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Trickle of sales tax projects turns to flood as deadline nears

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Local government offices echoed this week with the sound of crunching numbers as staff worked to complete submissions for a share of Georgetown County's proposed capital projects sales tax ahead of the April 1 deadline.

"I hate to miss this opportunity to at least put it down for

consideration," said Ray Funnye, the county's director of Public Services. "We're working on the numbers right now."

Those include the cost of multipurpose paths in the Parkersville community at Pawleys Island and two groins on the beach at Garden City.

As of mid-week, there were 11 proposals in hand that accounted for about \$67 million in projects, said Walt Acker-

man, the county director of Administrative Services, who is working with the Capital Project Sales Tax Commission.

The six-member panel was created last year to review proposals, rank them and prepare a referendum question to present to voters in November. The ballot question must be approved by County Council, which isn't allowed to amend the ballot

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A new emergency operations center is among the requests seen as having countywide impact.

Charles Swenson/
Coastal Observer

LAND USE

Revised plan adds restriction for redeveloping golf courses

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The latest draft of Georgetown County's land use plan calls for tougher stormwater regulations and sets a goal of preserving half of the undeveloped land remaining on Waccamaw Neck.

It also calls for property now used for golf courses to remain low density if those courses are redeveloped.

The Planning Commission will hold a workshop on the draft plan today. It could hold a public hearing in April. The commission must approve the plan before it goes to County Council for approval, along with another hearing.

The previous draft drew criticism at a public forum last month.

"A lot of the comments were broad," Holly Richardson, the county planning director, said.

But those that focused on stormwater, traffic and the preservation of natural and cultural resources were addressed in the revision that the Planning Commission will review.

References to four-story buildings were eliminated. Three stories is the tallest allowed under the county's current height limits.

References to residential density were also changed from gross to net. "They had written it as gross. We kind of live by net," Richardson said of the consultants, led by the Columbia firm, Boudreaux, who were hired by the county to update the plan.

The gross density is based on the size of a parcel and the number of units. Net density removes any unbuildable areas and infrastructure from the calculation.

"The other argument is, you can't build on it anyway," Richardson said. "That was a pretty big jump to make."

The gross density metric drew criticism at the forum as a back door way to increase density.

The latest version of the plan adds an

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Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer



Awash in Easter eggs | Wake-Lynn Macklen, 18 months, gets in the middle of the Easter eggs at Belin Memorial United Methodist Church. The hunt was kept indoors by rain. Below, Emma Terpstra, 6, decorates a cross.



TOURISM

Quest for data doesn't take a vacation

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A vacation getaway isn't what it used to be.

Along with footprints in the sand, visitors are leaving cellphone and credit card data for companies to scoop up, analyze and sell.

"There's a lot of information out there," said Adam Zappia, a sales director for Zartico, a Utah-based firm that provides data for tourism marketing. "It's messy to clean it up."

Georgetown County's Tourism Management Commission is looking at Zartico to help answer questions posed by County Council about the effectiveness of the county's marketing. That marketing is paid for through a 2 percent state tax on short-term rentals that raised \$2.3 million for the county in fiscal 2023.

The tourism commission gets most of its \$1.4 million budget from that accommodations tax. The remainder is awarded for "tourism related expenditures" in the form of grants to local government agencies and nonprofits.

In approving those grants last year, council members said they wanted to know more about where the tax is collected and how effective the grants are in attracting visitors.

The Chamber of Commerce provides tourism marketing for the county under the oversight of the Tourism Management Commission.

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Data can show how visitors travel and spend money within the county.

NONPROFITS | Teach My People

Tutoring program is good fit for WHS principal

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Waccamaw High School principal David Hammel has watched the positive impact Teach My People has had in the lives of children since the nonprofit was founded in 1999.

"In public education I've seen a lot of quick fixes. There are no quick fixes," Hammel said. "It takes long-term commitment, long-term support and it takes a community coming together. Teach My People's model does that."

On July 1, Hammel will take over as executive director from Eric Spatz, who has been in the



David Hammel

position since 2011. Spatz is expected to stay on until the end of the year to assist in the transition.

"Eric's done an incredible

job," Hammel said. "He's grown the program."

Teach My People is a Christ-centered afterschool and summer program that supports students starting in first grade and continuing until they graduate from high school. It has been based in Pawleys Island since it started but expanded into Georgetown in 2019 and will expand to Andrews in the next school year.

"I've just had a sense of joy, a sense of excitement about the opportunity," Hammel said. "I knew if I had the opportunity, this is something I'd want to do and partner with them."

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SCHOOLS

Superintendent among finalists for Midlands job

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County School Superintendent Keith Price is one of three finalists to be the next superintendent of the Lexington 1 School District.

Price declined to comment since the application process is ongoing. He notified the Georgetown County School Board members on March 20, the day before the names of the Lexington 1 finalists were made public.

School Board Chairman Bill

Gaskins said the board would have no comment until members know whether Price is staying or going.

School Board Member Scott DuBose said the news was "a bit of a downer."

"I think he's been a great asset to the Georgetown County School District," DuBose added. "I can't imagine he won't get it because he's really, as far as I'm concerned, top notch."

DuBose thinks moving to a larger school district is a "great opportunity" for Price.

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