

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Judge rules for county in suit over 2014 sales tax funds

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The town of Andrews waited too long to challenge the 2014 capital project sales tax referendum that included \$1.5 million for a building to house its police and fire departments that became a \$5.7 municipal complex, a Circuit Court judge ruled this week.

Judge Alex Hyman granted Georgetown County's motion for summary judgment in a suit

brought by the town in 2021. Following a hearing on the eve of the trial, the town attorney, mayor and administrator came to court the next day with boxes of files and exhibits. The table for the county's attorneys was nearly empty.

"The law was clearly on our side," Tommy Morgan, the assistant county attorney who handled the case, said afterward. "This could have been averted if they had just followed the language of the refer-

endum."

Eleazer Carter, the town attorney, fielded most of the questions from the judge during the hearing, particularly about a summary sheet of bids for the project to the town that showed contractors considered the town hall features as additions to the police and fire complex.

"I'm shocked and stunned," Carter said after the ruling.

While he said he would await the final order, which

the judge asked Morgan to prepare and he expected to supplement, Carter said he saw a path toward an appeal.

"When the referendum passed, you had 30 days" to file a challenge, he said. "We weren't even in the picture."

The referendum established a 1-cent local sales tax over four years that would fund \$6 million for dredging in Winyah Bay, \$10.3 million for dredging Murrells Inlet, \$1.5 million for the Andrews "fire/police com-

plex," \$1.5 million for rural fire stations and \$8.9 million for road resurfacing.

The ordinance setting the referendum question defined those amounts as "the maximum cost of the projects or facilities funded from the proceeds to be raised by the tax."

If the tax raised more than the \$28.2 million "estimated maximum cost" of the projects, the money was to be used to complete those priority

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A bright spot in the mist | Melody Edge teases her kite into the foggy sky over Hunting-ton Beach State Park during the annual kite festival. After calm winds on Saturday, the flyers faced a tornado warning on Sunday. Edge, a retired music teacher from Conway, has flown kites for 25 years. She and her family camped at the park and planned to return next month for more flying.

NORTH INLET

Settlement balances science and recreation in marsh ownership dispute

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

DeBordieu and the Baruch Foundation said this week they have reached an agreement in a lawsuit over the ownership of tidal property in North Inlet. If approved by the court, the agreement will preserve public access to the estuary while protecting areas that are used by researchers at Hobcaw Barony.

"This is a significant step toward protecting the environment and ensuring public access for recreational activities that the public has enjoyed for many years," Karen Licciardello, president of the DeBordieu Colony Community

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A monitoring station in the marsh at Hobcaw Barony.

BLACK RIVER EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Funding critical to expand environmental studies program

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

The people involved in developing the Black River Education Initiative all agree on two things: it's a great idea and finding the money for all the things they want to do will be a challenge, especially for the school district.

"I hope that you all will respect and understand that we have several schools, several beautiful visions just like this,"

superintendent of schools Bethany Giles told the initiative's advisory board this week. "We want to support this and we want to pour in the resources that we're able to, knowing that you all will supplement that."

The initiative is a program that uses outdoor, non-traditional curriculum to introduce students to careers in parks, agriculture, sustainability and eco-tourism.

As part of the program,

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PRINCE GEORGE | After the wildfire

Community looks for ways to increase safety after averting disaster

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

In the wake of a wildfire in Prince George that had the potential to wipe out the development, the homeowners association is looking for better ways beyond email to communicate with its members.

"We've never had to send, 'there's a fire everybody run,'" said Randy Hall, president of the association.

The association uses Town-Sq, a community management app, but not everybody who owns property is signed up.

Text messages might be a better option, Hall said.

"We're looking at a way to put a text link in our Town Square app so that more im-



Burned trees and grass along the marsh at Prince George.

Chris Sokoloski/
Coastal Observer

portant communications might reach more people faster," he added. "We think that could help."

The S.C. Forestry Commission has not released the results

of its investigation into the March 1 fire, which was driven by strong winds.

It burned about 130 acres.

A few days before the fire there was a controlled burn on

Arcadia Plantation, which is south of Prince George.

Hall said controlled burns take place once or twice a year on Arcadia Plantation and there's never been an issue be-

fore.

"We haven't had issues because they've been burning, and [they burn] on schedule," he said. "Everything's been good."

Hall does not believe the controlled burn caused the wildfire, but he is waiting for the report from the Forestry Commission.

However, Hall was told that embers can smolder for days before ignited into a fire.

"As far as we can tell nothing was done inappropriately," he said. "They stopped it when the wind picked up. Again, we are fortunate that our neighbors manage these lands so proactively."

Hall was on vacation on

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