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Strand projects land in new budget  
Funding for CCU, beaches pass; fight over terminal likely

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COLUMBIA - In a daylong session, the House disposed of about a third of the proposed state budget Tuesday, including Coastal Carolina University and beach improvement projects.

Major fights are expected today, however, over Horry legislators' proposals to use Conservation Bank money to compensate for preserve land that will be taken by Interstate 73, as well as money for I-73 and I-74.

The budget items approved Tuesday can be changed but it's not very likely that will happen, said Rep. Dan Cooper, R-Piedmont, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee that wrote the measure. The budget also has to go through the Senate.

"A lot of our stuff is pretty well through now," said Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach. Edge is a member of Ways and Means and chairman of a subcommittee that included beach renourishment and beach drainpipe removal in the budget. Both are Horry County projects. .

Even though it was a long session with many attempts to change the budget, "the real fights" are yet to come, said Rep. Thad Viers, R-Myrtle Beach.

He said he expects an attempt to strip \$2 million from the budget for a new general aviation terminal at Myrtle Beach International Airport.

"Horry County's done good with the budget because you got a lot of members complaining about how good we did," Viers said.

Most of the amendments Tuesday were from Democrats who disagree with the \$81 million allocation for income tax cuts. The cuts will amount to about \$5 for the average family and the money could be better used elsewhere, Democrats said in about a dozen attempts to change the spending plan.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to switch the money to new school buses, home health care, AIDS drugs for the poor, and similar uses. Many of the items are in the budget but were allocated some of this year's surplus funds rather than being put in as an ongoing expense.

Democrats such as Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, D-Orangeburg, said these items should be part of the regular budget to prevent people from being cut off such services during lean times.

Rep. Vida Miller, D-Pawleys Island, tried for a \$5 million increase that would put 1,000 more people on the rolls for home health care. The system currently serves 11,500 and has 2,000 on a waiting list, she said. Her proposal fell on an unrecorded voice vote.

She tried again for \$2.5 million more to serve 500 more people, which is the same as in the governor's budget request, but that was voted down 66-39.

Edge, whose committee handled most of the health-related spending, said there was not enough money to handle all the requests.

The longest fight was over more money for AIDS drugs, with Edge saying it was not fair to increase that part of the budget when there were many others with severe health needs who could not be served. But proponents said the AIDS drugs save lives and that South Carolina is the only state with a waiting list for assistance with the medicines.

The proposed budget includes \$3 million for AIDS drug assistance, but proponents said there will still be a waiting list and that \$8 million is needed to serve everyone. "Compared to what we have done before, this is a large step for us," Edge said.

The only change to the committee's plan was \$1 million to be spread among public libraries for new books.

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At a glance

Budget items passed by the House Tuesday:

Coastal Carolina University | \$12,667,571

Beach renourishment | \$5 million

Beach drainpipe removal | \$5 million

Cherry Grove Inlet dredging | \$1 million

Shared Care | \$500,000

Sea Haven | \$100,000

S.C Hall of Fame | \$25,000

