Chamber endorses private firm garbage pickup

By GIBBS ADAMS
Advocate staff writer.

The chamber endorsed the recommendations of its own advisory committee to the special city-parish Revenue and Budget Committee, which has recommended that the private operators be hired for trash and garbage collection.

Bids are to be received Oct. 19 from several local firms that have expressed an interest in taking over the garbage-trash business that now costs the city-parish roughly $12 million a year.

Director of Public Works Bill Howe estimated that the city-parish can save as much as $5 million a year by hiring one or more private firms.

G. Lee Griffin, chief executive officer of Louisiana National Bank and chairman-elect of the Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber stands behind the recommendations submitted last month in a report to the blue-ribbon committee, which included changes in a number of city-parish services.

Bill Little, president and chief executive officer of the chamber, said the organization also endorses the concept of hiring private companies to operate the sewage treatment plants.

The city-parish may be able to save up to $5 million a year by hiring private garbage collectors, he said.

But Little added that private operation of the sewer system is fraught with legal problems and that "it's harder to get a handle on" what the savings to the city-parish would be in using private operators.

Griffin cited the report of the chamber advisory committee, which said significant savings for the city-parish government are possible through private garbage collection.

"The savings generated in this area," Griffin said, "can be reapplied to other areas badly in need of funds. The Chamber is ready to do what it can through the mayor, the Metro Council and the general public to ascertain community support for this measure."

Also advocated in the report by the chamber and Public Affairs Research Council to the special committee are changes in the budgeting process, changes in the Plan of Government, combination of various city-parish departments and contracting private businesses to perform specific services.

Mayor Pat Screen and Ron Marrow, spokesman for the advisory committee, spoke out last week in support of private operation of the garbage-trash collection business.

Both Griffin and Little said the move created concern among workers over loss of jobs, but they said that no private firm already employs refuse workers in sufficient numbers to handle the garbage and trash collection. The city-parish has specified that preference must be given to present employees in the refuse division of the Department of Public Works. Little said.

Little said there may be some public misunderstanding that garbage collection by a private contractor would create a fee for homeowners. But, he said, the plan is to divert money now being used to operate the garbage and trash divisions in DPW to pay the contractors.