



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The current plan for the property on display at a 2022 hearing.

LANDUSE | The Mercom tract

Buyer won't pursue townhouse plan

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The new owner of Georgetown County's former technology park site doesn't have immediate plans for the 14.4 acres. But its future plans don't include the 90 townhouses currently approved for the site or the 182 apartments that were previously proposed. "Absolutely not," said Tom Keith, interim executive director of the Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation. "It's not going to be 150 apartments over there."

The foundation bought the property this month for \$1.2 million from the county Alliance for Economic Development. The sale was to One Georgetown Realty, a company set up through the Coastal Community

Foundation. That was done to help support the Bunnelle Foundation, which is an affiliate, said Darrin Goss, the community foundation's chief executive.

The Bunnelle Foundation's goal is "some kind of housing initiative over time that will be a real asset to the Pawleys Island area," Keith said. "It's part of the bigger vision for Bunnelle."

The housing will allow people who work in the community to live here. "The hospital and the school system say they need housing for their workforce," Keith said.

The initiative by the foundation began under Geales Sands, its first executive director who retired this spring after 21 years. Keith, former president of the Columbia-based Sis-

ters of Charity Foundation, is serving as interim until the Bunnelle board hires Sands' replacement.

The foundation recently completed an affordable housing study of the entire county. It has also held community meetings on the subject, Keith said.

While those provided a background, he said that planning for the former tech park, known as the Mercom tract for a former partner, will involve the local community.

"The plan is to be deliberate and be thoughtful," Keith said. "Ultimately, down the road, we will have a thoughtful plan."

The current plan was sought by the alliance in order to sell the property to a private developer.

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ELECTIONS | District 6 school board

Forum sparks interest as voting begins

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

More than 50 people came to Waccamaw Library to figure out who the three candidates are that are running in a special election for the Georgetown County School Board in District 6.

That was a good sign, the candidates said, because they see turnout as key in the election that will follow the Fourth of July weekend.

The League of Women Voters organized the forum for Alex Belser, a former TV newsman; Jarrod Ownbey, a lawyer; and Jon Tester, a retired educator in the school district.

Early voting starts Monday and runs through July 3 at the county election office in Georgetown. Election day is July 8.

Andrea Marshal of Wilbrook, a former educator, said she didn't know any of the candidates, but wanted to find out about them before she cast a ballot.

"I don't understand why people don't vote. This is our county school board we're voting for," she said. "If we don't like what's going on in the schools, if we don't participate, we have no right to say anything. We have no right to complain if you don't even voice your choice."

"This is what the league does," said Karen Ebbetts, the



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

The candidates, from left, Jon Tester, Jarrod Ownbey and Alex Belser.

league president. "We try to get up the vote."

The special election will fill the unexpired term of Kristie Baxley. She was elected in November and resigned in April.

The forum was also a chance for voters to learn what the school board does. Questions about book banning, curriculum and South Carolina's ranking in test scores, prompted the three candidates to point out that those issues are outside the scope of the county school

board. They are handled on the state level.

Tester said the three main goals of a board member is to hire school district employees, evaluate them and oversee policy.

However topics such as the budget arose and what would happen to the district's taxes and funding without the U.S. Department of Education.

Ownbey said that 14.3 percent of the board's budget comes from the federal govern-

ment and the board has proposed a \$1 million increase in taxes already.

"Unfortunately, there's only two other places for that to come from; the state and the local taxes," he said. "We're going to have to get creative."

Tester agreed that federal government funding is "critical."

"If we lose that federal input it's going to be, in my opinion, harmful. Especially over time,"

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SCHOOLS

District panel will address concerns about student vaping

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Measures to reduce the use of vaping devices by students in Georgetown County schools will be implemented when students return to class in August, the school board's safety committee learned this week.

Superintendent Bethany Giles said counselors, teachers, parents and administrators started an anti-vaping committee earlier this year. They plan to present their plan to the school board in July.

"One of the key pieces I'm most proud about, we're working toward having a list or a database of services and resources," Giles said. "It's not just the punitive measures that we have to focus on, but what can we do to help intervene?"

Board Member Eileen Johnson raised the concern about "the vaping that's been going on" after the safety committee discussed a revised code of conduct and whether school resource officers can prosecute students for violating the code.

Electronic cigarettes, also known as "vapes," are used by 5.9 percent of high school and middle school students in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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GEORGETOWN | Redeveloping the waterfront

Citizens groups give voice to concerns about future of paper mill site

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The citizens of Georgetown are concerned about the future of the International Paper Co. mill site. Really concerned. Enough so that there are three groups that share similar names.

Citizens for Georgetown was started earlier this year to oppose plans to expand the paper mill's power plant and generate electricity by burning biomass. It was started by Tom Swatzel, a political consultant and former County Council member, who is its only publicly-identified member.

Citizens for Georgetown



Brother Willie, a West End resident, said more fact and less emotion is needed.

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(Common Sense Edition) was started this month by Shawn James, who spent 30 years working in the power plant. He created a Facebook page to

support redevelopment of the plant.

"We are very concerned," said Bill Crowther, who is part of a third group, Georgetown

Concerned Citizens. "We don't want this coming to the IP site."

His group registered with the S.C. Secretary of State's Office in March and just received

its nonprofit tax status, he said.

Crowther is the former director of the county's Alliance for Economic Development. He started the Concerned Citizens with J.C. Sutton, a Pawleys Island resident who has an oil and gas business. A third member is an environmental lawyer living in Washington, D.C.

"We want to steer IP in the right direction," Crowther said.

They don't oppose biomass, just in the proposed site on the Georgetown waterfront, he said.

International Paper has solicited letters of intent from potential buyers. Those involved in the process said the deadline

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