City agrees to help launch Queen again

By DONNA FONTENOT
Staff Writer

A revived Vermilion Queen, helped by $100,000 in advanced City funds, should be back in the water by July, says the head of the Bayou Vermilion District.

The City Council gave its blessing and pledge for funds Tuesday.

Now it's a matter of using the money to build a new docking facility immediately off Pinhook Road near the river bridge, district president Fabian Patin told Council members.

And the river authority got a headstart on that even without Council OK of funds.

It was so hopeful of getting the allocation it recently "took the liberty" of hiring an architect to design the dock and advertising for bids to build it, Patin noted.

Lafayette taxpayers can feel optimistic, too, he and some Council members claimed.

They say the City can look to not only get its money back within three years, but benefit in the meantime from added employment, additional sales tax revenues and a boost to tourism.

Vermilion Queen operations should put at least 10 people to work, generate a minimum $18,000 in City and Parish sales tax revenues and rely on out-of-town or out-of-state visitors for solvency, Patin maintained.

It is even possible a larger boat will later replace the 150-passenger cruise ship and produce more income and employment, New Orleans businessman and owner Warren Reuther told the Council.

Owner of the Delta Queen in New Orleans and two other cruise ships, Reuther said a 300- to 600-passenger cruise ship may be brought here within the first year.

He has been required by the river district to put up an "irrevocable letter of credit" to guarantee lease payments.

The City's $100,000 is the the

(See City, page 22)
maximum needed to build bulkheads, access roads and parking spaces to house the Vermilion Queen in its new location, Mayor Dud Lastrapes noted.

He said City appropriation of public funds to a private enterprise is "no different" than the municipality's giving tax incentives to other businesses in a "public-private" exchange.

The money should be "paid back in full" by July 31, 1989 through a share of ticket proceeds and monthly income, Patin explained.

In addition to 25 cents a ticket, the Vermilion Queen is to pay the Bayou Vermilion District $250 a month in the second and third years of operations, plus negotiable funds beyond that, he commented.

Council members Bob Bacon and Jan Heymann voiced concern that already planned City projects may suffer loss of the City income.

But City Chief Administrative Officer Glenn Weber claimed a $500,000 Council reserve should be "unaffected."

Council members will be informed next week of unrelated "adjustments" in capital project spending because of declining sales tax revenues, he told Bacon.

Parish support for the Vermilion Queen came a few weeks ago in promise of in-kind services to clear and maintain the property for docking.

The City is being given "first right of refusal" to buy the land and make it public, Patin said.

City officials looked at putting the docking facility in the Beaver Park area, which is already public land, some Council members told The Advertiser. But they said the idea was scrapped because the General Mouton bridge separates the park from the navigable portion of the river.

Council dedication of the $100,000 was approved unanimously.

In other action, the Council:

- recognized Sertoma Club members, who reported gross receipts of $141,742 from the recent Cajun Air Festival and dedication of $41,000 of those monies to charities;
- gave final approval to an ordinance allowing police to enforce use of handicapped spaces on private property;
- reappointed USL vice president Dr. James Caillier to the Cajundome/Auditorium Management Board for five years;
- appointed Myrtis Hinze, Cecile Verret and Diana Crumling to the Crime Prevention Advisory Commission for five years;
- backed a resolution urging the state Department of Transportation and Development to recognize the need for an Outer Loop around Lafayette;
- endorsed the "Run America" effort to benefit children with heart defects or who have had heart operations;
- requested that the Legislature retain tax exempt status for publicly-owned properties, such as a coal-firing plant in Boyce which the City relies on for energy; and
- OK'd a $88,700 contract for Cajun Field parking lot lighting next to the Cajundome.