

LANDUSE | Dismissed case reaches Appeals Court

Judge questions flurry of lawsuits

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The first of three lawsuits over land use issues that were dismissed by Circuit Court judges came before the state Court of Appeals this week. It wasn't lost on the judges that more are on the way.

"It seems to be wildly unpopular what Georgetown County is doing," Judge Aphrodite Konduros, a member

of a three-judge panel, said at a hearing this week. "We're having a few of these pop up through Georgetown County at the present time, that it's making the locals very uncomfortable."

Lawyers for the county and companies that want to develop two tracts in the Parkersville community of Pawleys Island offered explanations.

"We're here this morning because the appellants of this

case did not like the decision of the elected officials of Georgetown County," said Tommy Morgan, the assistant county attorney. "We would posit that the proper means or methods by which the appellants should challenge this would be the ballot box and not tie up the court system with zoning decisions."

"I think it's a little bit of NIMBY – not in my back yard – and a very small population of

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Golf course rezonings move ahead with rebuke to citizens group

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County Council voted this week to prevent development of two area golf

courses under their current zoning while a zoning change that will limit what can be built on those sites moves toward final approval.

That followed a stinging rebuke from Council Member Stella Mercado of the citizens group Keep It Green, which had organized opposition to

a change that it didn't think went far enough in reducing future development at Litchfield Country Club and the Founders Club in Hagley.

"The misinformation and propaganda that has been disseminated by Keep It Green and Keep It Green Advocacy has stoked fear and confusion within the community, resulting in conflict, mistrust and division within the community, between neighbors and between the people and elected officials," Mercado said in asking the council to invoke the "pending ordinance" doctrine for three measures that will limit development on the sites

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Christina Tonelli-Staats, second from left, was the only person to show up for Red Cross volunteer training at the county emergency operations center.

HURRICANE SEASON

Red Cross short on volunteers

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

There used to be about 60 Red Cross volunteers who served Georgetown County.

Now there are 25. "We just need new, fresh blood," said Irene Braynard, who oversees the county volunteers. "We also need some new ideas on things, different approaches."

Braynard has been involved with the Red Cross since she started training people to teach CPR and first aid in the late 1980s. She has never seen a shortage of volunteers this severe.

"Any skill you have or any-

thing you ever thought you wanted to try to do you can come to Red Cross and do it," Braynard said.

When Hurricane Helene passed by last September, heading inland and devastating the Piedmont, the volunteer shortage hit home for Braynard.

"That's very important because we were in a hurricane," she said. "If something happens we have to open these shelters."

With this year's hurricane season just a few weeks away, Braynard needs to start training volunteers to set up shelters and staff them.

A training session on Saturday attracted just one volunteer.

"I believe if you live in a community, you ought to help the community," Christina Tonelli-Staats said.

Braynard and Libby Lynskey, the area disaster program manager, went through the online course with Tonelli-Staats while Brandon Ellis, Georgetown County's director of Emergency Management, prepped for a hurricane conference.

The trainers said they weren't disappointed.

"It's one more volunteer than we had," Lynskey said.

Shelters are usually set up in schools. For hurricanes it's Pleasant Hill Elementary,

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NONPROFITS

Founding director steps down from Bunnelle Foundation

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

It took Geales Sands nearly 21 years to figure out what the hardest thing is about the job of being the executive director of the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation.

Leaving it. "I love this job. It is not like work," Sands said. "It's not that it's a walk in the park, but it's joyful work, it's interesting and challenging and thought provoking every single day. There's something new, there's some challenge or some new victory to be celebrated."

Bunnelle, who retired to Pawleys Island, started the foundation shortly before her death on Nov. 12, 2000. She left a letter with instructions on how she wanted the money spent and which were her favorite causes, like the humane society. She wanted the money to be used to specifically to benefit Georgetown County.

It took a few years to settle Bunnelle's estate and for the Coastal Community Foundation in Charleston to get the foundation up and running.

Sands and her family moved to Pawleys Island in 1999. She was working as the development director for Tidelands Hospice when she saw a help wanted ad in the Coastal



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Geales Sands

Observer.

"That was back in the day when you ran classified ads," Sands said. "If you want local people, that's where you advertise."

Sands became the foundation's first executive director on Sept. 1, 2004.

What she's seen in her 21 years, is the strengthening of Georgetown County's nonprofits through the foundation's work, including the recent Palmetto Giving Day.

"We've got nonprofits that are just crushing it. They're doing their work so

SEE "BUNNELLE," PAGE 4

ENVIRONMENT | The future of IP mill

Talk of biomass power plant leaves citizens of Georgetown with questions

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Residents who lived for years wrapped in fumes from the International Paper Co. mill in Georgetown say they are wary of plans for generating power from biomass on the site where the production of paper ended last year. And it doesn't help that those plans are being discussed outside the public view.

"We're very much concerned," said Everett Carolina, a former County Council member whose district included the IP property. "We want our elected officials to be transparent as we go through the process."

The mill closed at the end of 2024. The biomass plant was discussed in January at a closed meeting of state and local offi-



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Leo Woodberry, who works with nonprofits opposed to biomass, answers questions about the plants after a meeting in Georgetown last week.

cials following the Chamber of Commerce's annual legislative breakfast.

State Sen. Stephen Goldfinch, who supports the plan, said it is the best use for an industrial site that would require extensive environmental clean-up to be converted to other uses.

Carolina organized an impromptu meeting last week at the Soul Saving Station on Hawkins Street, which adjoins the mill, to discuss ways to as-

sess the environmental impact of the project. He was expecting about 10 people.

About 60 showed up, and many of them said more would have if they had known about it.

It was a survey by the newly-formed Citizens for Georgetown that brought the citizens of Georgetown together, Carolina said.

The group, led by another former council member, Tom Swatzel, who is also a political consultant, commissioned a survey that found a large majority of respondents oppose a biomass plant, particularly one described in the survey as "bringing more pollution, low-wage jobs and no real plan to clean up the land or fix the crumbling infrastructure."

Respondents were selected

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