Atchafalaya Levee Board approves study of its revenues and expenses

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PORT ALLEN — A proposed contract to study revenues and operating expenses of the Atchafalaya Basin Levee District — with a ceiling price of $45,000 — was delayed at the board’s regular monthly meeting Wednesday.

Instead, the district’s executive committee will reconsider at a later date the request by commissioner O’Neil Malbrough to hire the Houma firm of T. Baker Smith & Son Inc. to assess revenues of the 1-parish district and make recommendations for “economics and revenue enhancement.”

Malbrough proposed the study because he said he met with state legislators who want an accounting of the overall operation of the levee district.

The commissioner said he felt the study was needed before the levee district could continue its efforts to absorb Tigre Island and Morgan City back into the district. He said a study might indicate a need to include more of the St. Mary Parish land in the levee district, which would enhance the district’s revenues.

The consultant’s literature says the company would review all sources of levee district income including taxes, interest, leases, royalties and fees. A study would be conducted to enhance revenue.

The company’s eight-page brochure indicates the study would not exceed $35,000, but commissioner W.O. Clause in an earlier executive committee proposed a ceiling of $45,000.

Board president L.J. Grezaffi said he thought the executive committee should study the company’s proposal and report its findings. He said he could call a meeting of the full board after the committee meets.

In other action, commissioners struck down a request to allow the state auditor to conduct audits of the levee district. Commissioner Ray Marchand said he thought the levee district should get quotes from private companies before deciding on who does the audit. But commissioner D.B. “Batt” Barrow said an audit by the state auditor removes the “smoke screen” that is often associated with an audit by a private firm.

Clause said he was pleased with the last time the state auditor conducted an audit because he “checked the closets” and questioned commissioners individually.

Malbrough said he thought private firm did a better job, but staff member Bobby Wilkinson said the state auditor’s office leans more toward compliance of state regulations.

A motion by Barrow to have the state auditor conduct the audit failed 10-5. Commissioners voting with Barrow included Emmanuel Crump, Wildy Templet, Kenry Colon and Clause. Commissioner J.G. Duplantis left the meeting in the middle of the discussion.

Commissioners Linton “Tickie” Melancon and Jimmy Marionneaux were absent.

In other action, the levee board approved a $1,000 payment to the Association of Levee Boards for 1989 membership. Clause withdrew his proposal to reorganize the board without explanation.