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County eases proposed buffers for wetland protection

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The size of the buffers contained in Georgetown County's proposed wetlands ordinance continues to shrink. The minimum size of the wetlands protected from filling continues to grow along with the number of activities that would be exempt from the ordinance.

That hasn't stifled opposi-

tion from those who say that federal and state protections are sufficient for the county's 249,336 acres of wetlands.

The Planning Commission will hold a hearing on the ordinance next week, but County Council Chairman Clint Elliott told a workshop of council and commission members this week he is willing to hold more discussions if necessary.

Elliott listed the adoption of

a wetlands ordinance as one of his priorities when he was elected council chairman last year.

The ordinance is among the goals of the county's comprehensive plan, which was updated in 2024. The initial proposal called for a 50-foot buffer between wetlands and residential and commercial development. The buffer for industrial development was 100 feet.

Those have been reduced to

35 feet and 50 feet, respectively. A 100-foot buffer proposed for wetlands adjacent to water bodies was reduced to 50 feet. A 100-foot buffer for golf courses was reduced to 35 feet.

The buffers initially applied only to wetlands over a quarter acre in size. The threshold was raised to half an acre.

In addition, there would be a 15 foot building setback from the buffer.

The ordinance would require a permit from the county to fill a wetland larger than a quarter of an acre. That was increased from a tenth of an acre.

The local ordinance is seen as a way to protect wetlands that no longer have federal protection under the Clean Water Act after a 2023 Supreme Court ruling held that those protections only apply where

SEE "WETLANDS," PAGE 3



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Spring colors on the run | Waccamaw Intermediate students headed into their spring break through a multi-colored cloud last week. The annual color run is sponsored by the parent-teacher organization. A foam machine helped students clean up afterward.



MURRELLS INLET

Church decides vintage restaurant can't be saved

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

After 165 years on the Murrells Inlet marsh, Oliver's Lodge will become just a memory.

But in many ways, it already has. There are jagged holes in the plywood ceiling panels. The floors are soft where they have soaked up leaking water. Debris fills rooms that once were once filled with hungry diners.

The Rev. Will Malambri, the senior pastor at Belin Memorial United Methodist Church, said he wished that things were in different conditions.

"We did take it very seriously, and we tried to explore every option," Malambri said. "I think the time put into it, the research that was done reflects that we care about that, and we care about being good neighbors."

A farewell ceremony following Belin's 11 a.m. service on Sunday is one way to do that, he added. The ceremony, which is open to the public, will feature speakers and a taste of the food Oliver's Lodge once served.



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

A farewell ceremony will be held Sunday.

"We felt like it still important to keep the story alive in some way," Malambri said.

The building will be disassembled rather than demolished or renovated. That decision follows Belin's purchase of the .6 acre property from Parsonage Creek LLC for \$2 million

SEE "BELIN," PAGE 2

PAWLEYS ISLAND

Historic preservation effort gathers momentum in town

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An inventory that began last month of nearly 500 houses on Pawleys Island has found 90 that could be nominated for historic status and one property owner who was willing to test out the town's nominating process that it hopes to have in place later this year.

"The momentum is phenomenal," said Jerry Lieberman, who chairs a special committee created by Town Council to develop a historic preservation program.

The goal of the program is

to provide incentives for owners to renovate houses with the "Pawleys look" that reflects the early 19th century structures in the island's historic district that was included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Sites eligible for inclusion in the town's proposed program are those that existed before Hurricane Hazel hit in October 1954.

The special committee met for the first time in March and currently has 24 members. People who have an interest in the effort can still join. The committee will propose a list of seven

SEE "PAWLEYS," PAGE 2

GEORGETOWN | Audit in question

City boasts surplus. Council wants 2nd opinion

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown ended the last fiscal year with enough money in its surplus to run the city alone for almost an entire year.

The city had a fund balance of \$17.5 million at the start of the 2026 fiscal year. Its general fund expenditures the previous year were just over \$18 million, according to the city's most re-

cent audit.

The city spends nearly \$1.1 million per month. So the unrestricted portion of the fund balance is enough to operate the city of ten and a half months without any additional revenue sources, said David Irwin, a partner with the accounting firm Mauldin & Jenkins, which performed the audit.

"There's really no accounting rule that says you can have

too much fund balance," Irwin told the City Council. "Your fund balance is strong. I will say it's stronger than most municipalities."

Mayor Jay Doyle and three council members - Jessie Walker, Sharon Melton and Hobson Henry Milton - took office in January.

Walker said she had never heard of an audit with "no findings" and requested a second

opinion.

She raised the request following February's presentation and again last month, though no formal action was taken.

"I just wanted to be sure that there's nothing that we missed or could have missed," Walker said. "It's like, they tell me I have cancer and I don't believe it, I can go get a second opinion. I'm not saying it's not legit but it's always good to have a sec-

Money in the bank

Local government fund balances at the start of FY26 as a percentage of general operating expenses.

22 95 96
Schools County City

Source: Government audits

ond opinion."

An annual comprehensive financial report isn't designed to catch every minor mistake,

SEE "CITY," PAGE 3

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



The human element: Waccamaw High's robotics team heads to state competition. **SECOND FRONT**

Easter on the hop: The sacred and secular sides of the holiday were on display. **PAGE 4**



Second chances: Pawleys Island Rotary Club makes connections with boys in trouble. **PAGE 8**

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