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Tybee council spares Hometown program

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Chantal Morton watched her job security for the year come down to a one-vote majority at the Tybee Island City Council meeting Thursday night.

Tasked with cutting about \$1 million from the 2010 city budget, the council went about cutting or sparing line items fairly quickly. But when it came to Morton's position and other funding for the Better Hometown Program, some of the night's most heated debate surfaced.

The program is designed to promote island businesses as well as cultural and historic programs along with spurring economic development.

Council members Paul Wolff, Wanda Doyle and Dick Smith supported extending the program, saying it was too new, it needed time to prove itself, and within two years it would yield results.

Councilmen Charlie Brewer and Barry Brown wanted to cut the program. They lost, but they won support in trimming other parts of the program's funding.

Better Hometown supporters were visibly relieved.

"This represents the biggest opportunity for Tybee Island to serve the business community in the 15 years I've been here," said Cullen Chambers, chairman of the Better Hometown board. "This was an attempt to cut us off at the knees."

The Brown-Brewer minority continued on a motion from Brewer to spend \$55,000 to study creating a toll road to Tybee. The toll proposal would fund beach and parking services, but not widening or elevating the road.

However, Brewer felt it could still alleviate some of the traffic problems. The motion failed, and Doyle told Brewer she could not understand how he could ask for the study after he frequently questioned the

budget and then said the most value for the dollar had to be found.

"We spent all this time, we have no employee merit raise, we've made all these other cuts. ... I just don't see this with everything else we went through," she said.

Council members also debated at length the River's End Campground and how to cut expenses there. They approved more than \$27,000 in cuts to the campground budget, but council did not vote to close the facility.

They did agree to ask the Georgia Municipal Association to provide a financial review.

The final, amended city budget was approved, 3-2, with Brown and Brewer dissenting.

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