

# COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XL No. 6

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ July 22, 2021

\$1.00



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

## A month with three r's

Mylla Sellers isn't impressed by the giant in a reading of Jack and the Beanstalk during a summer reading camp at Waccamaw Elementary. It also includes writing and math sessions. Ellen Guarino, above, and Christina Straight, below, have 12 students in the camp, one of five created to offset learning loss due to the pandemic.



## Battle over density looms in zoning change

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Property off Highway 17 near Prince George took the first step toward higher density development, but not before the chairman of the Georgetown County Planning Commission pointed out to some of the project's opponents that their community was only allowed to be built after a similar change to the county's land-use plan.

Benjamin Goff wants to re-zone 14.8 acres he owns between Waterford Road and The Colony development from "residential-half acre" to "residential-10,000 square feet."

Charles Suggs, a member of the planning staff, said under the current zoning, Goff's property could have about 24 lots. If rezoned, the number of lots could increase to about 40.

"Only by maximizing the population density on parcels available for development can the Planning Commission ensure the

protection of existing conservation land and the combined creation of open spaces for public uses and health and welfare of the community," Cynthia Murray, a real estate agent who represented Goff at a hearing last week, said. "We cannot have exclusivity and demand that an owner give up his rights on his property, especially if he is not intending on hurting anyone's property situation."

Six people spoke against the zoning change, including two from Keep It Green, a citizens group opposed to increasing residential density on the Waccamaw Neck, and two residents of The Colony, which borders Goff's property on the south.

Heather Kinder, who called herself a member and "fierce supporter" of Keep It Green, said traffic is already clogging Highway 17.

"The applicant has provided no compelling reason to approve. What's wrong with

SEE "ZONING," PAGE 3

## TOURISM

### Rising occupancy rates may point to changing trends

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

If you're looking for a vacation rental on the Waccamaw Neck before September, you're probably out of luck.

The area's occupancy rate for July and August is nearing 100 percent, according to tourism officials.

"They're great numbers for us and we hope that they continue," Mark Stevens, the director of tourism development for the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce, said.

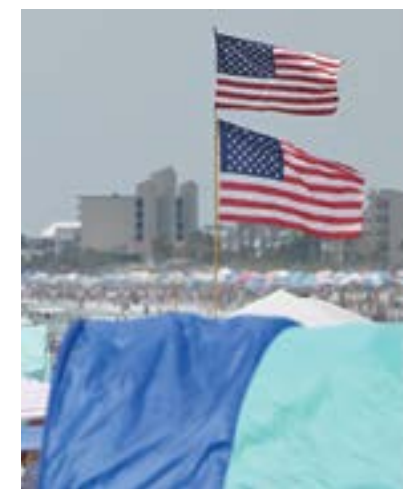
Occupancy rates are also already rising for October, November and January, Stevens added.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the county's tourism numbers didn't fall off.

"People were definitely here last year," Beth Stedman, the chamber president, said. "We definitely had great numbers."

Only three areas in the state - Georgetown County, Beaufort and Hilton Head - saw accommodations and hospitality tax revenues increase in 2020 over the prior year.

Stevens said some people



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A sea of tents below the flags at Litchfield Beach.

who canceled trips in the spring of 2020 rebooked for the fall or winter and now may consider non-summer vacation options going forward.

"We had really good numbers in the fall of last year," Stevens said. "What we're seeing this year might be a repeat of that."

Bob Seganti, director of golf operations at True Blue Golf Club

SEE "TOURISM," PAGE 4

## EDUCATION

### Staggered starts gets mixed reviews

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County School District is still working on its reopening plans, but its plan to stagger school start times is not popular with some parents.

The district announced in June that elementary and intermediate schools would start at 7:30 a.m. and middle and high schools at 8:30 a.m. for the 2021-22 school year.

The district surveyed parents, students and staff members about start times. Nearly 3,500 responses were received.

Among parents, 40 percent prefer all schools starting close to the same time; 38 percent prefer the district's plan. The rest favored the schedule adopted for the pandemic: 7:30 for elementary and 9 a.m. for middle and high.

The district plan was the choice of 54 percent of principals, 49 percent of students and 46 percent of staff members.

"It's not an easy answer, I definitely understand the parents' point of view," Board Member Lynne Ford, the parent of a high school student, said. "I believe that as the district hears more

responses of parents, hopefully that will inform the next iteration of schedules. I'm thinking they may well tweak it some."

The district initiated staggered start times when schools reopened last September because COVID-19 safety protocols allowed for fewer students on buses and required that buses be cleaned between routes.

Alan Walters, the district's executive director of safety, said the limit on the bus capacity is now a recommendation, not a requirement.

At Waccamaw Intermediate  
SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 4

## TRANSPORTATION | Grate Avenue

### Additional delays appear on paving project's already rocky road

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A project to repave the road to the Pawleys Island recycling center that is more than a year behind schedule will be delayed further by stormwater improvements.

Grate Avenue was approved for repaving by the Georgetown County Transportation Committee in January 2020. The cost was \$205,055. It was planned as a three-day project, with the center closed midweek to allow the quick turnaround. It is the business center in the county.

But utilities along the road's right-of-way had to be moved. Then the coronavirus pandemic arrived.

"We had a bad beginning," said Ray Funnys, the county's director of Public

Services. "It's been the public works project from hell."

County Council didn't approve the paving contract until November.

Then there was a problem with the stormwater system.

"The contractor put in catch basins that were too high," Funnys said. "They were a trip hazard."

The county also discovered that the drainage system wasn't draining.

"We've got water flooding people worse than it was before," Funnys said.

Another catch basin will be added when the low-profile basins are installed, he said. That will require additional digging before the paving can begin.

County staff and the paving contractor, Coastal Asphalt, met last week to come up with a new schedule for the project.



Bulbs in a sign announcing work on Grate Avenue have burned out, blurring the message.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

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Left to right: Corridor study includes plan for intersection changes at Litchfield.

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