New Crowley budget down from last year

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CROWLEY — The city of Crowley plans to operate on a slightly smaller scale beginning Sept. 1, according to the nearly $3 million budget presented at a public hearing Wednesday morning which preceded a special meeting between the mayor and the City Council.

Mayor Robert Istre said the $2,930,888 budget for the new fiscal year reflects a 3.48 percent decrease from last year's budget.

Departments are being given about the same money they received last year, except for a 2 percent salary increase for employees funded by a 1/2-cent sales tax.

A new revenue item this year is $52,000 from the Louisiana Department of Corrections. Part of this money was OK'd by a Council vote Wednesday to replace the state cutback on supplemental pay for police officers.

Police Chief Harry Courville told The Advertiser that he has cleaned up an area formerly used for storage in the city jail in order to house prisoners awaiting transfer to state penitentiaries.

The Department of Corrections pays law enforcement departments for this service and Courville plans to use part of the funds to pay the supplemental pay cut by Gov. Buddy Roemer from 28 officers.

Roemer agreed to fund 75 percent of supplemental pay for police officers for one year, however, officers hired after July 1 will not receive the extra pay.

Courville said that the cutback totals $1,820 per month for the 28 officers.

Other budget highlights show a decrease from the previous year of $42,250 in the 1/2-cent sales tax which is expected to generate $1,373,000 in the coming year.

The 1/2-cent sales tax projection is $450,000, a decrease of $15,400 from last year.

A new sewerage department was set up in February due to sewerage user fees and other federal environmental requirements.

Anticipated revenues are $671,006, which would leave a surplus of $183,601 that will be used to implement federal Environmental Protection Agency requirements for a new disposal plant.

Other big budget items include the police department at $815,625; fire department, $621,060; and street department, $599,030.

The mayor's budget message recommends that the Council acquire property in order to qualify for industrial development grants using the money to induce industry into the city by providing locations.

In other business, Istre took a slap at state lawmakers as he bemoaned the public bid law which required the city to let bids to purchase culvert pipes.

Istre said the city could have directly purchased the pipe at a savings of $3,000. The mayor said he agreed with bid laws, but felt some provision should be made using documentation for such situations in which a government body could save money by not having to let bids.

The Council voted to accept low bids for the two drainage projects. It accepted a $35,415 bid from Concrete Pipe Products Company of Lake Charles to furnish and deliver a reinforced concrete pipe and gaskets. It also accepted a $35,206 bid from Barry Concrete Pipe Company of Lafayette for similar materials.

In other action, the Council voted to switch the city's Blue Cross HMO employee insurance plan to U.S. Life Insurance Company from Dallas because no local doctors will participate in the HMO plan.

Some employees are already listed with the U.S. Life plan, but others had elected to go with the HMO plan when it was presented about a year ago. U.S. Life will allow retirees under the HMO plan to sign up within a year's deadline.

Istre told The Advertiser that retirees pay their own premiums except for a handful of employees who retired some years ago. These persons are under a different plan whereby the city contributes $20 a month per individual to pay the cost of premiums.