Commission compromise sought

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LAFAYETTE — A closed-door session Thursday of the Lafayette City Council, the mayor and the University of Southwestern Louisiana president may have smoothed the way toward a compromise for appointing members to the new Civic Center Commission.

The private meeting followed a special council meeting called to approve an amended five-year capital outlay budget.

The amended budget basically includes the same projects but spreads some of the funding for the $82 million in improvements over different years than proposed by the administration.

Action had been delayed on the outlay budget after the council asked to submit its own changes.

The amended budget was approved within seconds, and the special meeting was adjourned shortly after noon, when the council, Mayor Dud Lastrapes and USL President Ray Authement met privately in the council's briefing room.

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The council Tuesday refused for the fourth time to appoint 11 citizens, proposed by Lastrapes and Authement, to the Civic Center Commission.

The vote was 2-3, with council members Wilfred Pierre and Al Simon voting for the appointments, W.M. "Dub" Hudson, Benny Ritchey and Robert Domingue voting against them.

Lastrapes said the 90-minute closed meeting was not a violation of the state Sunshine Law. He insisted the meeting was a "Morial briefing," based on a court decision arising out of a lawsuit concerning private meetings held by New Orleans Mayor Dutch Morial with the New Orleans City Council.

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Council members wouldn't say who they objected to, but there was clearly opposition to some of the nominees.

Hudson said after Tuesday's meeting that commission members must have strong business backgrounds to insure that the facility is on sound financial ground.

It was suggested at Tuesday's meeting that the council meet with Lastrapes and Authement in private to hash out any differences concerning the 11 nominees.

Although Lastrapes wouldn't say why, he indicated progress toward an agreement was made during Thursday's meeting.

"I think we made some progress, but that's about all I can relate," he said. "I think we're on our way to a compromise decision."

"I think for the first time collectively we had a chance to air this out," he said. "It was a very amicable discussion."

He said a final decision by the council could be made at the next regular meeting on March 15. The March 8 meeting has been canceled to allow council members to attend a convention in Washington.

Lastrapes said one area of discussion regarded whether council approval should be required of Authement's appointees.

Ritchey, who joined in the opposition Tuesday, said he has no problem with not requiring council approval for the USL appointees.

"We've got that problem resolved in my opinion," he said.

But he said the matter still unsettled is naming persons to the commission who will have business backgrounds necessary to administer a multimillion-dollar public building. He agreed that a commission could be named by March 15.

"I have every hope there will be," Ritchey said.

Hudson agreed that areas of disagreement were thoroughly discussed.

"But there are still some things to be ironed out," he said, declining to say specifically what remains unresolved.

The appointments recommended by the mayor are still up in the air "to some degree," he said.

Pierre termed the meeting as "fruitful."

"We made tremendous progress from where we were Tuesday night," he said. "But I wouldn't say the entire problem has been solved."

He also declined to say just why the meeting was worthwhile. "I will say this, no names were taken off," Pierre said.

Some further examination of the nominees' backgrounds was discussed, he said.

Discussion also touched on requiring nominees named for future appointments to submit resumes before the council is asked to approve nominations, he said.

The 11 persons submitted for approval were not required to submit resumes because they are well known in the community, he said.