The Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission is splitting extra costs with Westway Trading Corp. to undertake a $1.7 million renovation project at the port's molasses terminal.

Westway leases the terminal from the port. It is used primarily for storing and shipping industrial-grade molasses used in animal feed.

Contractors submitted bids for the renovation project that were higher than original estimates. The estimates were compiled four years ago when the project was submitted to the state Department of Transportation and Development for port development funding, said Port Director Gary Pruitt.

Port officials did not expect the approval and funding process to take four years. Therefore, inflation and cost increases were not factored into the original estimates, he said.

Based on those estimates, the state allotted $793,856 to the renovation project. The port's share is $266,285.

In an agreement, the port is committing another $120,000 to a portion of the project for piping at the molasses terminal dock. Westway will contribute $173,291.

Westway also agreed to spend another $332,684 on tank repairs and a railroad spur project at the terminal, Pruitt said. The port will retain ownership of the improvements, Pruitt said.

B&K Construction in Mandeville was the low bidder for the piping project at $547,526.

Coastal Bridge Contractors in Baton Rouge was the low bidder for tank repairs. The port's contract is for $497,000. Westway will spend an additional $160,000 for its portion of the project.

CW&W Contractors in Baton Rouge was the low bidder on the railroad spur. The port's contract is for $129,741. Westway will spend an additional $172,684 on its portion.

More than $200,000 will be spent on engineering and inspection costs related to the projects.

In Finance committee action, members gave their blessings to renewal of a one-year, $20,400 contract with trade representative Ted Schroeder & Associates. The committee also recommended renewing a three-year contract with legislative lobbyist Randy Haynie at a cost of $31,200 per year.

Both contracts must be approved by the full commission next week. The contracts have a clause allowing the port to cancel the contracts with 30 days notice.

Schroeder makes sales calls on shippers, carriers and potential cargo customers for the port in the Northeast.

Pruitt told committee members the port could not hire an equally qualified employee and pay travel expenses for the cost of retaining Schroeder as a trade representative to recruit business.

Pruitt told committee members the port is negotiating with a potential user found by Schroeder for the port's midstream buoy. The buoy was vacated early this year by a coal shipper.

The finance committee also recommended leasing port-owned property in the Sun-Plus Industrial Park to Mark Canezaro Farms of Maringouin for nine months to grow corn.

The lease is for $20 per acre for about 25 acres.

Pruitt said the crop will save the port the cost of mowing the property four times.

The lease contains a crop buy-out clause should the port find a tenant for the site off the Intracoastal Waterway south of Port Allen.

Pruitt said Canezaro farms other portions of the industrial park not owned by the port.