

COASTAL OBSERVER

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County seeks dismissal of marina suit as trial nears

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A challenge to Georgetown County's approval of a new marina store and restaurant at Marlin Quay that prompted a series of lawsuits should be dismissed because it was filed too late, the county argued at a hearing last week.

"This is the one issue," said Henrietta Golding, the attorney

who represents the county. "If we try this case, that is the one issue as well."

Marlin Quay is a "planned development" zoning district that was created in 1982. It includes the marina, the Gulfstream Café, a parking lot and condominiums.

In November 2016, the new owner of the marina, Mark Lawhon, demolished the old store and shop. Gulfstream, which according to court docu-

ments is owned by Jerry Greenbaum of Boca Raton, Fla., and managed by CentraArchy Restaurants of Charleston, filed suit saying the work interfered with its easement to use the parking lot. Gulfstream also challenged Lawhon's plan for a new building, both at the county and in the courts.

The first version of the building plan was approved as a minor change to the planned develop-

ment that only required staff approval, a decision upheld by the Circuit Court. But Lawhon then applied for approval as a major change, which required a public hearing, review by the Planning Commission and three readings by County Council. That plan, known in court filings as version 2.0, was approved by the county in February 2018.

The following June, a jury ruled that Lawhon had interfered

with Gulfstream's easement. A judge issued an injunction saying the new marina facility could only be rebuilt in the footprint of the old facility. That required Lawhon to seek another change to the planned development. Following a hearing and review by the Planning Commission, the County Council gave final approval to version 3.0 in January 2019.

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ENVIRONMENT | Preservation vs. retreat

Panel approves permanent sandbags as 'research'

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Four DeBordieu property owners who installed sandbags in front of their beachfront houses without state permits will be able to keep them as part of a research project they are funding through Coastal Carolina University. The board of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control last week overturned a staff decision to deny authorization for the research.

In addition to allowing the study, which may not start for a decade or more, the board said that any penalties imposed by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management for failing to obtain permits cannot include removal of the sandbags.

The study is an important step toward developing strategies that will preserve oceanfront properties from erosion, said state Sen. Stephen Goldfinch, one of three attorneys who argued for the property owners before the board.

"In my other career," he told the DHEC board, "this is at the very top of everybody's mind in my district. It's extraordinarily important."

The Coastal Conservation League is expected to appeal the board's decision to the Administrative Law Court.

"It's completely unnecessary and it's illegal," Leslie Lenhardt, an attorney with the S.C. Environmental Law Project who represents the conservation group, said after the hearing. "I think it's highly likely that we'll pursue it."

The league also has an appeal



Photos by Chris Sokoloski (above) and Charles Swenson (below)/Coastal Observer

pending before the state Court of Appeals over a permit that allows construction of groins as part of a renourishment project at DeBordieu, a project designed to protect the area where the sandbags are located.

Staff at Coastal Resources said leaving the sandbags in place would violate the state's Beachfront Management Act and pose a threat to nesting sea turtles.

"The effect of sand bags is well known and has been studied for decades," Blair Williams, manager of critical area permitting, told the DHEC board. "There is little



Sandbags at one of the four houses whose owners are funding a research project in order to keep the bags in place. They will be covered by renourishment sand. State Sen. Stephen Goldfinch, one of the lawyers for the owners, said the research is needed to promote state policy.

to be gained in scientific knowledge that isn't already known."

The property owners were told in September 2019 that they would not receive a permit to bury large sandbags, Williams said. They placed the bags in the late summer of 2020 on four lots

along a sea wall at the south end of DeBordieu.

The renourishment project is underway in that area that will pump up to 650,000 cubic yards of offshore sand onto the beach along with constructing three

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EDUCATION

Early start proposal year-round in name only

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County School District is considering a plan to start the next two school years earlier, with teachers returning to work Aug. 1 this year and July 26 next year, and students joining them on Aug. 8 this year and Aug. 1 next year.

The district is calling 2023-24 a "modified year round" schedule, but Superintendent Keith Price said that term is needed to explain to the state why classes are starting before the third Monday in August, which is state law.

The proposed calendars also have both school years ending before Memorial Day.

"The primary objective, when the calendar committee set out, was to try to get exams done and first semester done before winter break," Price said. "When winter break hits, you leave it all behind and you go home and you rest. When you return, you start fresh with your new schedule. This is primarily for high school students. Semester break doesn't impact elementary and middle the way it does high school."

In order to finish the first semester in December, classes have to start earlier, Price added.

Along with the early start for the 2022-23 year, schools would be closed the entire week of

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ELECTION 2022 | Early voting

Board plans expansion of absentee polling places

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
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Waccamaw Neck residents may not have to drive to Georgetown to cast absentee ballots before the General Election in November.

County election officials are exploring the possibility of opening a voting center somewhere in Pawleys Island in October. It would be staffed by poll workers and open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. during a timeframe yet to be determined.

Aphra McCrea, director of elections, told the county's Election Board on Jan. 12 that she is still searching for a place for the center.

The Waccamaw Library is a potential spot, but McCrea said there are concerns about adequate parking. The Waccamaw Regional Recreation Center is not available, she added.

"We would like for it to be a

In-person absentee voting in 2020 opened with long lines outside the election office.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

month because the Waccamaw Neck has grown by 43 percent," McCrea said. "The need is there, the want is there. They're always asking."

McCrea expects the Waccamaw Neck center will be busy every day that it's open.

In 2020, which was a presidential election year during a pandemic, one-third of registered voters in Georgetown County cast an absentee ballot before Election Day. Half of the voters in Pawleys Island 5 cast an absentee ballot, the highest percentage of any precinct in the county.

Board member Billy Altman said the county was asked to open voting centers in 2020, but could not get the centers set up and poll workers hired and



trained in time.

"I think now voting centers across the state are becoming quite popular for absentee voting," Altman added. "There are a

lot of counties that are doing it."

The county is also considering a voting center at the recreation center in Andrews.

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town considers request to allow fireworks show over creek

BY CHARLES SWENSON
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Legal fireworks could return to Pawleys Island for the first time this century under a proposal being reviewed by Town Council.

The display would be shot from a barge in the middle of Pawleys Creek over Labor Day weekend to mark the 60th anniversary of Pawleys Island Realty.

"Labor Day weekend is traditionally our thank-you to our homeowners," Betsy Altman, owner of the company, told the council. "We want to show gratitude to our homeowners, vacationers, vendors, and give them something to enjoy."

The company sponsored a

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