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Project 1429 gets final approval in Chester

Company talked to nearby residents 8 years ago

Travis Jenkins

Landmark News Service

CHESTER – Since it first became a topic of discussion for Chester County Council, the big, exciting, new economic development known as Project 1429 has created a lot of interest around the state.

It remains big and exciting, but it turns out it really isn't that new.

The still-unnamed company behind the 1429 code name started doing research on the ground in Chester eight years ago, meeting with property owners near the proposed site.

"They did some up-front work on this," said Karlisa Parker, the county's economic development director. "Citizens attended meetings on this. There was a dialogue between the company and the people."

Last week, the county council approved third and final reading of the Project 1429 incentive ordinance at a special called meeting. The company behind the project plans to spend \$1.6 billion and create 1,400 permanent jobs in the renewable energy industry, making this the largest single economic investment in S.C. history.

As the Chester News & Reporter first reported in October, 1429 will nearly match last year's Giti Tire announcement in terms of jobs created and could dwarf it in terms of total dollars invested. Giti has already broken ground on a facility in the county that will ultimately employ 1,700 people and involve a total investment of more than \$500 million.

Nearby counties also

will benefit from the influx of jobs. Lancaster County officials are anticipating benefits for the entire region. The project will surpass what Boeing invested in Charleston County and BMW put into its Greenville County plant, projects that economically transformed those parts of the state.

In Chester, Parker said, the owners of the nearby properties have not changed since the talks with the company eight years ago, and none of those owners expressed concerns at that time. She said she couldn't imagine why any would have reason to have changed their minds since then.

Parker said the people who took part in those talks did ask for certain changes to be made, and the company complied. The county itself always has conditions it sets.

"We love our county," Parker said. "There are things we're requiring of them."

For example, Parker said the county requests that trees be left in place to act as a natural buffer between industrial sites and nearby residents.

After last week's meeting, Parker said specifics about the company and its plans will remain secret for now.

"There will be no release of information," said Parker.

She said the announcement will come when the company is ready, likely at a large-scale event that will include local and state officials, including Gov. Nikki Haley.

Parker said Haley's primary focus recently has been on the floods that devastated parts of the Midlands and Lowcoun-

try in October. She said when the time is right, focus can turn back to economic development announcements. She thinks the announcement will be in late February or early March.

Chester County has been on an economic hot streak for some time. There were several announcements in 2014, including the one involving Giti Tire. There have been many more slightly smaller ones in 2015, but each one is "a win for Chester County" Parker said.

Having so much success has also allowed the county to bargain from a position of strength. At the height of the recession, when Chester County was listed as being in a full-blown depression by some analysts and unemployment reached 23 percent, Parker said it was hard to say "no" when someone came calling.

With Giti and the company behind 1429 planning to invest more than \$2 billion in the county and employ more than 3,000 people combined, Sun Fiber hiring and other companies either locating or expanding here to the tune of tens of millions of more dollars, Parker said Chester County can now afford to be more selective.

"We've said 'no' to certain projects," she said.

She specifically mentioned a bleach manufacturer, noting red flags from the get-go like the request to be downstream from schools and in isolated locations. She said the county council "has been awesome" in supporting her office and in adopting a strategic plan.

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Newsome on local patrol



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Lancaster County will have a new face among the S.C. Highway Patrol officers in the county. Joshua Newsome completed training in December and is assigned to Troop 4, Post D, which includes Lancaster County. Above, Newsome, flanked by Mike Oliver and Gov. Nikki Haley, holds his Captain Cecil Dilworth Marksmanship Award, presented to him at graduation for the best marksmanship during firearms training.



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Brett joins ReWa Board of Commissioners

Renewable Water Resources (ReWa) recently welcomed Tim Brett, a former state legislator and political affairs expert, to its current Board of Commissioners.

Brett was appointed by Nikki Haley, Governor of South Carolina in October 2015 and will serve until December 2016. The duty of the ReWa Board of Commissioners is to provide governance and review for the Agency.

Brett is the owner of BrettSC, a Greenville-

based public affairs firm. He represented the Golden Strip for two terms in the General Assembly and served

on the congressional and gubernatorial staffs of Carroll Campbell. He has twice chaired the Salvation Army Advisory Board; is a past president of the Mauldin Rotary Club; past chairman of Greenville-



Brett

leConnect; past member of the Executive Committee of the State Chamber and past board member of BIPEC. Brett received the Order of the Palmetto, the state's highest civilian honor, from Governor Campbell.

