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By: Travis Fain

Funding mostly restored for Macon's sports, music halls of fame

ATLANTA — Georgia's budgetary dance favored the sports and music halls of fame Tuesday, with the Senate restoring most of their funding.

The \$1 million or so subsidy that the Macon museums depend on had been cut out by the House, which gets the first crack at the annual budget after the governor makes his recommendations. But the Senate restored \$412,329 for the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame and \$486,208 for the Georgia Music Hall of Fame when it passed its version of the budget through committee Tuesday.

That budget is expected to be voted on by the full Senate today. Then the House and Senate have to work out their differences, most of which seem to be relatively small line items in a \$17.8 billion budget.

Getting the funding back wasn't easy, said state Sen. Cecil Staton, R-Macon, and a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Staton said he had to convince top Senate leaders that "Macon was very serious about finding a way to support those halls of fame.

Staton said it helped that an increase to the local hotel/motel sales tax cleared the Legislature last week, paving the way for what could become a series of new funding mechanisms to wean the halls off of state subsidies. State leaders have made it clear they hope to stop subsidizing the halls in coming years, even if it means moving them out of Macon.

Staton said it's particularly important that local residents support the halls, and that local businesses consider holding events at the facilities. Basically, the new budget "gives us another year to get this under control," Staton said.

The new funding should be enough to keep the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame running, pretty much as is, for fiscal 2011, which starts July 1, director Jackie DeCell said.

"We can operate with the help of our friends and serious work on the part of the foundation," said DeCell, who is retiring soon. "It gives us time to try and work out more funding."

The Senate's budget also restores \$22,000 in funding for the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame at the Museum of Aviation at Robins Air Force Base. That would be about half of what the aviation museum got from the state last year.