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The Charleston City Council gave initial approval Tuesday to the city's \$147.7 million 2009 spending plan, which includes no tax increases or service cuts but uses some of the city's fund balance and gives employees cost-of-living raises ranging from slim to none.

The budget does call for raising the fine for parking at an expired meter from \$8 to \$14 and delays filling some city positions.

Also Tuesday, the council approved on a first vote the creation of a financing plan meant to spur the redevelopment of a section of the West Side, where vacant lots and surface parking could be replaced by biomedical research companies, new homes and shops.

By most accounts it will be years before new buildings rise in the area, but the financing mechanism would lay the groundwork for infrastructure projects, such as new roads, sidewalks and drainage work. The focus of the redevelopment plan is an area where the city, the Medical University of *South Carolina* and the *South Carolina Research Authority* own undeveloped land between Hagood Avenue, Lockwood Boulevard and Fishburne and Spring streets.

The financing plan is what's known as a tax increment financing district, or TIF, which would allow the city to borrow against the expected future increase in property tax revenue from properties within the district.

West Side Neighborhood Association President Arthur Lawrence told the council the association supports the plan but wants to be involved in the planning. Lawrence also sought assurances no neighborhood residents would be displaced by the plan.

"There are no private homes within the redevelopment area," said Michael Maher, director of the city's Civic Design Center.

Maher said the redevelopment, when fully realized, could create new streets within the large redevelopment block, which would help create a lively new neighborhood where people could live, work and play. Partnerships with MUSC and *SCRA* would focus on attracting biomedical research companies to the area, aimed at marketing medical discoveries made by MUSC researchers.

"This research-oriented, mixed-use district would help accelerate the knowledge-based economy," Maher said.

The redevelopment area is all landfill, and roads and parking lots in the area have had to be rebuilt from time to time as the landfill settles.

Councilman Jimmy Gallant raised questions about how the city would address that challenge. The city's Police Department and Greenberg Municipal Building are within the redevelopment area, as are several hotels and a state office building.

"One reason why the TIF funding is essential is that the infrastructure will be expensive," Mayor Joe Riley said.

The council will hold a public hearing on the TIF district Dec. 16.

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***Highlights: SC, SOUTH CAROLINA, South Carolina, Research Authority, SCRA***