Brusly council OKs $9,000 increase in Police Chief Berthelot's salary

By CHRIS FRINK
Advocate correspondent

BRUSLY — The Town Council voted 4-1 at a special meeting Tuesday night to raise the salary of Police Chief Louis "L.J." Berthelot from $15,000 to $24,000 a year.

Berthelot agreed to "work a shift or fill in" for holiday and leave time taken by other officers and to "work other hours necessary to prevent overtime."

Former mayor Rod Prejean was the only person to speak against the raise at a public hearing before the vote.

"This doesn't involve personalities," Prejean said. His opposition to the pay raise was directed at the position, not the man, he said.

"I believe there is politics involved in this thing," said Alderman Albert Mayeaux. "The first thing (the council did) after the election (was to) cut a man's salary."

"That's the dirtiest form of politics," Mayeaux said, "giving a man something then cutting it back after the election."

Prejean and several aldermen lost their bids for re-election in October 1988.

Alderman Sherrill M. Rhodes, who cast the only dissenting vote, said the pay raise was "a four-year commitment that was not fair to the taxpayers of this town."

"A 60 percent pay raise for an elected official is too much, too soon," he said. Any extra money should go first to the employees, the officers on the street, Rhodes said.

"Where are the dollars to pay for this?" Prejean asked at the hearing. "The public is due justification for this increase in pay."

"We have generated enough revenues" through rising sales tax revenues to pay for this pay increase, Town Clerk Bobby Stanley said.

Before the meeting, Mayor Lynn Pourciau said that the chief's salary had been raised from $13,000 to $24,000 a year in June 1988. With the pay raise, the chief also was required to work as a regular patrol officer.

In December the out-going council voted to cut the chief's pay to $15,000, Pourciau said.

Pourciau, who was elected in October, took office after the pay cut was approved.

Prejean said that the chief's workload had been lessened after the council decided to expand the police force to four men. "It's not justifiable to increase pay when you cut a man's responsibilities," he said.

Prejean also doubted that the chief could work 12-hour shifts and perform all the police chief's duties.

"I've been working these shifts since July 1," Berthelot said. "Prejean can't prove it ain't working."

"Everything was working fine until after the election when he (Prejean) got his three yes men on the council to cut my salary," Berthelot said. "Now I've got it back to where it should be."

Pourciau said Berthelot had been working the patrol shifts since his pay had been cut in December "out of the goodness of his heart."