

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Sheriff makes case for eight more patrol deputies

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Sheriff Carter Weaver wants to add eight patrol deputies this year and wants Georgetown County Council to reinstate merit pay raises to help keep them.

It would be the first increase in patrol deputies in 15 years, although deputies have been add-



Carter Weaver wants to reinstate a merit pay system to retain deputies.

ed for schools, traffic enforcement and a beach patrol through grants. The county has also added deputies for security at the judicial center and at the county offices in the old courthouse.

"I'm not here today to scare you with ominous reports of lawlessness if you fail to act, but I am here to say that the issues I have laid out will not fare well

for Georgetown County if not addressed prior to July 1 or shortly thereafter," Weaver told council members this week.

The new deputies would amount to a 20 percent increase in the number assigned to patrols. Weaver said that's justified by growth in the county, whatever way it is measured.

He told council members that

he wants the county to develop a metric that will trigger the hiring of new deputies.

"The sheriff's personnel numbers must keep up with growth and calls for service. To date, they have not," Weaver said.

Since 2006, the calls for service have increased by over 38 percent, according to figures

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LAND USE

Rezoning tests limits of rural growth

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A zoning change that could lead to the creation of 90 units of affordable housing outside Georgetown narrowly passed County Council this week, with the chairman saying concerns raised by opponents can be dealt with before a development plan is approved.

"I believe in, instead of concentrating on why it can't be, concentrating on why it can be," Council Chairman Louis Morant said. "It can lead to a better, blended Georgetown County."

The vote will allow multi-family use on 16 acres on Wedgefield Road that are part of a medical "planned development" approved in 2008 to allow construction of a new hospital by Tidelands Health. That project was tied to the proposed Crown Pointe development, which included over 7,700 homes. It was never built.

A development group wants to buy a portion of the hospital site to develop rental units under a program of Low Income Housing Tax Credits administered by the state. It needs the county zoning approval to move forward with its application. It won't find out if it receives the credits until late summer.

The project came up for approval this spring on the heels of a housing needs assessment commissioned by the county. The study showed little rental housing available for households with incomes equal to or below 80 percent of the county average, which is \$50,000 a year. That is the threshold for affordable housing.

Most public sector and service sector employees have

SEE "ZONING," PAGE 2



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Council Member Bob Anderson debates affordable housing with Marilyn Hemingway, who supported the zoning change. Anderson opposed it.

CORONAVIRUS

Governor overrules mask mandate in schools

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Now that parents have the option of not having their children wear masks inside school buildings, the Georgetown County School District is trying to figure out how to implement the new policy.

Gov. Henry McMaster signed an executive order on Tuesday overriding all mask requirements in the state.

"We have known for months that our schools are some of the safest places when it comes to COVID-19," McMaster said. "With every adult in our state having

the opportunity to receive a vaccine, it goes against all logic to continue to force our children - especially our youngest children - to wear masks against their parents' wishes. Whether a child wears a mask in school is a decision that should be left only to a student's parents."

McMaster directed the state Department of Health and Environmental Control to distribute a form for parents to sign for their children to "opt out" of wearing a mask.

State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman said Wednesday she was very

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Final version of design rules calls for town review board

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A proposal to preserve the traditional look of houses on Pawleys Island will follow a traditional approach: an architectural review board.

Pawleys Island Town Council is due to take up the latest version of the plan next week. It follows months of debate by the town Planning Commission that saw a list of design mandates whittled down from six to four to one.

Along with an ordinance creating the ARB and a set of guidelines, the Planning Commission voted last week to recommend that the town amend its zoning

ordinance to limit the size of a house's second floor to no more than 80 percent of the space on its first floor.

Council and commission members agreed at a workshop in March to bring the proposal to the council for the first of two required readings in May. In addition to the limit on second floor space, the commission also recommended the town adopt a steeper roof pitch, prohibit "stacked" porches and ban vinyl, aluminum and faux stucco siding.

It also proposed that the town hire an architect to review and approve plans, with the commission acting as an appeals board.

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MENTAL HEALTH | Signs of Suicide

Program encourages talk to promote prevention

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Suicide is not a taboo subject at Waccamaw High School.

"We don't want the first conversation about suicide to be when someone is suicidal," Emma Wheeler, the school's psychologist, said. "We want to normalize talking about it and asking for help. We really want students to feel just as comfortable coming to a counselor about a mental health problem as they do going to the nurse about a physical health problem."

"Mental health has been a big topic of discussion in our school for the three years that I've been principal," Adam George said. "We always want to continue the

conversation."

This year Waccamaw instituted the Signs of Suicide prevention program, known as SOS, that has reached more than 250 sophomores and juniors.

Wheeler and Bo Godbold, the school's rehabilitative behavior health services counselor, work with small groups, one classroom at a time. Students watch videos, answer questions and fill out a questionnaire that screens for possible problems.

"Small groups provide engagement. They're engaged in it instead of sitting there waiting for it to be over," Godbold said. "We've seen the effectiveness already."

"We are able to see if a student needs somebody to talk to



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Waccamaw High students took a mile long wellness walk on Pawleys Island this week. The green flags are a symbol of mental health awareness.

right away, or if it's somebody we just need to check on in a week or two," George said.

The motto of the program is A.C.T.: "acknowledge" the signs of mental illness, show the person you "care" about them, and "tell" a trusted adult.

"Teenagers are much more likely to tell their friends how they're feeling than they are to

an adult," Wheeler said. "Teaching teenagers how to help each other and how to seek help from a trusted adult when it's needed is so important."

"The really good thing about our students at Waccamaw High School is they're more aware," George said. "They're looking out for each other and they're able to know if someone needs help.

We've presented the resources to them so they know where to go and who to talk to."

Wheeler and Godbold both said research has shown that talking to kids about suicide does not lead to suicides.

"Having that conversation is essential to preventing suicide. It's the big elephant in the room

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