

COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XL No. 8

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ August 5, 2021

\$1.00

District urges returning students to wear masks in new surge

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County School District is preparing to welcome teachers and students back to school in the next few weeks as the state once again finds itself with a rising number of COVID-19 cases.

A month ago, there were 115 new cases in the state, including two in Georgetown County. As of Monday, there were 2,035 new



Jim Dumm

cases in the state, including 26 in the county.

Dr. Jonathan Knoche, a medical consultant with the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, said Wednesday that the Delta variant is "significantly

more transmissible" than when COVID-19 was originally discovered.

Knoche said Delta spreads like chicken pox, with each patient possibly infecting four times the number of people than a patient with the original strain of COVID-19.

On Tuesday, the Georgetown County School Board approved a reopening plan for the district that includes recommendations that students wear masks in

schools and on buses and makes plexiglass barriers available to those who want it.

School Board Chairman Jim Dumm said he would like to do more, but the district's hands are tied.

District officials would like students and staff to be vaccinated and wear masks when they return to school, but they can't require them to do either.

Alan Walters, the district's executive director of safety, said no

matter what the district does, not everyone will be happy.

Districts are "trying to take the various guidelines that we get, some of which conflict with one another, and come up with a plan we think best serves as many people as possible here in Georgetown County given our unique needs," Walters added.

DHEC and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention both recommend that all

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STORMWATER | The master plan

New data takes back seat to old problems at forum

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The launch of an effort to get the public's help to identify drainage problems on the Waccamaw Neck left residents frustrated that issues they want Georgetown County to fix have yet to be addressed.

"It turned into a gripe session," said Bob Anderson. "That's why I got mad and left. I was frustrated."

He serves on County Council.

Others had already left the session last week at the Waccamaw Library, including one man who didn't stay to learn about the app engineers want the public to use to provide data.

"This has been going on for years," he said.

The input is part of a \$702,000 stormwater master plan that the county is creating for the four watersheds on Waccamaw Neck. Engineers from the county and the firm that is producing the study, Thomas & Hutton, met with about 30 residents to explain how they could provide details about specific flooding events, damaged drains and blocked pipes that would help focus the attention of the study, which is due to be completed by the end of the year.



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Tracy Jones, in green, explains the goals of the watershed plan at a meeting last week.

Part of the study will be a list of recommended drainage improvements and cost estimates.

But that doesn't mean that the county has stopped working on projects that were scheduled before the County Council agreed to create the master plan last fall. Art Baker, the county capital projects manager, said he has more than 40 projects in various stages of development.

Those include a \$1.2 million

project to improve the drainage at Bent Tree, a 16-lot subdivision at the corner of Martin Luther King and Parkersville roads. Residents have seen the water lap at their front doors and damage vehicles.

Stephanie Bari, who has lived on Bent Tree Lane since 2019, said she was surprised more of her neighbors didn't attend the meeting. She went to make sure their drainage project stayed on

the county's list.

Caroline Williamson, who lives on Beaumont Drive, said she had been trying for years to get the county to address flooding that comes through her property from Hagley.

"Art came out and looked at it - five years ago," she said. "My land is eroding."

A \$750,000 stormwater project for the portion of Hagley that

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LAND USE

Groups threaten suit over delays in comp plan updates

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Three citizens groups say they are ready to go to court to force Georgetown County to complete an update of a state-mandated plan for infrastructure, growth and development.

"We need to have a plan for what our vision is for Georgetown County for the next 10 years," said Amy Armstrong, general counsel and executive director of the S.C. Environmental Law Project. She is representing Keep It Green, Preserve Murrells Inlet and the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

Armstrong told members of the county Planning Commission in a letter this week that the groups will ask the courts to order them to complete the 10-year update of the county's comprehensive plan unless the commission establishes a timeline for the work by Sept. 17.

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Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

Joe Cunningham meets with Democrats in Georgetown.

POLITICS

Cunningham brings campaign for governor to county for the day

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The shuttered steel mill in Georgetown reminds Joe Cunningham of Gov. Henry McMaster: they both represent the past.

"We can't afford to go backwards. We can't even afford to stay where we are right now," Cunningham said. "We need to go forward into the future and you all deserve a governor that's going to be honest with you about the challenges we face in the state and you deserve a governor that's going to have the backbone to actually address those challenges."

Cunningham is hoping to be

the Democratic nominee who runs against McMaster, the Republican incumbent in 2022.

He spent nearly 12 hours on Wednesday touring Georgetown and Andrews, and speaking to potential voters at events in Georgetown and Pawleys Island. The events are part of his 46-county tour of the state.

"We're going to every single county in the state, talking to every community, no matter how rural or how red or how forgotten they may have been by this governor. We're listening to their concerns because I'm running to be the governor of the future."

SEE "GOVERNOR," PAGE 3

PAWLEYS ISLAND

ARB approves first house design for owners who check all the boxes

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

It took less than 15 minutes for the Pawleys Island Architectural Review Board to approve its first set of plans. Paul Groce would not have minded if it had taken longer.

"We're open to any suggestions," he told the board. "My wife and I are so completely in support of the ARB."

Town Council established the board and adopted a set of guidelines for new houses in June after a year of discussion with the town Planning Commission about ways to curtail "big box" structures.

Groce has been coming to the island since 1964. He said he and his wife, Jen, would have submitted their house plans to the town voluntarily if the ARB hadn't been created.

"We're completely open to input," he said.

The house at 132 Atlantic Ave. will replace one that dates from the 1920s. It has character, but isn't historic, Groce said. Additions and alterations over the years left the house in what



Whitney Newman Architects

The design of Paul and Jen Groce's house on Atlantic Avenue met the goals of the new design code.

Ken Leach, who chairs the ARB, called the era of "avocado appliances," referring to their color.

Groce told the board he would have preferred to keep the old structure, but the requirement that it be brought up to code if renovations exceed 50 percent of the value didn't make that feasible.

He hired Whitney Newman, an architect who lives in Hagley, to design the new home. "I'm

hoping that a year from now it will look like something that's been there for 50 years," Groce said.

Along with creating the ARB, the town amended its development ordinance to require that the second floor of a new home have no more than 80 percent of the living area of the first floor. The Groce house has 2,010 square feet on the first floor and 1,360

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Yoga with a twist: The popular form of exercise is taking on new dimensions.

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