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Sea Isle officials OK administrator; civic group wants voters to decide

By BRIAN IANIERI Staff Writer, (609) 463-6713

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SEA ISLE CITY — At a contentious meeting, City Commission on Tuesday unanimously passed an ordinance that will create a business administrator in the city. But opponents said the city is moving too hastily on the position and should wait until an upcoming referendum, which will ask voters a similar question but will also include changing the form of government and adding elected officials.

Sea Isle City Taxpayers Association President Thomas Henry asked the city to withdraw the ordinance.

"The timing of this ordinance is being manipulated to influence the upcoming election," Henry said.

Mayor Leonard Desiderio said he spoke with residents who were on both sides of the issue that would change the form of government. He said the consensus is that there needs to be someone to oversee day-to-day operations in the city.

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"I'm not looking to start any fights. I'm looking to put out fights," Desiderio said following Tuesday's meeting. "This is something that is good for Sea Isle City, it's something that is needed and it's something that people want."

Earlier this year, a group of Sea Isle City residents collected signatures calling for a public vote. The vote Nov. 7 will ask residents to change the form of government.

It would change the three-member Commission to a five-member Committee, with a popularly elected mayor. Currently, commissioners appoint the mayor from their ranks.

A successful referendum would also require all three incumbent elected officials to have to run for election again in the spring.

Desiderio said there will be a business administrator whether or not the referendum passes.

Henry said the city has "ramrodded" the ordinance through to have it in place before the public vote. The ordinance was introduced earlier this month.

The ordinance creates the position. but city officials said a business administrator would not be hired until

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early next year.

A business administrator will cost the city about \$120,000, city officials estimated. Henry and others at the meeting said it will cost significantly more.

Mary Tighe, who was among those collecting signatures, asked City Commission on Tuesday to table the ordinance and have a public workshop on the issue.

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