COASTAL OBSERVER

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UDO proposal would cut 450 units on 141 acres

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A proposed change in Georgetown County's zoning would eliminate 450 future dwellings on the Waccamaw Neck.

That would require County Council to change the zoning on 96 vacant parcels totaling 141.6 acres from "general residential" to "residential 10,000 square feet."

However two parcels included in the proposal by consultants working to create a "unified development ordinance" were approved for an 18-lot subdivision last month.

"Zoning happens fast in that sense. If you have it, if your land is entitled, if it's ready to go, if it's right for development, someone could develop," said Sarah Sinatra, the project manager for Inspire Placemaking Collective, which is combining the county zoning ordinance and development regulations into a single document.

That work will also bring the zoning into compliance with the goals of the comprehensive plan that the county updated in 2024. One of those goals was to reduce density, or what Sinatra calls "development potential," on the Waccamaw Neck.

The rezoning would take property that could potentially have the highest density residential development and reduce that to medium to low density. Only single-family homes or clustered units know as "cottage courts" would be allowed on land that could now have a single- or multi-family development.

"The immediate threat right now is that we do have a lot of residential coming in," Sinatra told an audience of 60 people who gathered for a workshop on the UDO this week. "What

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Sarah Sinatra explains updates to the proposed UDO.

SAFETY | License plate readers

Keeping watch over the Flocks

BY MADISON SHARROCK
COASTAL OBSERVER

A camera on Highway 17 south of Georgetown alerted the sheriff's office last week that a stolen vehicle had just passed. A deputy found it being towed on a trailer.

Two men said they picked up the vehicle in McClellanville, where a woman said her boyfriend had left it in her yard before he was arrested in Charleston County. The men said they were selling it for scrap.

The owner, who lived in Mount Pleasant, reported it stolen. He said he would come and pick it up.

It was a typical case for the automated license plate reader from Flock Safety.

"The reason we want them is time matters," Georgetown County Sheriff Carter Weaver said. "That's where Flock came in."

But the proliferation of the cameras, known as ALPRs and instances of misuse by agencies across the country has sparked a debate over privacy.

Flock Safety, an Atlanta-based company, has a network of 120,000 cameras that's used by 7,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S.

Flock is capable of capturing license plate information and identifying vehicle characteristics including make, model, color, vehicle type and direction of travel.

The sheriff's office bought its first 10 Flock cameras in 2020. It now has 34. Each camera has an annual fee of $2,500. There is no installation charge.

"That's why Flock was attractive because it was affordable and only captured the license plate information," Weaver said.

Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The county has 34 cameras from Flock Safety. Below, a camera in Murrells Inlet and, right, one that drew attention from opponents of the cameras.

The system is commonly used in missing persons cases and violent crimes, Weaver said.

Erin Bailey, a criminal defense attorney in Georgetown, said that she sees Flock used often in criminal cases.

"I haven't had a case that's well positioned to challenge the use of Flock," Bailey said.

One client, she said, was stopped in Georgetown because Flock gave an alert that his vehicle's license plate was stolen. It was not.

"We could never figure out how that happened," Bailey said.

Flock did not respond to specific questions but pointed to the FAQ page on its website.

"LPRs, or license plate reader cameras, are a topic of conversation across the country, and I get it," Weaver said.

The county has not had any instances of vandalism of Flock cameras, he said. Signs that read "This camera is tracking you. Deflock.org" have been placed by some of the cameras.

Evan Aarons-Wood of

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LEGISLATURE

Agreement on earmarks alots $8 million for local projects

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Projects in Georgetown County will receive just over $8 million from $350 million in earmarks approved by the legislature last week.

Gov. Henry McMaster signed the supplemental appropriations bill this week.

"There are quite a few important projects for Georgetown County in there," state Sen. Stephen Goldfinch said.

It provides $2 million for a project to dredge 16 miles of creeks and channels through Murrells Inlet and $1.5 million for improvements to the public boat landing. Both requests came from Goldfinch.

He hopes the county will be able to add more dock space at the landing, the busiest public landing in the state. "They need to get the dockage under control," Goldfinch said.

The Murrells Inlet-Garden City Fire District will get $1.25 million for an emergency operations center.

"I'm very happy with what we've got," state Rep. Lee Hewitt said, who made the request for the district funds.

The legislature passed a $15 billion budget in August, a month after the start of the fiscal year, but the House and Senate could not agree on the earmarks, which were bundled into a separate bill.

"Earmarks have long been part of the budget process, and we have worked over the years to make the process for

SEE "EARMARKS," PAGE 2

BEACHES | Barriers to access

County will clear rights of way at North Litchfield

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County plans to clear its rights of way in North Litchfield to increase parking for beach access. Officials say they hope that will inspire the state to do the same.

Property owners on streets south of Boyle Drive will get notices from the county, said Carla Harvey, the county Public Services director.

"We are putting them on notice that we're coming out to do a project and clean everything up," she told the county's beach committee last week.

Those streets are maintained by the county, unlike Parker Drive, a state maintained road that runs parallel to the beach.

Harvey said the county would like to work with the state Department of Transportation to keep all the rights of way clear. "I don't know if they have an appetite to do that," she said.

"It's a very complicated issue politically," said John Martin, a North Litchfield resident who chairs the beach committee.

He is also a past president of the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association. Because the right-of-way issue pits beachfront property owners against those with houses off the beach who also want access, the association has never taken a position, he said.

"It has to be elevated to another level," Martin said.

Bill Ringer, the GOP nominee for County Council District 6, told the council last week that there is growing frustration with barriers erected to block street side parking. He said it's the issue he has heard about most since winning the June primary.

"In the past, SCDOT maintenance crews have removed barriers, as authorized by state code," Ringer said, "only to have property owners replace them within 72 hours."

"This lack of consistent enforcement has created considerable frustration," he said. "Some residents are so upset that I fear they may attempt to remove the barriers themselves."

Council Member Stella Mercado, who lost to Ringer in the

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Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

A pole on Media Lane that has drawn complaints about blocking parking.

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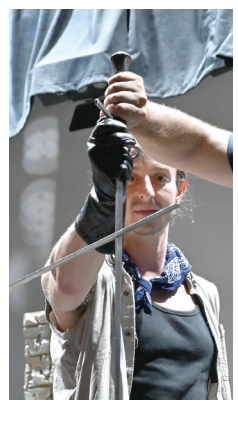

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