

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Thanksgiving foods, including turkey, are distributed at the Baskervill pantry. Some people, below, arrived by bike.

TOURISM

Tax revenue increases, but grant requests still face cuts

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A windfall in taxes paid by people who rent vacation properties has yet to find its way to the organizations that rely on the revenue to help fund their activities. Despite a rise in rentals fueled by the coronavirus pandemic, Georgetown County is still unsure how much it can allocate for accommodations tax grants.

"Six hundred thousand dollars of stuff is not going to be approved," said Kathi Grace, who chairs the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee. "This is painful."

The county receives quarterly payments from the state, which collects a 2 percent tax on short-term rentals. The payment for the quarter that includes the three summer months has not arrived. "We've never had a meeting where we don't have that first quarter number in stone," Grace said.

What was set in stone was \$1.8 million in requests from nonprofits and county government offices for a share of the revenue, which the law requires to be used for tourism-related activities.

The advisory committee estimated it had around \$1.2 million to allocate. That's an increase of almost 22 percent from the last fiscal year. But data compiled for the Chamber of Commerce, which handles tourism marketing for the county, showed accommodations tax collections in the unincorporated areas of the county rose by almost 33 percent.

The chamber was recommended to receive the largest share of the money on hand: \$630,111, which will be added to \$511,000 it expects to receive from that accommodations tax to market the county to tourists. The chamber conducts the marketing and advertising for the county Tourism Management Commission. It had asked for

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NONPROFITS | Feeding a need

Study highlights lack of access to food

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

More than one out of every 10 Georgetown County residents lacks consistent access to enough food to live an active, healthy life, according to a recent study.

This food insecurity is at its worst in the southern and western parts of the county, according to the study commissioned by the Baskervill Food Pantry and Georgetown RISE, a coalition of governments and nonprofits focused on sustainable development.

"No community that is sustainable is hungry," Pamela Martin, executive director of Georgetown RISE, said during one of the public presentations of the results of the survey, which was conducted by staff and students at Coastal Carolina University.

The study found that 6,900

people, 11.1 percent of the population, face food insecurity.

Baskervill, which is located on the campus of Holy Cross-Faith Memorial Church, has recently expanded its reach into the western part of the county thanks to a program called Blessing Forward, started by Renee Ford.

Baskervill volunteers pack about 125 bags of food each week, which Ford personally delivers to individuals and churches for distribution.

Blessing Forward got the nonprofit pantry's leadership team, including co-coordinator Nancy Cave, talking about how they could continue to have enough food to sustain Ford's program.

The team had already been talking about expanding its outreach, which led to them teaming up with Georgetown RISE on the CCU survey.

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LAND USE

Proposed changes to landscape rules call for more and greener plants

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A plan to put more green into green spaces is under review by the Georgetown County Planning Commission. Members say they want to make sure that the measure provides enough space for landscape plants to thrive.

The effort began in 2019 with a request from Murrells Inlet restaurant owners to eliminate the requirement that parking lots have one landscaped island for every 10 parking spaces. They wanted to shift that landscaping to the perimeter of the lots.

A proposed revision to the zoning ordinance would keep the interior landscape requirement and increase the size of the plants. It would also require that at least half of the plants are evergreens.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Commission members are skeptical that the house under construction above meets the town's roof pitch requirement.

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Planners renew effort to take control of building permits

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

With architectural guidelines in place, the town of Pawleys Island needs its own building inspector to enforce them, Planning Commission members say.

They made their third pitch in three and a half years to Town Council to take back plan review and inspections from Georgetown County and hire a private firm to do the work.

"We will be able to control our own destiny," said John Hildreth, who chairs the commission.

The issue was first raised by Administrator Ryan Fabbri in 2018. He was concerned at the time that work was being done without permits. Since county inspectors only came to the island for building inspections, they weren't catching the unpermitted work. The Planning Commission endorsed the idea, but Town Council never took up the

recommendation.

In June 2020, as the commission worked to craft a set of architectural guidelines for new houses, the issue reemerged. The owner of a contract inspection service, CC&I, outlined how the services worked. The company is used by about a dozen local governments across the state and has worked for Georgetown County.

Under the agreement with Georgetown County, which be-

gan in 2005, the building department keeps all the fees collected in exchange for reviewing plans and conducting inspections. CC&I would give 20 percent of the fees to the town.

The commission again voted to recommend the town hire a third-party inspection service. Town Council vetoed the idea.

Council Members Guerry Green and Rocky Holliday thought it would add another

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