"We are excited to have someone with Tim's abilities and years of public service on ReWa's Board of Commissioners," said J.D. Martin, ReWa Board Member. "We feel he will be a key asset."

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Joanna man one of South Carolina's newest troopers

The South Carolina Highway Patrol held graduation ceremonies for 40 troopers from Highway Patrol Basic Class 97 last week. Gov. Nikki Haley addressed the graduates. The new troopers include Thomas S. Peay of Joanna, who has been assigned to Troop 2 / Post A.

"I think it is so incredibly important to honor what you have gone through and to talk to you about being part of the South Carolina team," Gov. Haley said.

"With that uniform comes a lot of power. You can't demand respect; you have to earn respect. You are someone that everyone needs to trust. You are the good guys ... I saw that firsthand as we

went through three tragedies this past year."

Basic 97 brings the total number of troopers in South Carolina to 772. An additional class will report to the Academy in January to begin the 98th Basic Class. The troopers began training on July 19 and graduated from the Criminal Justice Academy on October 30. They continued with specialized

training from the Highway Patrol in all areas of law enforcement. The SCHP Basic Training Program consists of 21 weeks of extensive law enforcement training in-residence. After graduation, Troopers must complete a minimum of 400 hours of field training.

"As law enforcement faces increasingly varied and complex challenges, we are pleased to welcome this new class of men and women who are well-trained and ready to meet those challenges," said SCDPS Director Leroy Smith.

Troopers are assigned to areas based upon population, calls for service, and the number of drivers/registered vehicles in an area.

"Today, we welcome 40 troopers to our ranks, and as we do, we encourage them to remember the foundation and legacy of those who came before them," said Highway Patrol Col. Mike Oliver. "It is a privilege to wear this uniform and serve the great State of South Carolina."



Thomas S. Peay



Pass expansion to dam safety office

At an additional cost of \$1.8 million per year, it is difficult to envision a rationale for South Carolina to not improve its dam safety program in the wake of last fall's torrential rains that caused nearly three dozen dams to fail.

A bill presented by South Carolina Speaker of the House Jay Lucas would nearly quadruple the budget for the program that's administered by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, according to a report by The State newspaper. The department's current budget is about \$470,000, and it is woefully inadequate.

Unfortunately, South Carolina got irrefutable proof of just how inadequate the program now is. When October's 1,000-year rainfall event dumped more than 20 inches of water on parts of the state, 32 dams failed causing significant property damage and putting lives at risk.

An analysis of the state's dam safety program revealed that the state's network of 2,400 regulated dams is not inspected frequently enough and the staff that does the work is far too small. In addition, too many dams in the state are not being inspected at all.

In a detailed report in November, Greenville News investigative reporter Rick Brundrett revealed that DHEC has only 6.75 employee positions dedicated to inspecting all of the state's regulated dams. Unbelievably, that's an improvement from 2005 when only 1.5 full-time positions were in the program. At times, the program's budget has been as low as \$200,000.

The national model calls for dam inspections every year for those structures that pose the greatest risk to life and property if they fail; every two years for the next class of dams, and every five years for the least risky dams. Brundrett's analysis found that at least a dozen dams that were under emergency order for repairs after the fall's floods had not been inspected in the past five years or more.

Such a lag should not be allowed to continue.

The dangers of a breached dam are far too great for South Carolina not to take this seriously. Although this state has a history of requiring agencies to operate on bare-bones budgets and kicking problems down the road, the need to fix this funding disparity should be obvious.

As DHEC director Catherine Heigel said, "We do have a role at the end of the day to keep people safe."

To their credit, lawmakers appear to readily see that need, as well.

Lucas' bill would expand the office by 13 staff members, allowing them to properly inspect and monitor the state's regulated dams and increase the number of dams that the agency inspects.

“Unfortunately, South Carolina got irrefutable proof of just how inadequate the program now is. When October's 1,000-year rainfall event dumped more than 20 inches of water on parts of the state, 32 dams failed causing significant property damage and putting lives at risk.”

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It is hard to imagine that this legislation would not get the support it deserves. The total cost to recover from the October deluge exceeds \$1 billion. Certainly only a fraction of that would have been prevented had the dams been inspected more routinely, but it seems worth the relatively small cost to make the dams safer.

Once Lucas' bill is passed, the Legislature and the governor need to follow through with funding.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Nikki Haley acknowledged after the flood that there's a funding gap in the agency and said that there would likely be a more money for the program in the executive budget. That needs to happen.

