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LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION

Weighted voting tips balance to GOP in 'cosmic shift'

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A dispute over appointments that had simmered for two years boiled over last week with Republicans on the Georgetown County legislative delegation ousting James Sanderson from the Board of Voter Registration and Elections.

Lawmakers said the move threatens to upend working relationships that transcend party politics and impact how the four-member delegation functions. It prompted the delegation chairman to consider briefly whether he should walk out.

"This represents what I consider to be a cosmic shift in how Georgetown operates, which is consistent with what I'm seeing around the state, and it's troubling," state Sen. Ronnie Sabb said.

Sanderson was nominated to the elections board in 2021 by state Rep. Carl Anderson, the

current delegation chairman. He and Sabb are Democrats.

Sanderson is the president of the local United Steelworkers union. He has served on the elections board in the past.

State Sen. Steven Goldfinch and Rep. Lee Hewitt, Murrells Inlet Republicans, objected to the nomination, saying Sanderson's ties to the Democratic Party made him too partisan to serve on the board that conducts elections. They abstained from voting in 2021 in order to uphold the tradition of not overruling their colleagues' nominees. The appointment was made by the governor.

Even had they voted against Sanderson, Anderson noted at the time, his vote and Sabb's would have prevailed because they represented 58.44 percent of the county's population. Delegations use "weighted voting" to ensure equal representation.

With the 2020 Census, the balance shifted. Goldfinch and Hewitt now represent 53.96 per-



cent of the county's population.

The delegation met last week after a legislative workshop sponsored by the Georgetown County Chamber of Commerce. In front of an audience of about 300 at Pawleys Plantation, the lawmakers showed that they disagreed on issues, but managed to talk things through and work together.

As they took up an agenda of appointments to local boards in front of an audience of about 20, Anderson noted "we respect each others' appointments."

For vacant seats on the County Transportation Commission and the board of the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District, they did.

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The legislative delegation – from left, Rep. Lee Hewitt, Rep. Carl Anderson, Sen. Steven Goldfinch and Sen. Ronnie Sabb – tried to work out differences over appointments before convening their meeting last week.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town wants to review impact of golf carts

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The town of Pawleys Island is moving forward with a plan to raise its fee for golf cart permits from \$10 to \$25, with Town Council members calling for a review of the impact that the carts are having on the island.

"Golf carts seem to be a little more wild, west, kind of a free-for-all," Mayor Brian Henry said at a Town Council meeting last week. "We, as a town, need to get a handle on who's coming on the island, because these golf carts are mixing with vehicles. It creates a little bit of a dy-

namic. It's a little more dangerous with golf carts and vehicles mixing, especially when golf carts don't pull over, [which] of course they don't have to."

The town issued 667 permits last year, including 204 that were issued to Pawleys Island Golf, which rents carts to visitors. The company paid \$5 for each of its permits. The town took in \$4,374 in total permit fees.

Administrator Dan Newquist said either he or Town Clerk Daniel O'Hara spends about 15 minutes processing a permit.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The town issued 667 permits last year. This cart got a new permit before council froze the process.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Retreat links strategic focus to land-use plan update

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

These are the headlines for Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026:

"Affordable housing partnership opens first homes."

"Major manufacturer relocates to county employing 1,200."

"Job market booms."

Whether those make it into print three years from now depends on how well Georgetown County Council is able to convert its vision into policy and action. And the best opportunity to do that is with the update to the land-use element of the

county's comprehensive plan, a consultant told the council after a day-long retreat this week.

"The most important thing you can do as County Council is roll up your sleeves and jump right in," said Irene Dumas Tyson, the planning director for the Columbia-based firm Boureaux. "The thing you're going to have to do to have these headlines is to get the land-use element right."

The county started work on the element in 2018, but delayed the process in 2020 after complaints that it didn't include enough public input. It

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LANDUSE | Royal Farms

Opponents ramp up efforts as gas station seeks permits

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Opposition from area residents to a convenience store and gas station on Highway 17 in the Litchfield area took on increased urgency with an application last week for state permits for the project.

Royal Farms, a Baltimore-based chain, plans a 5,154-square-foot store with 16 gas pumps on 2.8 acres at the corner of Ford Road. Residents in the Hidden Oaks neighborhood, which is adjacent to the site, learned of the project last fall when the engineer made a presentation to the homeowners association.

Neighbors raised concerns about traffic and stormwater runoff and started organizing.

"We have over 3,000 signatures on our petition," Jackie Harris, the HOA president, told



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Jackie Harris, HOA president at Hidden Oaks, outlines strategy at a meeting of opponents to Royal Farms.

an audience that packed into the Waccamaw Library over the weekend.

Opponents have contacted local and state officials and plan to request the state Department of Health and Environmen-

tal Control hold a public hearing on the project's stormwater permit. They have also hired a lawyer.

Because the property is already zoned "general commercial," which allows convenience

stores and gas stations, the project will not come up for a public hearing by Georgetown County unless the company seeks a variance to the zoning regulations, said Holly Richardson, the county planning director.

Royal Farms has submitted a site plan for zoning approval, she said.

"There is still an opportunity for us to step in," said Tom Winslow, an attorney working with the opponents. "Today, you're driving past a wetland. Tomorrow, you'll be driving past gas pumps."

From the information Royal Farms has provided the state, "they're pretty far along," said Frank Pinizzotto, a civil engineer who lives in Litchfield Country Club. "I used to be in this business."

From his experience, "this is not the only site that was picked," he said. But it is prob-

ably the best one.

The location between Pawleys Island and Litchfield means there is sufficient traffic. The fact that Royal Farms estimates the store will generate 4,100 daily car trips doesn't mean it will produce more traffic.

"I'm not selling gas to people who are leaving town, I'm selling gas to people who are in town," Pinizzotto said.

Royal Farms did not respond to a request for comment about the project.

Pinizzotto suggested that the opponents find a way to tap into the names on their petition to create a survey to find out what people want in the area. That will make their argument stronger when talking with officials and agencies.

"You can't just say what you don't want," Pinizzotto said.

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