Metro Council adopts remap plan

By MARK LAMBERT
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The Metro Council on Wednesday passed a new reapportionment plan for the 1992 elections that adds a new district in south Baton Rouge and takes a district away from north Baton Rouge voters.

The plan was passed despite objections from some black council members, who favored a Southern University plan that would have added a fifth predominately black district. A motion to pass the Southern plan failed by a 7-4 vote, with Councilman Mike Babin abstaining.

Under the plan that was accepted, portions of districts 9 and 12, currently represented by council members Patti Roubique and Jay Dardenne, would be formed into District 3, which would be moved to south Baton Rouge. Most of what now is District 3 — now represented by Babin — would be consolidated into District 4.

“We’re losing one more voice in north Baton Rouge,” Babin said.

Babin noted that, under either plan, District 3 would have to be consolidated into other districts because of population shifts as reflected by the 1990 census.

Councilwoman Sharon Weston, who helped draft the plan that ultimately was passed by the council on Wednesday, asked the council to consider the alternate plan from Southern University’s Center for Social Research. That plan would have added a fifth predominately black district and presumably a fifth black council member to the 12-member council.

But the vote to adopt the Southern plan failed when only the four black members supported it, and Duke Welch’s motion to pass the original plan was accepted.

Dardenne called the plan “fair and equitable,” saying it accurately reflects the population trends in East Baton Rouge Parish.

The plan must still be approved by the U.S. Attorney General because it constitutes a change in voting procedure.

In other action on Wednesday, the council approved the appropriation of $4,500 to the district attorney’s office to reproduce checks and bank statements in connection with a criminal investigation of the South Baton Rouge Community Development Association.

SBRCDA is the focus of an ongoing investigation by Inspector General Bill Lynch, who has criticized the corporation for sloppy record keeping in administering state community service contracts for the poor, elderly and handicapped of south Baton Rouge.

Lynch has submitted a status report on the probe to Gov. Buddy Roemer recommending that state agencies stop the flow of state funding to corporation.

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SBRCDA was awarded $640,000 in state contracts during the last fiscal year despite financial problems involving the Internal Revenue Service and other creditors.

The IRS last week issued liens against SBRCDA for back taxes that froze assets in many of the corporation’s bank accounts.

Councilman Darrell Glasper said false rumors have been circulating in his district that the Metro Council had suspended programs the association, had supported. Glasper said he wanted to “set the record straight” that the suspension of programs was the fault of the previous administration of the association, not the council.

“I think the blame should be laid at the feet of the former director or the accountant or the chairman” of the association, Glasper said.

The councilman also called on Roemer to release the inspector general report, which he said has been sitting on the governor’s desk for a month.

“I think the people of this community deserve better,” Glasper said.