Home building permits dip 43%

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City-parish figures show a 43 percent drop — the worst in at least five years — in the total value of residential building permits issued in East Baton Rouge Parish during the first six months of 1986, compared with the same period last year.

The value of all building permits, including those issued for commercial and accessory construction, dropped 26 percent for the same period, the figures show.

The value of building permits generally is regarded as a barometer of construction activity during a given time period and a factor of the overall economic health of the area.

"It is developing slower than we had anticipated earlier in the year," Buddy Webre, executive director of the Home Builders Association of Greater Baton Rouge, said of building activity.

"We don't see any dramatic rise or fall," Webre said Tuesday. "At least if there's not a fall, that's encouraging. If we can continue to watch our expenses and keep the free enterprise spirit, we feel Baton Rouge will once again move into the forefront."

Webre said he knows of no large projects being undertaken in the area and that Baton Rouge and Lafayette seem to be the most economically distressed areas in the state as reflected by construction activity.

There are some hotbeds of activity in the South right now, such as Atlanta, Nashville, Tenn., and Pensacola, Fla., Webre added.

Bob Dolese, city-parish planning director, said his office has observed a definite decline in residential activity as indicated by plans being brought in for approval.

"We have seen a downturn in the number of preliminary plans for subdivisions being brought in for SEE PERMITS, 5A

CONTINUED FROM 1A JULY 23, 1986 approval... . The revised lot plan for Santa Maria Golf Club was the first big project we've seen in a long time," Dolese said.

One of his employees who tracks utility connections, such as those for water meters, told him Tuesday that he detected a decrease in the number approved within the Baton Rouge city limits within the last 12 months, Dolese said.

"We usually see some increase from year to year, but we actually saw a decrease this time," he said.

Residential permits issued from Jan. 1 through June 30, 1986, totaled $47.9 million, compared with $83.9 million for the same period in 1985, according to recently released figures from the Department of Public Works inspection division.

The decline between those two periods was not quite so drastic as the drop from $183.3 million in 1984 to $83.9 million in 1985 — a 54 percent decline.

The figures for previous years show 1984 was a rally year. The figure in 1983 was $96 million; in 1982, $86.8 million; and in 1981, $72.4 million.

The value of commercial permits this year was much higher than residential — a trend that began just last year — and the decline in commercial valuation was not quite so severe as residential, the figures show.

Commercial permits, which include all non-residential types of construction such as recreational, religious, institutional, professional, educational and retail structures, were valued at $114.6 million. That's a 15 percent drop from $135.3 million worth of permits issued from January through June 1985.

Commercial permits for the first six months of last year showed a slight increase from the $128.6 million value in 1984.