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Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Making a splash for Special Olympics | Kelan Slocum, 7, and his father, Lance, emerge from the 40-degree ocean at Litchfield Beach for the annual Polar Plunge sponsored by the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office. It raised over \$42,000 for Special Olympics. "He woke me up this morning saying, 'it's time to go swimming,'" Lance said. A 15-20 mph wind chilled the 50-degree air. "It was a little cold at first - I'm not going to lie to you," said Maggie Dufour, right, who dressed as a walrus.



LAND USE

County zoning update will go beyond maps

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

If you want to open a 5-and-10 or a TV repair shop, Georgetown County won't keep you waiting. Those are allowed in the "general commercial" zoning district.

If you have to turn to Google to find out what a 5-and-10 is, you may agree with Holly Richardson, the county planning director, that the zoning code needs an update.

"The structure from the '70s is still in place" in the ordi-

nance, she told County Council at its annual retreat this week.

Talk of updating the ordinance, which was first adopted in the 1970s, has focused mainly on bringing the zoning districts into compliance with the future land use maps that are part of the county's comprehensive plan. Those maps are being updated with the plan's land use element.

But Richardson said the ordinance itself needs to change to address today's issues, such as affordable housing.

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SALES TAX

Panel weighs criteria to rank capital projects

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A proposal to evaluate capital projects seeking funds from a new penny sales tax looks at two broad categories: how much value and impact would the project have in the community, and what is the likelihood that the project will succeed?

The committee charged with reviewing the projects and drafting a referendum question for the November ballot will try to decide how much weight to give to those and other criteria when it meets today at the Waccamaw Library.

The Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission was created by Georgetown County Council last year to present a plan for spending an estimated \$10 million annually that a 1-cent sales tax would raise. Under state law, it can be imposed for up to eight years.

The projects and their costs will be listed in order of priority on the referendum ballot. The six-member commission has been meeting around the county in an effort to convince rural residents that their needs will be considered even though three of the members live in the Pawleys Island area, two live in Georgetown and only one lives in the western portion of the county.

"We're working on your behalf," Mark Hawn, who chairs

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Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

Supporters of a JROTC program at Waccamaw High at the school board meeting.

WACCAMAW HIGH

Principal makes pitch for JROTC class

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The first time David Hammel was principal of Waccamaw High School, one of his goals was to start a Junior ROTC program.

Unfortunately the county was in the middle of an economic downturn and there was no money in the district's budget.

Now that Hammel is principal again, he has resurrected the idea.

"Adding this program at Waccamaw High School would provide our students with numerous opportunities and experiences that are currently missing in our curriculum

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ENVIRONMENT | Outdoor lighting

Community serves as pilot project for low intensity fixtures

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

This winter has been a dark one at Heritage Plantation. Residents seem pleased.

The community is a pilot project for Santee Cooper. The state owned utility replaced 174 street lights in Heritage last year with LED fixtures that have a lower intensity than the ones used elsewhere across its three-county service area.

"It's clearly better than the old sodium," said Peter Eisenberg, a member of the property owners association board, referring to the high-pressure sodium lights that used to be



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Santee Cooper is installing LED lights, left, in place of high pressure sodium lights, right, as they wear out.

the standard.

Those old lights once had Heritage seeing red. The community was among several that in 2020 challenged Santee Cooper policy on leasing street lights to customers. It argued that the leases ended up costing more than the value of the equipment, but that the utility wouldn't allow customers to buy the poles.

"That was the initial thrust of the whole thing," said Doug Decker, a Heritage resident who is retired from the energy industry.

As part of the dispute over costs, Decker noted at the time that under the utility's leasing

program the cost of converting to LED lights ended up costing property owners more even though the fixture used less electricity.

Santee Cooper ended up changing its outdoor lighting program. It then began to install LED fixtures in Heritage.

That had residents seeing blue. The fixtures had a temperature of 4,000 Kelvin, which is in the blue spectrum. They also had an intensity of 6,000 lumens, which is bright.

"When they started putting the street lights in in Heritage, they were the very bright ones," Eisenberg said.

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