

COASTAL OBSERVER

Vol. XLIII No. 22

Pawleys Island, South Carolina ~ November 7, 2024

\$1.50

County focuses on keeping jobs as IP shuts down mill

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

There are jobs available at local industries for many of the 674 employees at the International Paper Co. mill in Georgetown who learned last week that the facility will close by the end of the year, according to local officials. They are now working with the company and state agencies to match those jobs to the workforce.

But the closure of the mill that has dominated the city of Georgetown's skyline since 1937 will still have far-reaching effects on businesses that provide timber and other goods and services to the company.



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The paper mill opened in Georgetown in 1937. It will close by the end of the year.

"It's hard to assess the far-ranging impacts," said Sarah Smith, executive director of the Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments, which provides economic development services to local governments. "It is going to carry forth into a number of businesses. It's going to be big."

By one estimate, the impact on the logging industry could affect over 1,000 people, she said.

The last delivery of pulp wood to the mill was Nov. 1, a day after IP announced the mill's closing in a press release that took local officials by surprise. It once received 400 truckloads of wood a day.

"This decision is especially difficult because of the impact on hard-working employees, their families and the surrounding communities," the mill manager, Bernie Chascin, said in a statement.

The employees will be offered severance benefits, outplacement services and access to mental health resources, the statement said.

The closing was announced along with a review of "strategic options" for IP's \$2.9 billion global cellulose fibers business, which has eight mills in three countries. It produces absorbent pulp for personal care products and as a raw material
SEE "MILL," PAGE 3

ELECTION 2024

Capital projects tax squeaks by

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A 1-cent local sales tax to pay for infrastructure projects won approval from Georgetown County voters this week by a margin as thin as a dime, according to the preliminary results.

Voters rejected a second penny tax that would have provided a property tax credit by an even narrower margin: 64 votes out of 35,164 that were cast in the referendum.

Aphra McCrea, director of Voter Registration and Elections, said she was checking to see if a recount was required for the local option sales tax.

The extra penny will be added to the state 6-cent sales tax starting in May and remain in effect for eight years. The revenue will pay for 22 priority capital projects totaling \$74 million. Any additional revenue will be applied to a list of 19 contingency projects, starting with \$1 million toward a \$36 million creek dredging project in Murrells Inlet.

The capital project tax failed to win support in two of the four Murrells Inlet precincts. It also failed in two of the five Pawleys Island precincts.

It also failed in four of the five precincts in the city of Georgetown, where funding for a project to cut down oak trees for a road widening project sparked opposition.

The capital projects tax had an 11 vote majority out of 18,803 cast on the Waccamaw Neck, according to the preliminary results. Those votes were 54 percent of all the votes cast.

Countywide, the tax passed by 754 votes, 2 percent of the 34,392 cast.

There are \$42 million in water and/or sewer projects on the priority list. The most expensive is a \$13.3 million sewer project in the rural Sampit community.

Tommie Kennedy, executive director of the Georgetown
SEE "TAX," PAGE 3



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Only a third of the voters in Murrells Inlet 1 showed up on Election Day to vote at the fire station. The rest voted early. Turnout was 77 percent. For the county it was 73.8 percent.

SAFETY

Council cuts fire fee in half for solar farm

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County has cut the fire impact fee for a solar farm under construction in the western part of the county by more than \$1 million. But the \$1 million that the developer, Silicon Ranch, will still pay is more than enough to cover the cost of specialized equipment that the county will need to buy, officials said.

Silicon Ranch is building two 100-megawatt solar farms on 2,064 acres in the Lambertown community. The \$252 million project would normally require a fire impact fee of \$2,016,045.30.

"While the current pricing structure may be appropriate for a typical commercial or apartment building, we believe that the fee, as currently assessed, does not reflect the reduced fire risk," Reagan Farr, the CEO of Silicon Ranch, wrote in appealing the fee.

The company paid half the fee while the appeal was pending. The county's rural fire district implemented the fee in 1997. It can be appealed to County Council.

BRANDON ELLIS, the county's director of Emergency Services, looked at what the county needed to fight a fire at the solar farms, known as Lambert I and Lambert II.

"We had done some research when it was first proposed," Ellis said. "We're still actively learning and exploring."

Silicon Ranch is seeking county zoning approval to add another phase to the Lambert facility with 50 megawatts of solar. That has been delayed by concerns from Council Member Raymond Newton that the first two phases are behind schedule.

A solar farm with 363 megawatts of capacity has also been proposed for 4,042 acres in Plantersville. That project is still awaiting review by the Planning Commission.

All the solar sites are former timber tracts, "a wild-land type of environment," Ellis said. "It's easy, but difficult, to access. It's wide open space."

The lack of water for fire-fighting in a remote area is the first concern. Second is getting
SEE "SOLAR," PAGE 3

Thin crowds on Election Day belie heavy turnout

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

It was perfect weather for voting: warm, dry and with a hint of fall in the air.

Most of the voters in Georgetown County weren't at

the polls to enjoy it. They had already voted.

Preliminary results show that 69 percent of the votes cast in Georgetown County for this year's general election were cast before Election Day.

Over 12 days of early voting

that ended Saturday, 24,378 ballots were cast. Over half, 12,660, were cast at the Waccamaw Regional Rec Center in Parkersville, one of four early-voting sites around the county.

When the 1,834 absentee votes were added in, 56 percent

of the county's registered voters were already accounted for.

"It looks like it's going to be a long day," said one poll worker at the rec center, which is the polling place for the Pawleys Island 2 precinct.

SEE "VOTING," PAGE 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



New life: A living shoreline is helping ease erosion at Morgan Park.
Second Front



Education: Students get a taste for politics at Boys State.
PAGE 7



WHS sports: Tennis team drops just one game as it advances in playoffs.
PAGE 12

Obituaries	2
Crime.....	5
Opinion	6
Crossword	10
Classifieds	11
Sports	12
Online coastalobserver.com	

