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PI COMMUNITY CHURCH

Ministry for kids returns with added review after sex scandal

By Madison Sharrock
COASTAL OBSERVER

Pawleys Island Community Church purchased a MinistrySafe membership just before the church's kids ministry resumed this Sunday.

The leadership and elders of the church have been working to review and strengthen child protection policies and procedures, according to an email sent out by the church last week.

"Background checks and training have always been required to volunteer in PICC Kids, but we are now even more committed to ensuring we are providing the safest and most secure environment for children in our care," the email read.

The church announced that it would "formally end" operations at the Pawleys Island Christian Academy earlier this month. Church leaders cited the ongoing investigation after the discovery last month that Warren Perry, 70, a registered sex offender had been allowed to work at the church and the school, which served more than 100 students.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Protesters outside the church last month.

MinistrySafe, based in Fort Worth, Texas, serves more than 25,000 churches. The company aims to prevent child sexual abuse in churches and their ministries. It offers training and background checks through a self-led, online platform.

An annual membership costs $400.

Last week's email called

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Walter McNeil has kept watch on the terrapin nest since he saw it laid in June.

ENVIRONMENT | Diamondback terrapin

It's nesting season on the marsh

By Charles Swenson
COASTAL OBSERVER

The nest under the oak and magnolia trees in a quiet Litchfield neighborhood won't draw the sort of crowds that gather on the beachfront for sea turtle nest inventories. But it has captured the attention of residents who have counted down the days since it was laid.

It could be any day now.

The diamondback terrapin hatchlings that emerge are also of interest to scientists who study the reptiles that only make their home in the salt marsh. While not federally protected like sea turtle species, diamondback terrapins are ranked high on the state's list of species that need to be conserved.

The species is among those that the state Department of Natural Resources asks the public to report.

That wasn't what occurred to Walter McNeil when he saw the nesting terrapin in a common area across from his home in Marshland Park.

Walter McNeil

The diamondback terrapin lays its eggs under a magnolia tree near the marsh behind Litchfield Beach.

"The first thing I said, in my ignorance, is 'look at that turtle,'" he said.

To be fair, a terrapin is a type of turtle, scientifically speaking.

"All terrapins are turtles, but not all turtles are terrapins," said Andrew Grosse, the state herpetologist with Natural Resources. "The diamondback terrapin is the only estuarine species in North America."

The terrapins were caught for food and jewelry in the 19th century. Coastal development in the 20th century further contributed to their decline. South Carolina banned the commercial harvest of diamondback terrapins 20 years ago.

What McNeil found as he took a noonday walk in June to check on a neighbor's house was "not common," Grosse said. McNeil and his wife watched the female lay her eggs in the nest scraped from under

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LAND USE

County plan proves to be inconsistent guideline for zoning

By Charles Swenson
COASTAL OBSERVER

It's only been two years since Georgetown County updated its future land use plan, so a unanimous Planning Commission recommended denial of a 396-lot development on the Black River that would require changing the plan's low density designation for the site.

The vote came just before a nearly-unanimous commission said that opposition from neighbors justified keeping the current non-residential zoning for property west of Georgetown rather than rezoning it for a 224-lot development that would comply with the land use plan envisions.

"If the Planning Commission can't recommend approval of this, I think it's time to revisit all of your future land use maps so we can all actually understand what you really mean," said Dan Stacy, the attorney who represented the owners of both tracts. "It's very confusing for the community."

The maps are part of the land use element of the county's comprehensive plan, which it is required by state law to update every 10 years. During the last update, county officials frequently pointed out that the plan is a guide and that the zoning ordinance is the law.

But state law requires zoning to follow the guidelines in the comprehensive plan. That has been an issue in a series of court cases challenging the county's land use decisions, and it became an issue for the commission last week.

The first proposal, known as the Blackwater River Club, proposed rezoning 507 acres from "forest and agriculture" and "conservation preservation" to a "planned development" with homes and commercial uses for the community. The development would be clustered on 146 acres of upland. The tract has 361 acres of wetlands.

Because the current designation on the future land use maps allows low-density

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NORTH LITCHFIELD | Boyle Park

Buying land to block development continues to draw support

By Charles Swenson
COASTAL OBSERVER

An effort to buy property at the entrance to North Litchfield to keep it from being developed is about halfway toward its goal of raising $2 million with pledges from 110 people.

"We need a lot more participants," said Elliott Powell, a property owner who is leading the effort, but he sees the current level of support for an effort that started in May "a significant success."

The project known as Boyle Park picked up some additional pledges after a meeting Saturday that drew about 200 people. The organizers are awaiting approval of their nonprofit tax status from the IRS before turning those pledges into cash.

Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Elliott Powell outlines the plans for Boyle Park at a community meeting at St. Paul's Waccamaw Methodist Church.

The 6.7 acres they want to buy is owned by members of the Floyd family. It sits on the north side of Boyle Drive between Highway 17 and the Bike the Neck path. It is currently zoned "neighborhood commercial," which would allow shops and offices. A proposal earlier this year to change the zoning to "general commercial" to allow construction of a convenience store and gas station drew opposition from neighbors and was withdrawn.

In the past, the property was zoned for residential use, which also raised concerns about traffic impacts at the Boyle Drive intersection, one of two entrances into North Litchfield.

The Boyle Park group is proposing to buy the property and prevent development through deed restrictions or a conservation easement.

"We are all here to make sure we don't kick ourselves later on," Powell said. "We cannot count on Georgetown County."

He first presented the idea to the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association at its annual meeting in May. He was encouraged that no one said no.

"I haven't had anyone come up to me and say I really don't like this plan," Powell said.

This week's meeting generated questions along with suggestions for ways to raise the money that the Boyle Park group hopes will be sufficient to buy the land.

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