

COASTAL OBSERVER

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Council advances wetlands ordinance over rural objections

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

An ordinance to protect wetlands from future development is one vote away from final approval by Georgetown County Council.

Council Member Ron Charlton, who represents the area in and around the city of Georgetown, joined the three coun-

cil members who represent the Waccamaw Neck in moving the wetlands ordinance forward on second reading this week. The three council members who represent the county's rural areas were opposed.

"This is needed. We need some protection," said Holly Richardson, the county planning director, who added that the issue has been discussed

since she started working for the county 20 years ago.

The ordinance will require a 35-foot minimum buffer between wetlands and new construction. A county permit will be required to fill wetlands, particularly those that are no longer protected under the federal Clean Water Act. A Supreme Court ruling determined only wetlands with a link to naviga-

ble waters are protected under the act.

Council Member Raymond Newton said the ordinance amounts to an unconstitutional taking. "People out there right now that own land will not be able to utilize the land as they see fit that they worked for, most of them, for their entire life," he said.

Stephen Williams, the coun-

ty's former GIS manager who is a consultant with G3 Engineering, cited federal data that shows 13,100 parcels in the county have wetlands. The county's current ordinance requires a 15-foot setback from saltwater wetlands, which impacts 1,600 parcels.

Expanding the protection to freshwater wetlands would
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SCHOOLS

Proposed tax increase prompts board debate

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

Eileen Johnson said she and her fellow Georgetown County School Board members are stewards of the tax dollars. She is leery of a 3-mill increase proposed in the district's draft budget and the impact it will have on people already living on the margins.

"I also want the board to understand that with every decision we make, there are consequences," she said. "We have some families that are struggling. We have our own teachers struggling to pay their rent."

Board Member Jarrod Ownbey said the district has limited tax increases over several years. Compared to other districts in the state, Ownbey said George-



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

Eileen Johnson

town County has one of the lowest millage rates. He thinks the district needs to put more money into salaries and programs.

The debate will play out as the board works through its \$128 million operating budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

"I don't think we're in competition with other districts to see who can raise their rates the fastest or who has the lowest," Board Member Scott DuBose said as the board took up the budget for the first time last week. "We haven't even talked about how we could slash unnecessary spending."

DuBose said the board should look at their own budget and financial management.

"That needs to be a part of the equation," Johnson agreed.

DuBose cited travel as a large expense, using conferences in San Diego as an example. He said memberships to the S.C. School Boards Association was an unnecessary expense.

The district has been criticized over the last year for spending through its procurement cards.

"This is not a P-card issue right now. A lot of that is
SEE "BUDGET," PAGE 2



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Honoring the fallen

Taps sounds, above, at the Memorial Day service at the VFW post in Georgetown. State Rep. Carl Anderson, whose son was killed in Iraq, said "it gives me a sense of pride knowing how courageous he was, how courageous they all were." At right, Emerson and Michael Gasper from Boy Scout Troop 360 dip the flag for Taps before raising it over the Pawleys Island Nature Park at the town's Memorial Day summer kickoff. Below, a wreath is placed at the ceremony at the VFW post in Murrells Inlet. "I lost a lot of friends in Vietnam. I'm never going to see them again. This is in their memory," said Fred Horman, a Marine Corps veteran.



Madison Sharrock/Coastal Observer

LAND USE

Litchfield group raising money to buy property to head off development

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Property owners at North Litchfield are raising money to buy property at the entrance to the community that was proposed for a convenience store and gas station.

"The issue has not gone away," said Elliott Powell, a board member of the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association who is leading the effort. "Our desire is to get that property off the market."

The 6.7 acres at the corner of Highway 17 and Boyle Drive is owned by members of the Floyd family. They sought a zoning change earlier this year from "neighborhood commercial" to "general commercial" to allow what was called "a high-end convenience store."

The request was withdrawn
SEE "LITCHFIELD," PAGE 3

GEORGETOWN

Consortium starts work on master plan for former port

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Planning for the redevelopment of the former port of Georgetown was due to get underway this week, nearly three years after Georgetown County took ownership of the 46 acres on the Sampit River.

"A huge component of this effort is going to be the public engagement with the residents from Georgetown County and, obviously, Georgetown itself," said Lee Gastley, the managing principal at Seamon-Whiteside in Mount Pleasant.



Lee Gastley

The planning, engineering and design firm is the lead consultant for the port project, which includes seven other companies with specialized skills.

County Council approved the selection of the firm in April. The contract was signed earlier this month, at a cost not to exceed \$250,000.

"It's obviously a complicated
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