

COASTAL OBSERVER

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MURRELLS INLET

State budget includes funds to restore bike path parking

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A “no parking” zone along the Bike the Neck route in Murrells Inlet will be replaced with 13 parking spaces using funds included in this year’s state budget.

The parking area on the west side of Business 17 across from a wooden bridge over the marsh was a popular spot for people

who wanted to park and bike or walk the path through Huntington Beach State Park. The state Department of Transportation put up “no parking” signs in October 2020 saying that people were parking at right-angles to the highway, which isn’t allowed in state traffic regulations because it requires them to back out into traffic.

“I don’t know why they think

this parking isn’t as important as beach parking,” said state Rep. Lee Hewitt. He got \$325,000 included in the budget for the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism for Georgetown County to create the parallel-parking spaces.

The funds were an earmark in the budget. They survived a veto from Gov. Henry McMaster, SEE “PATH,” PAGE 2



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

DOT put up signs to stop parking that required drivers to back out onto Business 17.

RECREATION

Sales tax surplus helps fund overdue park project

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

More than a decade after plans were created for new county ballfields at Waccamaw Elementary School, Georgetown County Council has awarded a contract for the work. It is one of the last projects in a capital improvement plan adopted by the county in 2008.

“It looks like we’re close,” Council Member Steve Goggans said before this week’s vote to award the \$5.76 million contract to Ben Cox LLC of Andrews.

It was Goggans’ architecture firm that came up with the original plan in 2010, two years before he was elected to the council. The school district, which owns the property, asked for an update in 2017 that included a perimeter road around the school campus to alleviate traffic on Waverly Road.

That added to the cost of the project, which was budgeted for \$3.5 million in the county’s capital plan.

When the project was first put out for bid last year, it came in far above the budget.

SEE “PARK,” PAGE 3



Photos by Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

Volunteers use oyster shells in bags, above, and cages, below, to build an artificial reef across from Garden City Point.

ENVIRONMENT

Shell games Volunteers build oyster reefs to rebuild stocks and curb erosion

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Building an oyster reef is hands-on work. That’s what about a dozen volunteers found out in Murrells Inlet this week.

First, 208 bags and 26 wire cages full of oyster shells had to be unloaded from a South Carolina Department of Natural Resources truck and loaded onto a DNR boat at the public boat ramp.

Then, the boat was driven to an island across from Garden City Point where the volunteers unloaded the bags and cages and placed them along 107 feet of the shoreline.

Michael Hodges, oyster restoration biologist for DNR, said that spot was chosen because the amount of erosion was evident every time he drove by in a boat.

“There’s just no natural substrate to prevent it from eroding any further,” Hodges said.

It was the second reef building project at that spot in as many weeks, SEE “SHELLS,” PAGE 2



BUDGET

County finds outside funds for projects

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

As Georgetown County struggled to find money for pay raises in its new budget, it was able to secure over \$17 million in grants for capital improvements.

Employees will get 5 percent pay raises in a three-tier system that starts out with raises for first responders on July 1 and reaches general government employees in January. Employees also get one-time bonuses based on their time with the county.

The \$2.3 million compensation package is being funded through a property tax increase and \$500,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act.

With its tax rate limited by state law, the county will use grants and other funds from the ARPA to fund a range of projects. The county received two \$6 million allocation from the rescue

SEE “GRANTS,” PAGE 3

GEORGETOWN COUNTY SCHOOLS | The budget

Board members hope pay raises keep district competitive

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County School Board approved a \$97.2 million budget this week that will give raises to all employees, including \$4,000 for teachers.

The budget for the fiscal year that begins Friday is a 4 percent increase over the current budget.

Eighty-seven percent of the budget, or \$84.3 million, goes toward salaries and benefits.

In addition to the raises, the district will increase:

- salary scales for administrators, nurses, bus drivers, food service workers and other classified employees;
- the employee retirement rate;

- athletic stipends;
- pay for substitute teachers.

“As a board, we wanted to make sure we had all the bases covered as far as what the students need,” said Board Member Mike Cafaro, who holds an at-large seat. “I wish we could have given more, but you work within certain numbers and you just have to make it fit.”

The raises for bus drivers and teachers were mandated by the state, so the district wanted to include all its other employees, Superintendent Keith Price said.

Board Member Patti Hammel, who represents District 1, said increasing salaries and salary scales was very important to the board.

“The counties that border us

pay so much more for employees and the number of employees that we can get that are quality, everybody’s trying to get those same employees,” Hammel said. “I really believe that it ought to be competitive, and to keep our quality very high, we have to do that.”

During the Great Recession, SEE “SCHOOLS,” PAGE 3

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