Ascension jury looks at budget
By VICKI FERSTEL
River parishes bureau

GONZALES — The Ascension Parish Police Jury may double its budget for 1990, thanks to large road, drainage and courthouse construction projects in a proposed deficit budget presented at Monday's finance committee meeting.

The major money-eater in the $26.2 million budget is increased expenses to run the new jail.

In the rough draft of the budget presented Monday by Secretary-Treasurer Gwen LeBlanc, the Police Jury would have to dip into the previous year's fund balance by $2.3 million, leaving $14 million in the surplus fund.

Last year, the Police Jury adopted a projected $10.6 million budget for 1989. The Police Jury will adopt the actual, or amended, 1989 budget along with the proposed 1990 budget on Dec. 21.

Along with its major construction projects, the Police Jury will have to grapple with increased costs for operating the new parish jail.

Those costs to the Police Jury include $200,000 for maintenance and repairs (up from $50,000 in 1989), $120,000 for prisoner medical and dental services (up from $35,000), $55,000 for prisoner medical supplies and drugs (up from $15,000), and $250,000 for prisoner transportation (up from $87,500).

Sheriff Harold Tridico carries other jail operating costs under his separate budget.

LeBlanc suggested the Police Jury set up a separate fund for the jail in the budget that would include the sheriff's projected expenses as a way to analyze costs and come up with budget-cutting or financing solutions.

LeBlanc also cautioned that the proposed general fund budget of $3.5 million is problematic because its fund balance of $61,900 is too low.

Meanwhile, parish revenues look healthy. LeBlanc said 1989 sales taxes revenues so far have increased 25 percent over the same period in 1988, but she said she was projecting those revenues downward for 1990.

State funds are expected to increase. For instance, the parish transportation fund, which consists of state money for local road projects, was at $86,000 in 1988, increased to $111,900 in 1989 and is expected to jump to $434,000 in 1990.

LeBlanc said the parish also earned $1 million in interest in 1989 by better investment policies on its funds.

In other business, the committee took no action on a request by Recreation Director Roy Quezaire Jr. to dedicate a portion of the half-cent sales tax to recreation.