

Utility weighs costs and claims in ‘forever chemical’ suit

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

It will cost at least \$28 million to remove contaminants known as “forever chemicals” from the drinking water provided by the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District. The utility must decide in the next few months whether to seek that money from chemical companies through settlement agreements pending in Federal District Court in Charleston.

“That’s an estimate,” said Ray Gagnon, the utility’s executive director. “Just the capital, not the operating cost. That would be putting in the fil-



Ray Gagnon

icals known as PFAS is constantly evolving, he said. The EPA has proposed standards to limit per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances in drinking water. At the same time, hundreds of lawsuits filed against 3M and

ters and everything else needed, not operating the filters, not getting rid of the waste from the filters.”

The data and litigation around the chemicals known as PFAS is constantly evolving, he said. The EPA has proposed standards to limit per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances in drinking water. At the same time, hundreds of lawsuits filed against 3M and

DuPont and two spin-off companies were consolidated in federal court and proposed settlement agreements are now pending.

The DuPont companies have agreed to pay up to \$1.185 billion to resolve claims. The 3M settlement is \$10.5 billion to \$12.5 billion.

The district’s board met this week with attorneys from the Columbia firm Richardson Thomas in an hour-long closed session to hear a presentation on the settlement agreements. Although the firm does not represent the district, Amy Hill, one of the attorneys, said the executive session was appropri-

ate to protect “potential attorney-client privilege.”

Gagnon said the firm was one of several who had contacted the district since the 3M settlement was approved by U.S. District Court Judge Richard Gergel last month.

The board agreed to let Gagnon obtain legal advice on the settlement, but didn’t specify a firm.

Hearings are scheduled for December for the DuPont settlement and February for the 3M settlement. If they receive final approval, they will bar future claims from public water systems for PFAS contamination.

The systems can opt out of the agreement by filing a notice with the court. That would allow them to make future claims. But Gagnon pointed out that if the systems don’t opt out and don’t file claims “they get nothing.”

Under the broad terms of the settlement, the district would be eligible to file a claim.

It currently tests for PFAS, which has been linked to a range of health problems, but its results can’t be certified because the EPA hasn’t approved the test method, Gagnon said.

The state Department of Health and Environmental
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Georgetown County Emergency Management

THE FRONT STREET FIRE | Ten years later

Along the city’s waterfront, a block still awaits rebuilding

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Ten years after fire destroyed eight buildings in downtown Georgetown and left many wondering if the city would ever recover, the empty space in the 700 block of Front Street is now a park that has hosted everything from weddings to ice skating.

The Maritime Park was the brainchild of the board of the S.C. Maritime Museum, which suffered some smoke damage and charring in the fire, but escaped relatively unscathed.

The museum leases the six middle lots and subleases the site for events. The rent is based on property taxes and insurance.

“The taxes have been steadily going up,” said Johnny Weaver, president of the museum’s board.

The museum started with a five-year lease, thinking they would then go month-to-month. “We put the concrete down and fixed the deck,” Weaver said.

The museum doesn’t expect the park to be there for another 10 years.

Steve Timmons, a real estate investor from Greenville
SEE “FRONT STREET,” PAGE 12



Tanya Ackerman (above) and Chris Sokoloski (below)/Coastal Observer

The pre-dawn fire, top, burns along the 700 block of Front Street. Above, the block as it appeared before the fire. Below, the view from the Harborwalk across the still-vacant lots and the Maritime Park.



LAND USE

Judge says zoning code doesn’t require update with comprehensive plan

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County is not required to change its zoning ordinance to mirror its comprehensive plan, a Circuit Court judge said in a ruling this week.

Judge Kristi Curtis last month dismissed a suit by neighbors and citizens groups seeking to overturn County Council’s approval of a 12-unit development on Petigru Drive in Pawleys Island. It was the third suit over land use issues brought by Keep It Green Advocacy to be dismissed.

This week, Curtis filed her formal order. It is similar to an

order issued in July by Judge Ben Culbertson in a suit that also focused on site plan review for multi-family developments. Both judges asked the assistant county attorney, Tommy Morgan, to draft proposed orders.

The suits argued in part, that the county was wrong to approve the “high density” projects on property that is shown on the future land use maps in the comprehensive plan as “medium density.” In dismissing the suits, both judges said the comprehensive plan is “a guide” not “a legally binding standard.”

Curtis said in her order “it
SEE “JUDGE,” PAGE 4

Discussion of land plan revisions includes talk about incorporation

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The citizen group Keep It Green is encouraging people to continue to submit comments to the consultants drafting an update to Georgetown County’s land use plan. But people who attended the group’s land use forum over the weekend aren’t convinced their ideas will make a difference even if the consultants adopt them.

County Council Member Bob Anderson said there will be a time line for each of the land plan’s goals and objectives.

“We have not followed the plans,” Anderson said. “That time line will force council to make a decision.”

But he admitted that he has



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Some found the input sessions too simplistic.

been on the losing end of votes on land use issues taken by the seven-member council.

“There has to be a better way,” said Steve Magyera, a
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EDUCATION

Waccamaw Middle finds strategy to raise scores on reading tests

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

During the last school year, Waccamaw Middle School students were tested quarterly on their writing skills to prepare them for state testing.

That strategy worked as 90 percent of eighth-graders and 71 percent of seventh-graders met or exceeded expectations in the English/language arts (ELA) portion of the state’s standardized tests, known as

SC READY.

“We are so, so proud. This is a testament to the high caliber teachers that we have and our faculty as a whole in supporting each other,” principal Ginny Haynes said. “Our entire school took on a plan and really worked collaboratively and it really did prove to be successful.”

In the Georgetown County School District, 43 percent of seventh- and eighth-graders
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