

COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XL No. 49

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ May 19, 2022

\$1.00

Changing community prompts council member's resignation

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The pace of growth on the Waccamaw Neck led a County Council member to move to the mountains of North Carolina.

John Thomas resigned his District 1 seat effective May 23. The timing means that a special election won't be needed to fill the vacancy, but it means the district won't have a representative on council until Jan. 2.

"The things that I've been trying to fight won," Thomas said. "Well, it hadn't overwhelmed me yet, but it is so much different

than when we moved here."

"We're losing the density war," he added.

Thomas, who lived in North Litchfield, was elected in 2014 and served as the council chairman in 2019 and 2020.

He and his wife, Peg Howell, have moved to Hendersonville, N.C. Thomas turned in his resignation last Wednesday and left for North Carolina the next morning with a U-Haul trailer packed with the last of their belongings.

"I'm going to be 69 in September, and it's time for some peace and quiet, and that's really the

driving factor," Thomas said in an interview before his departure.

Thomas moved to North Litchfield in 2009. He served as president of the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association before he was recruited by the former District 1 council member, Jerry Oakley, to run for council.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," Thomas said. "I think I could have had better skill sets."

Thomas worked as a traffic engineer in Tennessee before joining the Navy, which led to a
SEE "COUNCIL," PAGE 3



John Thomas, near left, with Clint Elliott, who is in line to replace him on Jan. 2

Charles Swenson/
Coastal Observer



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Bringing Brittane home

Dawn and Chad Drexel, backed by Sheriff Carter Weaver and other law enforcement officials, address a phalanx of reporters in the Georgetown County Judicial Center after charges were brought against a Georgetown man in the 2009 disappearance of their daughter Brittane. Here body was found outside Georgetown last week. Raymond Douglas Moody, 62, confessed to her kidnapping, rape and murder, according to the sheriff's office. "We are glad that we are able to bring Brittane home," Dawn Drexel said. Story, Page 6



EDUCATION

District tax capacity will cover all options for pay raises

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Funding employee pay raises and additional staff in the Georgetown County School District will leave a \$3.1 million shortfall in the budget for the coming year.

But the school board learned this week that it can cover that with a 7.3 percent tax increase, equal to a little over \$50 for every \$100,000 of value for commercial property and second homes.

That would still leave the district with the ability to raise additional revenue in property taxes in the future.

District officials say the raises would help retain staff who may be recruited by nearby districts.

Georgetown County is facing similar pressures, but, unlike the school district, it is running into the tax cap imposed on local governments by state law.

The last time the district
SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 4

ECONOMY | Port of Georgetown

Candidate for governor backs dredging for mill

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

State Sen. Mia McLeod brought her gubernatorial campaign back to Georgetown this week to support local steelworkers and call for the dredging of the port of Georgetown.

"Liberty Steel currently employs around 65 workers, but with an investment of dredging the port of Georgetown to its project depth of 27 feet, Liberty Steel would be able to expand its operation," McLeod said. "Because the port's depth is currently only 18 feet, there are restrictions on what types of vessels may utilize it. Instead of turning away business we need to send a message that this port is open for business."

The city and Liberty Steel are locked in a battle after City Council included the property in a "re-

Mia McLeod outlines he plan for port dredging on a visit to Liberty Steel. The facility faces a zoning challenge from the city.

Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

development district," known as REDD, which states that "heavy industrial uses are incompatible when in close proximity to the city's downtown, waterfront, historic district, residential neighborhoods, and gateway corridors and intersections."

The city's zoning administrator determined that the mill was in violation of the grandfather clause in the ordinance that allowed it to operate.

A second hearing is scheduled before the city's Board of Zoning Appeals on June 1. The board declined to rule at a meet-



ing in April, deciding instead to seek more information.

McLeod, a Bennettsville Democrat, spoke with Liberty Steel workers and got to see parts

of the mill up close.

"The city's efforts to close this mill are wrong for Georgetown and wrong for the hard working
SEE "PORT," PAGE 3

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town hires clerk, but administrator takes early leave

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The town of Pawleys Island has a new clerk.

It does not have an administrator.

Ryan Fabbri, who resigned earlier this month, left Town Hall last week. He had been expected to stay until June 3.

"Essentially, I was very clear about the reason I left," he said. "The two weeks that I did make it, it was very stressful for me. I felt like I was there against my will."

In his resignation, Fabbri cited conflicts with council members, but did not elaborate.

Mayor Brian Henry is now in the office at Town Hall from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. He will keep the doors open to the public until Daniel O'Hara starts work as town clerk on May 31.

"I think he was just done," he said of Fabbri's departure after
SEE "PAWLEYS," PAGE 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Walk the walk: Nonprofit takes steps toward raising mental health awareness.

SECOND FRONT



Schools: Pre-school teacher retires after 29 years at St. Peter's.

PAGE 8



WHS sports: Boys win Lower State track and field title.

PAGE 15

Obituaries	2
Crime.....	6
Opinion.....	7
Crossword	12
Classifieds.....	13
Sports.....	14

Online
coastalobserver.com