The reality is, South Carolina gets heavy rains throughout the year. The 1,000-year rain might have been a freak occurrence, but it doesn't mean the state shouldn't be prepared for the next significant rainfall. Ensuring the state's dams are properly inspected, and that more of them are inspected, is simply common sense.

This should be an easy vote and it should happen very early in the upcoming legislative session.

— *The Greenville News* }

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Gov. Haley to give GOP response to State of Union

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley will give the Republican response to a State of the Union address that is sure to include President Barack Obama's plans for tightening gun sales, seven months after both spoke at funerals for the victims of a massacre at a historic black church in Charleston.



Haley

House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell jointly announced Tuesday that Haley will speak for Republicans after Obama's Jan. 12 speech.

The South Carolina-born daughter of Indian immigrants is the state's first female and first minority governor. At 43, Haley is also the country's youngest governor.

"In a year when the country is crying out for a positive vision and alternative to the status quo, Gov. Haley is the exact right choice," Ryan said in a statement.

The selection will likely fuel speculation that Haley would join a potential Republican administration in 2017.

Haley, governor of a state that holds the first-in-the-South presidential primary, becomes the third Republican woman ever to give the response. It's a role typically reserved for a member of Congress. Last year, Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa gave the response. In 2013, it was Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, who's now among a crowded Republican field running for president.

It's also an opportunity that can backfire: Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, who abandoned his 2016 presidential bid, was widely panned for what critics said was a less-than-spectacular speech in 2009.

The speech will further the profile of a governor put in the national spotlight after the June 17 mass shooting at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church, in which the nine killed included its pastor, state Sen. Clementa Pinckney. The white man charged with killing them could be seen in photos brandishing the Confederate battle flag.

Since taking office in 2011, Haley has staunchly criticized Obama on everything from health care reform to immigration. But the two seemed to share a vision, if only partially, after the shooting.

Haley, who attended funerals for all of the church shooting victims, has said the event motivated by "pure hate" will "forever change the way I live my life."

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Haley

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“These people are forever ingrained in my soul — what they went through,” she told The Associated Press amid tears in July.

Days after the shooting, she called for legislators to bring down the rebel flag that had flown on the Statehouse grounds for 54 years. Giving an impassioned eulogy at Pinckney’s funeral, Obama too called for the Confederate flag to be removed from places of honor.

Within weeks of the shooting, the flag was removed from its 30-foot perch outside the Statehouse and taken to a museum.

Obama also called for gun con-

trol in eulogizing Pinckney, and Pinckney’s widow stood beside Obama on Tuesday as he unveiled his plan to use presidential powers to tighten control and enforcement of firearms in the U.S. He insisted it was possible to uphold the Second Amendment while doing something to tackle the frequency of mass shootings in the U.S.

But Haley has staunchly defended gun rights. She holds a concealed carry permit, and she posted a picture on social media in 2013 of the handgun her husband gave her for Christmas.

Haley said she was honored to be asked to deliver the address.

“This is a time of great challenges for our country, but also of great opportunities. I intend to speak about both,” she said.

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Title: **Report from your Representative**

Author:

Size: 46.19 square inch

Batesburg-Leesville, SC Circulation: 3651



Report from your Representative

Dear Friends:

As expected, the 2nd week of Session for the SC House was a busy one. The week began sadly with the passing of Mrs. Janelle Havird, lifelong resident of Batesburg-Leesville. On Tuesday, I asked special permission to adjourn the House in her memory, which was granted. Miss Janelle was such a special lady to all who knew her. She was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and friend, who always was kind and gentle; the essence of a true southern lady.

Tuesday also included our Whips Leadership Meeting. This is the beginning of my 4th year as part of the House Whips Leadership Team. We begin each Legislative week with a meeting and discuss plans with Speaker Lucas for the House. While the Whips meeting is generally a dozen or less in attendance, we then transition into a Caucus meeting which usually has over 100 people present. At that meeting, plans are discussed with the group and introductions made of special guests. I introduced Chief Judge of the Administrative Law Court, Tripp Anderson, to the group. Confined to a wheel chair since an accident during his

teenage years, Tripp has overcome much adversity and is a well-known and respected Jurist in South Carolina.

