

COASTAL OBSERVER

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BIKE THE NECK

Work begins on last link in path

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Slabs of concrete from a 40-year-old sidewalk that hadn't already crumbled yielded to the jaws of a backhoe as workers began clearing the way this week for a long-awaited extension of the Bike the Neck path down Waverly Road. The 1.3 mile section from Waccamaw Elementary School to Highway 17 will complete the route from the Horry County line in Murrells Inlet to the South Causeway at Pawleys Island.

The 4-foot-wide sidewalk will be replaced with a 10-foot-wide path that can accommodate bikes and pedestrians.

"I'm pleased beyond belief that they have started this," said Gene Turner, a River Club resident who has pressed the county to complete the project.

Although bikes can use the sidewalk, Turner said he stopped using it because it was in such poor condition.

"I can get past the school, but it killed my back," he said.

The route has been the top priority since Georgetown County adopted a master plan for bike paths in 2017. It was funded in 2020, but delays in permitting and design followed. The county also needed easements in order to do some of the drainage work that is part of the project.

The county still hopes to acquire one last easement, said Ray Funnys, the county director of Public Services.

"Is it a game changer? No, it's not," he said. "There's a work-around, but it's not our first choice."

The county approved a \$2.7 million bid from Green Wave Contracting for the project last October. That was \$1.25 million more than the original estimate.

The county funded the original amount with surplus from a capital projects sales tax that was discontinued in 2019. The overrun will be paid for with money budgeted for stormwater drainage.

It was drainage work that drove up the price of the project, Funnys said.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer
Sidewalk comes up and trees come down for the new path along Waverly Road.



LAND USE

Judge's ruling stresses role of comprehensive plan as 'guideline' for decisions

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

No one challenged the decision of the Georgetown County Planning Commission to recommend against a zoning change that would allow 90 townhouses on land proposed for a tech park. The 5-1 decision last fall was based on the conflict between the zoning and the county's land use plan.

That decision "would, on its own likely be considered arbitrary, and would constitute an abuse of discretion on the part of the Planning Commission," according to a Circuit Court judge.

What was challenged in a lawsuit filed by neighbors and citizens groups was County Council's decision to approve the zoning change. Judge William Seals dismissed the suit in April. Last week, he issued a formal ruling.

The complaint, he said,

"fails as a matter of law in its quest to invalidate the zoning ordinances. In addition, the law greatly limits the power of the judicial branch to invalidate ordinances. The Court cannot (and will not) substitute its judgment for that of the legislative body of Georgetown County. Plaintiffs quite clearly disagree with the political decisions made by Georgetown County Council as it relates to zoning decisions."

The suit is one of four filed over the course of 12 months by Keep It Green Advocacy on behalf of area residents who opposed the county's land use decisions. It was the first to come before a judge on a motion by the county to dismiss. A similar motion in another case was scheduled to be heard last week, but was postponed at the last minute.

Cindy Person, chief counsel for Keep It Green Advocacy, SEE "SUIT," PAGE 3

BUDGETS

School district considers 1.7 percent tax increase

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Georgetown County School Board is close to approving a 2-mill tax increase for next year's budget.

Lisa Johnson, the district's assistant superintendent for finance, presented a proposal to the board this week.

The proposed 2023-24 operating budget is \$108.19 million. That is up 11.2 percent from this year's budget. The tax increase would equal 1.7 percent.

The district expects to get \$8.23 million from the state, although the legislature has not approved the budget yet.

Included in the next year's budget are increases in the salary schedules for teachers, classified staff and bus drivers;

increase in the daily rate for substitute teachers; additional days for guidance clerks and custodians; addition of autism behavior support positions; paid maternity/paternity leave; a stipend for student teachers; and an increase in pay for school board members, athletic directors and coaches.

Johnson also presented a list from district staff and principals for new positions and expanded positions, including another front office secretary at Waccamaw High School, a part-time math teacher and a physical education/weightlifting teacher at Waccamaw Middle School, administrative aides at all elementary schools, and a special education instructional coach.

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HISTORY | Remembering the Hagley 22

Discussion about grave marker continues two years later

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The grass that has grown up around the grave sways in rhythm with the traffic that passes on Highway 17. Below the soil are the remains of 22 people of African descent that were laid to rest 15 years after they had been exposed during construction of a home on the site of the former chapel at Hagley Plantation.

Two years after a reburial service that drew about 150 people to the cemetery at Holy Cross-Faith Memorial Episcopal Church, a hand-painted marker stands at the head of the grave. Angela Christian hopes to restart discussions about a permanent marker.

"It's still a little wooden sign," she said. "That is my summer project. I would love to get it done before then."



A wood marker was put up after the reburial in May 2020.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Christian, the Georgetown County administrator, organized the effort that led to the reburial. The 300 bones had been turned over to the coroner's office after they were discovered in 2006. They were sent to Columbia, where Bill Stevens, a forensic anthropologist and a deputy coroner for Richland County, used DNA analysis to try to locate possible descendants.

Stevens' research also showed that the people were enslaved workers on the rice plantation and had been buried from the 1840s through the 1860s. It was thought that the cemetery had been moved in

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