in-person classes. Bottom, Dr. Angie Strickland shows the board a chart of coronavirus cases in the county.

EDUCATION | Bringing back students

Board rejects call for 4-day week

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

For the second time in a month, a proposal to bring some of Georgetown County's students back for in-person learning four days a week was defeated by the school board.

Under the hybrid-plus plan recommended this week by district staff, all students in pre-K through fifth grade, along with at-risk children like English learners, homeless students and students in foster care, would have four days of in-person classes starting on Nov. 30.

"This has been the most difficult issue facing public education in generations," School Board Chairman Jim Dumm said.

The vote was 5-4, with Lynne Ford, Mike Cafaro, Sandra Johnson, Bill Gaskins and Randy Walker voting against the plan. Dumm, Patti Hammel, Pat DeLeone and Arthur Lance Jr. voted for it.

It was the first meeting for Ford, Hammel and Gaskins, who were elected to the board Nov. 3.

"While we're trying to push forward with more safe in-person options, our state and our country is seeing a spike again," Superintendent Keith Price said. "There's so many valid concerns
SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 3



LITCHFIELD BEACH

Dredging plan draws concerns over turtles

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A third request for a permit to place sand on the south end of Litchfield Beach was the first to generate positive comments, but it also drew new objections from a state agency and a conservation group that say the proposal to allow work in the spring and summer will harm sea turtles.

The Peninsula Property Owners Association wants to place up to 400,000 cubic yards of offshore sand on the beach in front of 33 lots. The area is part of Inlet Point, a gated community. The Peninsula POA first applied in April for federal and state permits to place sand along portions of the beach in front of both communities. Inlet Point owners objected, many saying they didn't want to share the cost for a project estimated to cost \$12 million.

A revised permit application sought approval to bring sand by truck to the Peninsula over two or three years. That drew an outcry from Litchfield Beach property owners who were concerned about the impact of the truck traffic, estimated at 100 to 150 trips a day for three months.

The current proposal will return to an offshore borrow area as a source for sand that will be pumped to the beach by a dredge. The work, funded by the Peninsula POA, will take place around the clock for six to eight weeks.

SEE "LITCHFIELD," PAGE 7

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Bid for clarity brings new suits over easements for beach project

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An attempt by the town of Pawleys Island to clarify how it will use easements from oceanfront property owners obtained as part of its beach renourishment project has led to a new round of lawsuits from three owners challenging the process. They say the town is trying to do an end-run around the suits they filed in July.

The town needs easements from 113 property owners in order to partner with the Army Corps of Engineers on the \$14.8 million renourishment project completed in the spring. The Corps will plant vegetation on the new dune along 1.4 miles of beach at the south end. The agency will also fund any repairs if that portion of the beach is damaged by erosion and pay half the cost of periodic future beach renourishment.

The owners of three properties - Frank Beattie, Barry Stanton and Sunset Lodge LLC - declined to provide the easements the town wanted. Town Council agreed in May to condemn the easements. The owners sued in Circuit Court to block the condemnation, saying the easements were no longer necessary and gave the public access to their property and claiming the condemnation process was flawed. Stanton represents himself and the other two owners.

The town sought a quick resolution and asked a judge to dismiss the suits. Following a hearing in September, Judge Ben Culbertson allowed them to proceed.

Last month, Town Council adopted a resolution to change the wording of the easement to define the public use. It agreed to allow Town Attorney David Durrant to make the final change and Mayor Brian Henry to sign off on it.

A new condemnation notice was then sent to the property owners, according to the suits filed last week. That violates
SEE "PAWLEYS," PAGE 2

NONPROFITS | Tara Hall Home for Boys

Director retires after 50 years as facility plans conversion

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

After 50 years of working at Tara Hall Home for Boys, Jim Dumm is retiring.

"It's bittersweet," Dumm said. "But I'm ready for it."

The nonprofit is a residential facility for troubled boys.

The facility will be converted into a non-residential school for girls and boys which could be open as soon as next year.

"Going through this change, it might be a good time to bow out," Dumm said. "I'll still be supportive and consult with them, especially if they end going into the education field. Maybe I can be helpful at some level."

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March, Tara Hall residents were sent home to their families.

"COVID has really done a number of us," Dumm said.

The boys were brought back for a short time, and then sent home again in July when



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Jim Dumm at Tara Hall in 2018.

a couple of people tested positive for COVID-19.

"We just felt like it would be best for the kids to be with the families," Dumm said. "We were hopeful that maybe by October we would be able to bring them back."

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



A flood of plastic: Study details a decade of impact on marine animals.

SECOND FRONT

Tourism: Panel recommends cuts in tax grants.
PAGE 12

Churches: Operation Christmas Child gift boxes begin a global journey.
PAGE 14



Obituaries	2
Crime.....	5
Opinion	6
Crossword	10
Classifieds.....	11
Sports	15

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