

Incorporation group says it will meet with sheriff

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The group that has worked for nearly three years on a proposal to form a town in the Pawleys Island-Litchfield area plans to meet with the Georgetown County sheriff about law enforcement. But that won't change its plans that police protection from the sheriff's office will continue uninterrupted.

"There is no Plan B," said Andy Hallock, chairman of the Pawleys Litchfield Municipal Study Group, at a meeting the group organized for Hagley residents over the weekend. "What



Jim Crawford, left, a Hagley resident and assistant chief at Midway Fire Rescue, talks with Andy Hallock about public safety.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

we showed you today is the plan."

Sheriff Carter Weaver said this week no meeting with the study group has been scheduled. He said before the study group began meeting with residents and property owners in May that he wanted to meet with them about law enforcement.

"They're simply ignoring factual information," he said. "There's no confusion at this point."

The study group is gathering signatures on a petition to submit to the S.C. Secretary of State's office to hold an incorporation referendum in the area between Brookgreen Gardens and DeBordieu. It has more than half of the 3,000 signatures it wants to collect and is almost finished with the feasibility study that it must also submit to the state to outline how the town will function, Hallock said.

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EDUCATION | The path to excellence

For top schools, culture helps boost academic success

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Kyree Grant peeked into Travis Klatka's office at Waccamaw Intermediate School. "I've got something that I want to show you," he said.

Kyree, a fifth-grader, wanted to show Klatka, the school principal, the card he got for showing good character. The cards are placed on a bulletin board to give students a chance to win an Amazon gift card provided by the parent-teacher organization at the end of every month.

There are many incentives to get intermediate school students excited about learning, according to Klatka. Those include free ice cream for completing 25 i-Ready Learning assignments that align with the state assessment.

Klatka said the open-door policy helps, too.

"Every school is unique, so what we're doing here may or may not work in another school," he said.

"Not to brag, but my class won the turkey trot," Kyree said about another school event.

This summer, the Georgetown County School District recognized Waccamaw Intermediate and Waccamaw Middle as the best of their kind in



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

Principal Ginny Haynes celebrates with seventh-graders working through math problems.

the state, after reviewing assessment data and the state report cards issued last year. Both principals received banners from the district to display.

The schools have already received the results of the state's standardized tests from the

spring. They won't be made public until next month.

But both principals expect to see the growth in student achievement continue.

The middle school scored 68 on the state report card, up a point from the prior year,

and the intermediate scored 63 points, a six-point increase. That meant both were ranked "excellent" and that they "substantially exceed" state standards. Middle schools must score at least 56 out of 100

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PAWLEYS ISLAND

Town will go beyond signs after drownings in rip currents

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The widow of a man who drowned off the north end of Pawleys Island last month met at Town Hall with members of the family her husband was trying to rescue from a rip current.

"It was a good moment for us to reflect and pivot on things that we can do to increase the safety of our visitors and beachgoers," Town Administrator Dan Newquist said. He sat in along with Police Chief Mike Fanning who facilitated the meeting.

The conversation helped the town design signs that went up on the north end two weeks after the death of Chase Childers warning of rip currents. He was visiting the beach with his family. His death followed the drowning in June of John Young, who was also visiting the island when he was caught in a rip current near the Shell Road beach access.

Two other drownings took place in the area in October. Another occurred there in June 2023.

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MURRELLS INLET

Fast moving gas prices drive store's variance for electronic sign

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A convenience store will get an electronic sign and a fitness center will get a gentler slope on its roof under a pair of variances to the design standards for the Highway 17 corridor.

Georgetown County has prohibited digital signs at businesses along Highway 17 on the Waccamaw Neck since 2014. But the owner of the Sunhouse convenience store on Bypass 17 at Pendergrass Avenue told the Board of Zoning Appeals last week that rapidly changing gas prices meant his store struggled to compete with larger chains.

"If gas prices changed once a day or once a week, it would be OK," said Shri Kamma, president of Sunhouse Petroleum. "Especially in that vicinity, within two miles gas prices

change three to five times a day, and that's where we are having a hard time."

Sunhouse bought a vacant convenience store on the site in 2021. It sought a series of variances to renovate and expand the existing building, all of which were denied in 2022.

Kristal Infinger, the county zoning administrator, said the variance request didn't meet the four criteria required by state law since the store is already in operation and the design standards apply to other businesses. Approval could set a precedent, she said.

Employees at the new store have to change the gas prices by hand. Kamma showed the appeals board a photo of one employee with blood on her face and a cut on her hand. In June, they said they wouldn't change the prices as often as the com-



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The manual sign, left, at the Sunhouse store makes it hard to compete with the digital sign at Circle K and the scroll sign at 7-Eleven, the owner says.

petition.

"They're getting hurt, and I can't insist on them changing the prices if they're getting hurt," Kamma said.

Vas Vundavalli, who operates the store, told the board that it takes 10 minutes to change prices on the sign and one employee can't run the

store and change the sign. He also said the manual numbers are breakable. The 7 broke last month, meaning the store had to set its prices with just the 6 and the 8.

There are digital signs at the Refuel and Circle K stores a mile north at Bypass 17 and Wachesaw Road. They were in

place before the county ban on electronic signs. The 7-Eleven store built at that intersection in 2023 uses a scroll sign that changes the gas prices mechanically.

"They have a different budget," Kamma said, telling the appeals board that it would cost

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