Screen gets OK to apply for state DWI funding

By MIKE DUNNE
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Mayor Screen — taking a shot at the law enforcement and judicial wings of local government — Wednesday convinced the Metro Council to allow him to seek state funds for a special center to handle those convicted of driving while intoxicated.

Screen got a lot of static from council members before they finally relented and let him do what he had requested.

In the process, the mayor warned council members to watch out for other officials.

“When you get a call from whatever special interest ... remember each of them have their own cake to bake,” the mayor said.

“Everyone in our justice system has their own interests. We’re just trying to develop a comprehensive proposal and not be swamped by drunken drivers who under new state law are required to serve two-day mandatory sentences, Screen said after the meeting.

“But so far, there are eight different interest groups pulling in eight different directions,” Screen said.

Groups of judges and other members of the law enforcement/judicial system have voiced various ways — such as public service tasks — to meet the requirements of the state law that could jam the already crowded jails.

The administration has tapped Eden Park Community Center Director Willie Hawkins to draw up a proposal. His first effort was aimed at a special center that had been planned for Plank Road that would have housed those convicted of DWI and given them special counseling and treatment.

That plan, however, is on hold.

Hawkins is now authorized to seek part of the $2 million the Louisiana Legislature

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set aside during its special session to help defray the costs of the new state law.

But before the council approved it, there was much debate over whether the council was putting a “$200,000 hammer” over its head.

“I’d like to have the opinion of the judges and law enforcement,” Councilman Tom Ed McHugh said, in suggesting a task force be formed to formulate a plan quickly.

“We’ll be committing to things by making that grant application. I think it’s a good move, but I would like to see some of the details,” McHugh said.

“You’re setting the rules for the ballgame when you’re making the application,” McHugh said. He feared that if the money is granted and the plan comes back to the council that it will be limited in changing anything with which it might disagree.

Screen tried to assure McHugh his fears were ill-founded and the money will be supplemental and couldn’t be spent until it came back to the council.