LAFAYETTE — The City Council here approved a contract Tuesday for construction drawings of improvements to Jefferson Street, but asked city staff to provide alternate suggestions for expensive items in the plan.

Improvements are to be made on Jefferson from Cypress Street to Lee Avenue, with an estimated price tag of about $2.35 million. The improvements have been in the planning stages for some time — planning that some council members were a part of — but council members expressed concerns about the cost of the plan.

Tuesday’s contract would authorize Sasaki Associates Inc. to begin construction drawings, which would be used by contractors to make the improvements. A management committee already has reviewed alternatives to items in the plan, and passed the plan on for implementation. Council members Wilfred Pierre and Al Simon were on the committee.

Before the council’s vote on the contract, Council member Pappy Landry said he was going to vote against the contract because he didn’t think the plan was reasonable. Landry said he would support a “safe, sound and realistic” restoration and improvement plan, but this wasn’t it.

Landry noted that many merchants are moving their stores out of the downtown area and trying to unload their property there.
"This may end up being the most beautiful ghost area in the state of Louisiana," Landry said.

After Landry made his statement, other council members expressed concerns that they hadn't been offered alternatives to features of the plan. Mayor Dud Lestrakes assured the council that they would be provided with additional information about alternatives before any bids were accepted for the work.

In other business the council:
- Authorized the state Department of Transportation and Development to construct a lighting system on Interstate 49 from its intersection with Interstate 10 to Pont des Mouton Road.
- Authorized a $10,000 contract with the St. Martin, Iberia, Lafayette, Community Action Agency (SMILE), a $26,000 contract with the Acadiana Arts Council; an $8,000 contract with the Lafayette Museum Association Inc.; a $10,000 contract with the Lafayette Mardi Gras Festival Inc.; a $10,000 contract with the Greater Southwest Louisiana Mardi Gras Association Inc.; a $10,000 contract with the Acadiana Symphony Association Inc.; and an $85,000 contract with the Festival International de Louisiane Inc.
- Authorized a $28,000 contract with Acadiana Youth Inc., an expenditure which will enable the corporation to build a new youth shelter for the children of the city and surrounding parishes. This shelter replaces an old building.
- Voted to hire Sue Faulk Kaplan as Vision Lafayette Coordinator, replacing Carol Ross, who has left the position.
- Introduced an ordinance that will allow Sheriff Don Breaux to proceed with expansion of the Lafayette Parish Correctional Center.
- Passed an ordinance naming A La Carte, Total Catering, Michael, A Catering Experience, City Productions and Lafayette Town House as exclusive caterers for all Heymann Center Junctions.
- Passed an ordinance amending city codes regulating sewers and waste discharge.
- Honored Director of Administration Gerald Domingue for his work on this week's Mayor's KIDS rally. The rally kicked off the KIDS - Keep Individuals Drug Safe - program in the parish, and featured more than 11,000 teenagers who filled the Cajundome Monday. Domingue worked behind the scenes for months to make the rally a reality, and the council honored him with a plaque Tuesday night.