Baker OKs $3 million budget, garbage fee

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BAKER — It took a full round of explaining — and even apologizing — from each member of the City Council Tuesday evening, but the five councilmen finally voted to approve a $3 million budget, which includes a new garbage fee.

Mayor Pete Heine began the explanations of the nearly break-even budget and the reasons behind institution of a garbage fee.

"It's something I've wrestled with for a long time," Heine said. "We just need the revenues to continue operating the government on the same good basis as it has in the past."

Baker, along with parishes and other municipalities, is being forced to trim its budget as the state Legislature trims the state budget, Heine said. As a result of the Legislature's cuts and reductions in sales tax and revenue sharing income, the city had no choice but to institute the garbage fee, he said.

The fiscal year 1986-87 budget for the city is some $250,000 less than for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. The mayor said that every year in the past, the budget has grown by about that amount.

"There's not one dime in this budget for capital improvements," Heine said, adding that the lack of money for capital improvements "is troubling."

The new budget also includes no money for pay raises, he said.

"We did everything but lay off employees," Heine said. "To be honest with you — that's the next step we'll have to take if those budget axes keep falling."

The city also has chosen not to replace employees who have left the service of the city, he said.

The city's budget does include a $90,000 surplus, which Heine said is inadequate. "But that's all we can have," he said.

Revenues from the new garbage fee — $5 a month for most residences and small businesses, $2.50 for senior citizens — will total about $230,000 per year and will help offset more than $500,000 in anticipated revenue losses for the next fiscal year. Budget cuts made up for most of the rest of the revenue losses.

Councilman Greg Allen said the city would abolish the garbage fee if the city ever sees an increase in its revenues to correspond with the revenues that have been lost.

Heine also told the council he has written Mayor Pat Screen asking that $26,000 in road maintenance funds be rewritten back into the city-parish budget. Screen recently cut those funds to Baker and Zachary to help balance the city-parish's budget.