Jury opts for La. obscenity law

By TIM TALLEY
River parishes bureau

DONALDSONVILLE — A proposal to outlaw pornography in Ascension Parish was passed over Thursday night when the Police Jury decided instead to observe state obscenity ordinances.

The parish's pornography ordinance, which was rewritten following its introduction last March, was challenged repeatedly by jurors and parish residents who attended a public hearing on the controversial proposal. Vincent "B-Z" Settle, the jury's legal adviser, said the revised ordinance closely tracks state law. It's adoption would be more of a symbolic statement against obscenity than creation of a new legal tool to fight it, he said.

"It's really no more than what state law prohibits," Settle said.

Several spectators said they believe the parish ordinance was unnecessary. "I'm opposed to it. I just don't think it's necessary," said Cole Williams of Gonzales.

"I don't believe we have a problem to begin with. Why can't we control this within our own community," said an unidentified man.

"If you don't want to see these magazines, you don't have to buy them," Williams said.

The parish ordinance would have been enforced in rural areas only and would not be effective in the cities of Gonzales, Donaldsonville or Sorrento.

Robert Picard of the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana said the proposal was legally flawed and would not turn Ascension into a "Playboy-free zone" where all publications or broadcasts that have a sexual content or depict nudity would be banned.

"This particular ordinance would ban people's reading the (U.S.) Attorney General's report on pornography," Picard said.

"The Police Jury cannot legislate morality," said Mary Jackson.

Juror Marvin Braud, who moved to begin logging the calls, said it will help keep track of official telephone calls and stop abuses like those that helped exhaust jurors' $10,000 annual phone budget in just eight months.

Jurors who voted against the proposal said they are in favor of reducing telephone costs but don't want to cope with the paperwork involved in logging their calls.

"I think our budget problems pretty soon are going to take care of this," said Juror Darnell Martinez. He said jurors who want to make personal calls with their cards can still do so by logging in erroneous purposes for the calls.

"It gets back down to the honor system," he said.

Jurors postponed a decision on whether to create a new charter commission until December after several jurors said they want to study the ramifications of the action.

Juror Albert "T·J" Gautreau said the commission would draft a home-rule charter that would change the parish's form of government from the Police Jury to a Commission Council and a president that would be elected parishwide.

The proposed charter would be placed on a public referendum for approval by the voters.

Juror Joseph U. Pierre accused proponents of the commission of using it to dilute black voting strength and black representation on the parish's governing body.

"It's not in the best interest of the black voters of Ascension Parish," Pierre said.

However, other jurors said their motivation is to improve parish government and the effectiveness of parish operations.

"This is not white against black. That is as false as false can be. ... We want a better parish for all the people," Braud said.

Martinez said changes are needed to better utilize dwindling tax dollars and make parish government more progressive.

"We have trouble convincing the whole parish that we're united on anything," said Juror Eleman Babin.

In other action, jurors:
- Rejected a proposal to renovate an abandoned funeral home in Donaldsonville for a juvenile detention facility after area residents objected and Sheriff Harold Tridico said the cost is prohibitive.
- Adopted a subdivision ordinance that will require developers to have their projects approved by the Planning Commission.

Juror Albert "T·J" Gautreau said the commission would draft a home-rule charter that would change the parish's form of government from the Police Jury to a Commission Council and a president that would be elected parishwide.

The proposed charter would be placed on a public referendum for approval by the voters.

Juror Joseph U. Pierre accused proponents of the commission of using it to dilute black voting strength and black representation on the parish's governing body.

"It's not in the best interest of the black voters of Ascension Parish," Pierre said.

However, other jurors said their motivation is to improve parish government and the effectiveness of parish operations.

"This is not white against black. That is as false as false can be. ... We want a better parish for all the people," Braud said.

Martinez said changes are needed to better utilize dwindling tax dollars and make parish government more progressive.

"We have trouble convincing the whole parish that we're united on anything," said Juror Eleman Babin.

In other action, jurors:
- Rejected a proposal to renovate an abandoned funeral home in Donaldsonville for a juvenile detention facility after area residents objected and Sheriff Harold Tridico said the cost is prohibitive.
- Adopted a subdivision ordinance that will require developers to have their projects approved by the Planning Commission.