Tuesday evening saw everyone at the Convention Center for Lexington County night. This night is one of the biggest events on the Legislative evening calendar and showcases the accomplishments and assets of Lexington County. I was introduced to Lou Kennedy, CEO of Nephron Pharmaceuticals, which is a global leader in manufacturing various medications. Nephron recently completed a new plant in Lexington County and has already invested over 313 million dollars in their facility and created numerous well paying jobs. Also present at Lexington County Night were Community Leader, Al Harmon of Gilbert, County Councilman, Larry Brigham of B-L, and Town Manager, Ted Luckadoo.

Wednesday began with an early 8:00 a.m. breakfast with the SC Forestry Association. House District 39 has a great deal of timber and forest lands. It was a pleasure to speak with the head of the Forestry Association, Cam Crawford, and meet constituent land owners

to discuss forestry issues.

Wednesday evening, the General Assembly gathered for the State of the State address by Governor Haley. Wednesday was also our Governor's birthday. I suggested that the chamber sing Happy Birthday but could not find consensus in that regard. I was honored that House Leadership asked me to speak on camera after the State of the State address about the challenges and opportunities that face our State this year.

Thursday's House Session was brief and afterwards I was invited and had lunch with Admiral Mike Mullen, US Navy (RET) former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States of America. Admiral Mullen served as Chairman from 2007 until 2011 and was the highest ranking officer in the US Armed Forces. Prior to this, he served as Chief of Naval Operations as well as Commander of US Naval Forces Europe and Commander of NATO Joint Force Command during his over 43 years of service. It was a rare opportunity to hear from such a distinguished gentleman, who has devoted his entire life to the service of our country.

Finally, I was pleased to

co-sponsor H.4717, a Bill to create the "SC Farm Aid Fund", which will assist farmers who have suffered a 40% loss of agricultural commodities as a result of a natural disaster and which also creates the Farm Aid Board to administer the fund and specify eligibility and grant amounts. I will work hard to ensure that this Bill is passed by the General Assembly during this Legislative Session; it will help so many of our farmers who have been devastated due to the historic flood of October 2015.

As always, it is my honor and privilege to be your Representative. If you need help navigating State Government, our have any thoughts or concerns about what we are doing in the State House, I am available. I hope you will always feel free to contact me at 803-315-4621.

In your service,
Ralph Shealy Kennedy, Jr.



Title: **Senate to take another crack at SC road funding this week**
 Author: Associated Press
 Size: 25.26 square inch
 Greenwood, SC Circulation: 16494



Senate to take another crack at SC road funding this week

Associated Press

COLUMBIA — A pair of senators — a Republican and Democrat who are not seeking re-election — plan to spend this week trying to shape a bill to get more money to improve South Carolina roads and get the rest of the Senate to finally go along.

Both senators warn the process is going to take a few weeks if not longer. But they are confident they can pull together a bill that business leaders and pothole-hitting drivers have been clamoring for.

“I think you’ll see all of us try to take baby steps toward consensus,” said Sen. Joel Lourie, D-Columbia.

Consensus has been hard to come by. Lawmakers seem to agree any bill that raises more money for roads and highways will also need to cut taxes elsewhere and reform how the Department of Transportation is run.

But the 46 senators seem to have 46 different ideas. Conservative Republicans are leery about raising the gas tax without a significant cut in other taxes. Democrats want to make sure any tax cuts get to the largest number of people and don’t threaten services. Some senators are quietly hinting the board that runs DOT doesn’t need to be changed at all. The board is made up of members picked by lawmakers and an at-large appoint-

ment from the governor.

“The road funding piece, that’s pretty black and white. Either you want to raise more money or you don’t,” said Sen. Ray Cleary, R-Murrells Inlet, who plans to work on his fellow Republicans. “But there is plenty of room for disagreement elsewhere.”

Lourie and Cleary have announced they aren’t running for re-election next year, leaving them more room to take a stand that might lead to a challenger in a party primary.

The House passed a bill in 2015 that would raise around \$400 million a year for roads through an increase in the gas tax, and reduce income taxes by about \$50 million. Rep. Gary Simrill shepherded the bill through the House and has said members are waiting to see what the Senate sends back. But the Rock Hill Republican thinks the House could alter its earlier proposal and still come up with an agreement again this year.

Gov. Nikki Haley wants lawmakers to change the DOT structure and balancing any gas tax increase with a tax cut or she will veto the bill.

The DOT announced this month it needs about \$1.2 billion extra a year for repaving, bridge work and widening to get the state’s roads and bridges to good condition.