

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Mediation fails in dispute over shifting Pawleys Inlet

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

When beachfront property owners at Prince George first filed suit, their houses were still south of Pawleys Inlet. Now, 12 of the 19 houses are north of the inlet. At high tide, they are creekfront houses, some guarded by stacks of sandbags.

Their suit against the town of Pawleys Island, its contractors and two state agencies over a 2020 beach renourishment project has been on hold since last April while they tried to reach a settlement.

"A settlement was not reached," they

said in a filing last month.

Next week, the property owners and the Prince George Community Association will ask a Circuit Court to let their case move forward.

The town placed 1.1 million cubic yards of offshore sand on the beach from the south end parking lot to just above Second Street on the north end. Pawleys Inlet began to migrate south toward Prince George. It had moved 300 feet when Bud and Melesa Watts filed suit in May 2022. They own the northernmost beachfront lots on Prince George and 1,065 acres on the west side of the creek that they placed in a conservation easement.



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A dozen beachfront houses at Prince George now face the creek.

Other property owners also sued, asking the court to order that the inlet be restored to its location before the renourishment project and repair the erosion damage to the beach at Prince

George.

The town denied that the renourishment was responsible for the shift in the inlet. So did the state Department

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Tripp Nealy, right, and David Tanner listen to concerns about the project from a neighbor, Beth Martin.



LANDUSE | Magic Oaks

Development moving forward as lawsuit moves through courts

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Tripp Nealy and Beth Martin met for the first time this week across a drainage ditch. Their attorneys have met in court.

Nealy is about to start sales at Magic Oaks, a 27-lot development between Pawleys Creek and Highway 17. He is moving forward in spite of a lawsuit by Martin and four other neighbors who are asking the Circuit Court to overturn Georgetown County's rezoning of the property.

Nealy said he was assured by his lawyer that the development could move forward with the suit still pending. The plaintiffs have appealed a judge's ruling that struck out a portion of their complaint. That is now pending before the state Court of Appeals.

"I don't think I'll lose the suit," Nealy said.

An open house for real estate brokers is planned for today. Nealy invited the press to



Martin greets Nealy across the ditch that separates their property. They didn't agree on a way to improve drainage.

the property this week to tell how he came to acquire the property and what he plans to do with it. He said he's tired of being "bashed" by the citizens group Keep It Green, which is not a party to the suit. He has filed a counterclaim against the group as well as the plaintiffs,

alleging they conspired to delay the project and seeking damages.

"I want to be a neighbor to these people, but something's got to change," Nealy said. "I never had one person to approach me, not even a phone

SEE "LAND USE," PAGE 4

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town considers plan for creekside berm to curb road flooding

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A low spot on Pawleys Island is due to rise under a project that the town expects to be the first of many to reduce flooding and improve drainage.

Work could start before the town completes a stormwater master plan, due this summer from the engineering firm SeamonWhiteside.

"This is an effort to show a little proof of concept," Mayor Brian Henry said.

The state provided the town with \$250,000 for drainage improvements in 2023. The project will use up most, if not all, of that.

What the engineers have proposed is a 2.5-foot-high berm along the creek side of Myrtle Avenue north and south of the Pawleys Island Chapel. It's an area where extreme high tides send water over the street even on sunny days.

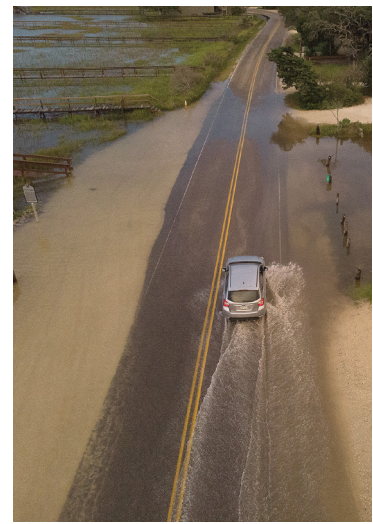
Rhyné Phillips, the project manager for SeamonWhiteside, told Town Council last month that the average high tide in the creek was only about 6 inches lower than the pavement on that stretch of Myrtle Avenue based on 2023 data.

Not only does water flow over the road, but it flows through pipes that are intended to drain into the creek.

The vegetated berm would tie in with higher ground at each end, Henry said.

"I understand the logic of this," Council Member Rocky Holliday said at the council meeting last week. "I really wonder if we're thinking big enough."

He worked on a couple of pilot projects around Town



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A high tide washes over the portion of Myrtle Avenue where the berm will go.

Hall that used check valves to prevent the tide in the creek from backing up onto the island through drain pipes.

"If we break it into chunks like this, we're not going to solve the problem with flooding on the island for years and years," Holliday said.

"We're not looking at this as a piecemeal action," Henry told him.

The town is due to get \$2 million for drainage improvements from a capital project sales tax that Georgetown County voters approved last year.

The work is 10th on a list of 22 priority projects, giving the town time to design actual projects that will use the funding, and possibly grants that the sales tax can match.

The drainage study by SeamonWhiteside began last year with a state infrastructure

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ENVIRONMENT | Beachfront management plan

County partnership could aid private renourishment projects

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Renourishment projects along Georgetown County's beaches have moved about 6 million cubic yards of sand in the last 45 years. But they haven't kept pace with erosion, according to data collected for an update of the county's beachfront management plan.

"We're losing now 200,000

yards per year along the developed beaches of the county," said Steven Traynum, president of Coastal Science and Engineering, the firm hired by the county to update the plan.

Since Hurricane Joaquin in 2015, "it's been a very energetic past 10 years," he told County Council during its annual retreat.

The state requires local governments along the coast to

adopt and maintain a beachfront management plan. Georgetown County's was last updated in 1992.

The county wants to incorporate the update into its state-mandated comprehensive plan, which it just updated.

Holly Richardson, the county planning director, said she plans to present the draft from Coastal Science to the Planning Commission once it's complet-

ed. It will also require approval from County Council.

The draft "does not identify or commit the county to new initiatives. That's something that needs to be done by council and then incorporated into the plan and future updates," Traynum said.

His firm, which has worked with the county and the town of Pawleys Island in the past, collected the data that is required

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