Council keeps volunteer rule for most bingos

By JIM McDONNELL
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The Metro Council voted 8-4 on Wednesday to continue requiring most bingo games in East Baton Rouge Parish to be operated strictly by unpaid volunteers.

Council members also decided to schedule two special meetings next month to deal with the relocation of American Legion Nicholson Post No. 38 headquarters and with a controversial proposal for a new ordinance to regulate the wrecker industry in East Baton Rouge Parish.

The first special meeting will be at 4 p.m. on Dec. 6 to consider approving an agreement whereby the city-parish would appropriate up to $500,000 to obtain a new home for the post, now located on Florida Street property needed for a new federal building complex.

The second special meeting will be at 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 12 for the sole purpose of holding what is expected to be the final public hearing on the proposed new wrecker ordinance.

As to Wednesday’s action on bingo, the vote came at the end of a debate about whether the local charitable gaming ordinance should be changed to allow those organizations that want to pay their game workers to do so.

Earlier in the year, the state Legislature had amended the state’s charitable gaming law to allow charitable organizations to pay their game workers if they want to, but the city-parish’s own charitable...
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gaming ordinance still requires charitable games be operated by unpaid volunteers who are members of the groups sponsoring the games. The only organizations allowed to pay workers are those for the visually or hearing impaired.

The city-parish’s Bingo Enforcement Division had presented the council with the proposed amendment to the local ordinance that would reflect the changes made at the state level.

Bingo Enforcement Director Bobby Dale Callender said the proposal was sent to the council simply to give the council the opportunity to consider changing the local ordinance.

The enforcement division took no position pro or con, Callender said, while the city-parish’s Bingo Control Board unanimously recommended to reject the proposed amendment.

Several smaller charitable organizations had complained that they were having a hard time recruiting enough qualified volunteers to operate their games, and Councilman Darrell Glasper said he could not understand how the board could have taken the position it did with so many club representatives asking that the law be changed.

Glasper and Councilman Johnnie Matthews asked the council to amend the local ordinance to give all charitable organizations freedom of choice in deciding whether to pay their workers.

“I’m trying to play favorites to both sides,” Matthews said.

Councilman Mike Babin insisted, however, that if the council amended the ordinance it would soon be impossible for any organization to run its games without paying workers.

City-parish auditors had estimated that if all organizations pay their workers, the net gaming proceeds going directly to charitable causes could be reduced by about $900,000 a year.

Babin moved to delete the proposed amendment from the agenda. Glasper, Matthews, Sharon Weston and Thomas Woods voted against his motion while the rest of the council members supported it.