New DWI center to be at Parish Prison site

By MIKE DUNNE
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The controversial special center to handle persons convicted of driving while intoxicated will be housed at the parish prison, according to Mayor Screen.

Screen said that a meeting to work out details of the center resulted in two conclusions on the plan: the facility will be located at Parish Prison at Metro Airport and booking will be done through the central booking desk in the Downtown Jail.

Original plans would have set up a special facility in the Ourso Building in the 5600 block of Plank Road and would have included a dormitory, classrooms, and a booking facility.

“We agreed that regardless of what decision on the exact type of building, if any, that the booking desk presently centralized in the Downtown Jail will be the booking desk,” Screen said.

The meeting also produced a “consensus that such a facility, if it is built, should be on the grounds of the Parish Prison,” Screen said.

“We talked in terms of a separate, free-standing facility totally apart from the prison. It would be a minimum security facility for 40-50 people. There was considerable discussion of making it like the Volunteers of America facility (which is work-release oriented). It would be strictly a minimum security facility for both DWIs and other minor misdemeanor offenders,” he said.

The mayor said the prison architect doing Phase II of the Parish Prison expansion will come back before the group with a “ballpark figure” on the cost of such a facility.

City-parish officials began working on a plan during the fall to deal with an expected influx of DWI offenders in the already-taxied Parish Prison.

The original plan called for the Ourso Building facility and for drivers education, substance abuse evaluation and other rehabilitation programs to meet the state requirement of two days of mandatory incarceration for those found guilty of first-offense DWI.

Several opinions have been voiced on how to handle the DWI offenders.

After the council approved letting the mayor apply for state funds to help pay for such a facility, he criticized political factions in the parish.

He said there were eight different sets of opinions on what the facility should be.

The city-parish is seeking a share of the $2 million in state funds. Willie Hawkins, director of the Eden Park Community Center which runs the medical program at the prison, said he is still awaiting word from the state on the grant.