

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Students will start new term with 4 days of classes

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County parents of students in elementary and intermediate schools will have the option of sending their children to in-person classes four days a week starting on Feb. 1.

The school board approved a hybrid-plus plan this week. Students were attending in-person classes two days a week before the winter break but have been in a remote phase since Jan. 4.

"As we've made decisions going through this process, we've tried to do it not only for the best interests of our students, but also for all of our teachers, for all of our educators, for all of our staff, and all the families they go home to," Superintendent Keith Price said.

Parents who do not want their children at school four days a week can choose to join the district's virtual program.

"I think our children deserve a chance to go back to school and parents deserve a chance to choose virtual," Board Member Patti Hammel said. "I don't think what we're doing right now is acceptable."

Board Member Pat DeLeone, who called for votes on the hybrid-plus plan



Emalee Poindexter of Georgetown fell asleep Tuesday night while waiting for her mom, Melissa, to address the school board.

Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

that failed in October and November, said the district couldn't wait for the COVID-19 infection rates to go down before acting.

"It's not that I don't care about our children and our teachers, but this coming March it will have been one year since our students have met face to face with their teachers more than a few hours a week," DeLeone said. "I do not think that we can continue until we reach low [rates] before these kids come back to school."

The board heard pleas from a dozen parents and students before the vote.

"I don't like sitting in front of the computer and not getting to see all my friends and my teacher in person," said Ruby Badgett, a kindergarten student at Waccamaw Elementary School.

"I get tired of putting on the computer and sitting there for two-and-a-half hours," said Ruby's sister, Mary Margaret, a

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GEORGETOWN COUNTY

New chairman wants to unify council

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Louis Morant turned 65 on Tuesday. He got a gavel for his birthday.

Midway through his first term on Georgetown County Council, Morant was elected chairman. It's the same position that his older brother, Johnny, held for 12 years.

Morant succeeds John Thomas, who said last week that he planned to run for a second two-year term as chairman since no one else had expressed interest.

But Morant said he had been approached by other council members to serve. "Things have changed slightly, I guess," he said.

He was elected in 2018 to the District 7 council seat, the one that his brother had held since 1993. The brothers were partners in a law practice in Georgetown until Johnny's death last year.

Thomas said he learned of



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Louis Morant is the new County Council chairman.

Morant's interest after four members - Bob Anderson, Everett Carolina, Lillie Jean Johnson and Raymond Newton - were sworn in last week.

"I welcomed that because I knew that Louis would be a good

chair," Thomas said. "Being chair is not something that I have had a craving for, even from the beginning."

Thomas was elected in a 4-2 vote with Carolina backing

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CORONAVIRUS

Hospitals get 15,000 requests for vaccine with 70-plus eligible

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Residents age 70 and above can now get the COVID-19 vaccine, but the state will not have enough doses to keep up with the demand this month.

Dr. Brannon Traxler, interim public health director for the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, said the state gets 60,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine every week, but there are 10 times that many seniors who need it.

Wednesday was the first day that seniors could schedule an appointment to get the vaccine, and the DHEC care line received more than 5,000 calls in the morning. That's more calls than are normally received in a week,

Traxler said, adding that DHEC is working to add more operators.

"We ask all South Carolinians to be patient," Traxler said.

More than 15,000 requests for appointments were received by Tideland's Health on Wednesday by midday, according to Dawn Bryant, Tideland's senior communications strategist.

"We are excited to see such a tremendous response as our community works to turn a pivotal corner in the battle against COVID-19," Bryant said.

Tideland's expects to give first doses of the vaccine to about 2,000 seniors next week.

It got help with vaccinations from the National Guard last week and is also hiring temporary workers.

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LANDUSE | From tech park to apartments

Vote deferred as opposition mounts

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A request to rezone property once intended for a technology park to allow 182 apartments was deferred this week to allow the developer to "consider some other information," according to their attorney.

Opponents of the project called on Georgetown County Council to deny the request outright. They said they are concerned that the council will revert to virtual meetings due to a rise in coronavirus cases and that the public won't be able to provide meaningful comment.

"That situation would be wholly beneficial to the developer," said Cindy Person, a leader of the citizens group Keep It Green.

Graycliff Capital Partners wants to buy the 14.5 acres on Petigru Drive from the Georgetown County Economic Development Alliance, a nonprofit controlled by the county. The property was bought in 2016 with a \$950,000 loan from Santee Cooper. Mercom, a tech firm that owns adjacent property, planned to develop the park in partnership with the county, but ran into financial problems.

Dan Stacy, an attorney who represents Graycliff, said this week's deferral



Cindy Person, a leader of Keep It Green, said the issue should be delayed again if the council resumes virtual meetings.

was only a pause in the process and that they plan to move forward. The Planning Commission also deferred a decision on the plan last year to get more information about traffic and stormwater impacts.

In a procedural move, the council moved the rezoning, scheduled for the second of three required readings, to the top of its agenda and unanimously approved the deferral before taking public comment. The change caught opponents by surprise.

Council Member Louis Morant, who was elected chairman at the start of the meeting, said the deferral was not unusual, and likened it to a continuance in a court proceeding.

Council Member John Thomas, who opposes the rezoning and who is the former chairman, said the move on the agenda was not intended to circumvent comment. Council routinely deals with deferrals at the start of meetings so people don't have to wait through other agenda items to learn its fate, he noted.

Person was among 13 people who spoke out against the zoning change. She told the county that more than 900 area residents have signed a petition opposing the apartment project. It is also opposed by the Pawleys Island Civic Club, a local community

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Judge rules for owners in beach easement suits

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The owners claim the easements will let the public use their property for beach access.

A Circuit Court judge has granted a motion by three oceanfront property owners seeking to quash an effort by the town of Pawleys Island to condemn easements for beach renourishment.

Last week's ruling by Judge Michael Nettles did not specify the grounds for his ruling on the motion for summary judgment. A formal order will follow. A notice of the decision notes that the ruling does not end the case.

Until the order is filed, it is unclear how the case will proceed, attorneys said.

The property owners filed suit in July to block the condemnation, saying the easements are no longer necessary because the town has already completed a \$14.8 million renourishment project earlier in the year. They also said the easements would allow the public to access the beach across their property.

The town wants the easements in order to allow the Army Corps of Engineers to participate in the renourishment project along 1.4 miles of beach on the south end of Pawleys Island. That will allow the Corps to repair storm damage along that portion of the beach and pay half the cost of future renourishment projects for the next 45 years.

The town obtained easements from 110 of the 113 property owners in the area eligible for federal participation. It delayed planting beach grass along the southern portion of the renourishment area so that the Corps could do the work. Town Council voted in

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