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Tybee wipes out dog park

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Right up until Thursday night, Tybee dog park supporters argued forcefully against moving the canine-friendly area from Memorial Park to Jaycee Park.

They got their wish.

But the Tybee Island City Council did what it wanted as well: It took the dog park out of Memorial Park.

Now, there will be no dog park.

Council members on Thursday voted, 5-1, to make the dog park volunteers dismantle the two-year old area for dogs in Memorial Park within 30 days, and they didn't offer to move it to Jaycee Park.

If the volunteers won't shut the dog area down, the city manager will have to.

"Shame," a few people yelled after the vote, which was preceded by an hour and a half of people urging the council to keep the dog park.

Councilman Eddie Crone offered the motion to remove the dog park from Memorial. He did not offer an alternate location like Jaycee Park, which had been discussed.

"I sat up there for two hours and heard about how people didn't want it in Jaycee Park," Crone said after the meeting. "It's in their lap now. If they find a spot, they can bring it to us, and we'll vote on it."

To remove it with no other relocation option came as a surprise to Deb Barrerio, a leader in the push to construct the current dog park. She said she was too shaken to comment after the meeting.

Aside from opposition to moving the dog park, a secondary theme ran throughout the night's discussion: changing the law to allow dogs on the beach. This was suggested by people on both sides of Tybee's

current political divide.

"People have the dogs, and they want them on the beach. Let's do something about it," said Larry Nesbitt, former leader of the Tybee Island Residents and Property Owners' Association.

He said he offered some options to city leaders last year, involving a different set of council members, but he was rejected. Nesbitt offered a handful of options again Thursday night, like designating specific areas of the beach for dogs or having specific dog hours.

Councilman Paul Wolff, the political opposite of Nesbitt, suggested various fee schedules to allow people to have dogs on the beach.

But there was no vote on that Thursday night. People showed up to talk about the dog park.

"The major platform of this council was fiscal responsibility. ... I have a real problem with spending \$6,000 to move the dog park," said Chris Garbett. "I would like the people in favor of this to explain why this is a good use of my money."

Turns out that by not offering a place to move the dog park, the council didn't have to spend the estimated \$6,500 to complete the move.

Two weeks ago, council members showed support to move it to Jaycee Park, mostly because that public park is shaded. Crone noted that he offered Jaycee Park as an option at that meeting, but no one wanted to listen.

Thursday night, after each dog park supporter spoke, people in the crowd silently waved bone cut-outs on sticks and pro-dog park signs.

Removing the dog park was the second significant change this council has made to Memorial Park since taking office. They earlier removed a proposed skate park.

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