City-parish officials were still working Tuesday on changes to the almost $129 million 1988 budget that Metro Council members would vote on at Wednesday's final regular council meeting of 1987.

The proposed change, agreed to by administration representatives and the district judges Tuesday morning, is a $56,540 addition to the city-parish appropriation to district court. Mayor-counsel Randal Beach said the additional court appropriation was most likely to come out of the Department of Public Works' canal cleaning budget.

A final version of the proposal for a 1988 budget was being fine-tuned Tuesday afternoon, according to both Beach and Chief Administrative Officer Bobby Gaston.

Other changes might have to be made as well, depending on how the council reacts to the administration's proposal to renew the controversial fire inspection fee.

Business groups and some council members have objected to the fee, from which the city-parish property tax is $1,000,000 in 1988 revenue. The council has not renewed the fire inspection fee for 1988, and should the council refuse to do so, the money necessary to balance the budget will have to be found in other revenue sources. Gaston said the administration probably would have to perform a balancing act within the Fire Department budget.

The plan for billing with the city's trash service has undergone a number of changes since Screen first proposed one method of dealing with it in his 1988 budget message.

The original administration proposal would have charged a monthly billing to every household in the city, who would be billed $1 per month to finance a beefed-up city trash collection service. A number of people objected to the idea, partly because everyone would receive a bill for a service they did not use or pay for.

An alternative proposal advanced by the Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce would have eliminated the monthly billing and substituted a trash dpw would bill only the person requiring trash collection, attach the bill for services to the sewer user fee bill, and thus make the bill payer subject to the same penalties as those who refuse to pay the user fee bill, who would have to pay the bill off.

The administration liked the idea, as did the Federation of Greater Baton Rouge Civic Associations. Last week, however, the Metro Council's Finance and Executive Committee modified it considerably.

The committee recommendation was that two-man dpw crews should patrol the city looking for illegal trash piles and, when they spot one, notify the resident responsible for the trash to clean up his options. Arrange to have the trash taken away on his own; pay dpw to
either cut and bundle it so that Browning-Ferris Industries would pick it up or to have a DPW trash truck come and haul it away; or be served with a misdemeanor summons for violating the trash ordinance.

Beach said Tuesday that the committee recommendation was “rife with problems.” DPW personnel involved would have to make several trips to the same household carry out their mission, and city police would have to be involved in the serving of any criminal summons. Such summonses would have to be served on the individual responsible for the trash pile in question, and identifying and locating the individual could be a problem as well.

In all, Beach said, implementing the committee recommendation would be an “administrative nightmare” for all concerned. Beach said administration officials and council members were trying to establish a more workable billing mechanism as well as a trash collection policy that would allow for crews to roam the city picking up those trash piles that BFI will not pick up under the terms of its current contract.

The additional funding for district courts is the result of a “compromise” between Screen’s administration and district judges who aggressively lobbied for additional funding of about $90,000 to fund merit raises for district court employees and, at one point, threatened to steer some $480,000 in district criminal court fines away from the city-parish general fund and into the judicial expense fund.

Gaston suggested last week that the judges raise the money on their own by increasing civil filing fees by $5 — from $115 to $120. That way, the money for the court employee pay hikes could be generated without having to take money away from other city-parish services, and the additional cost would be borne by those who file lawsuits rather than by the taxpayers in general.

Screen himself said the suggestion was perfectly reasonable and that it would be “almost unconscionable” to consider taking money away from police and fire protection, the Department of Public Works or any other city-parish service under the circumstances.

The judges refused and insisted that their original demands be met.

After Gaston and Beach met with district judges Tuesday morning, the two said the administration had agreed to provide enough money to fund merit raises for those court workers who would be eligible for merit raises if they were classified city-parish employees.

City-parish employees get the last merit raise they can get once they reach the seventh step of the city-parish’s seven-step pay plan. The judges had put together a 10-step pay plan for their employees. Beach said the compromise agreement would involve city-parish funding for court employee merit raises up to and including Step 7 but the judges would use their judicial expense fund to pay for merit raises for court employees beyond the seventh step.