

METRO NEWS

Jeff reassessment raises property tax bills

By ROBERT RHODEN
East Jefferson bureau

Some Jefferson Parish residents will pay property taxes for the first time this year and others will have tax bills higher than last year, Assessor Lawrence E. Chehardy said Monday.

The increases will range from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars, he said.

The taxes will be new for some and higher for others because of this year's property reap-

praisal/reassessment and the state Legislature's refusal to increase the \$7,500 homestead exemption, Chehardy said.

Under state law and constitution, homes are assessed at 10 percent of fair market value for taxation. Homes assessed at less than \$7,500 pay no parish property taxes. Those assessed at more than \$7,500 pay taxes on the amount above the exemption.

Chehardy, who has proposed increasing the homestead exemp-

tion to \$10,000, warned of even higher taxes in the future "if (the Legislature) continues to turn a deaf ear."

The recently completed reassessment of property places the parish's assessment roll at \$1.88 billion — up from the 1982 figure of about \$1.6 billion.

Chehardy said his office revalues property by examining sales of property during the past four years and using those prices as comparables.

State law requires parish assessors to reappraise property at least once every four years to keep assessments in line with fair market values.

State law and constitution provide that property tax millages be rolled back, when necessary, to keep public bodies from receiving windfall tax increases tied to the inflation rate. However, after a public hearing, those public bodies, with a two-thirds vote, may retain the millages at their current levels.

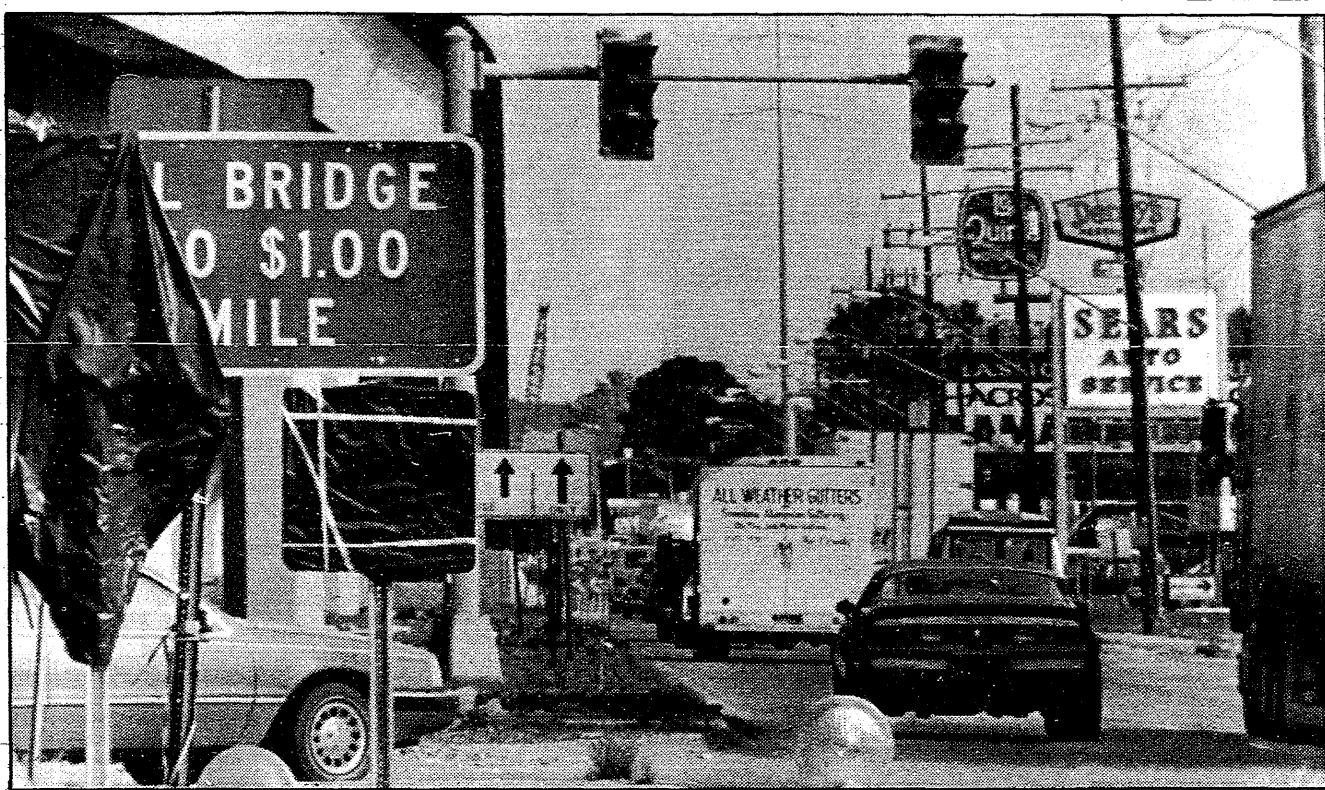
The Parish Council rolled back millages in October to compensate for the reappraisal/reassessment.

As in every reassessment year, Chehardy said, the assessor's office has received many telephone calls from residents with questions about their property tax bills.

Chehardy said he couldn't tell whether he has fielded more questions from taxpayers this year than in previous years.

"Whenever we have a reassessment, we get a lot of calls," he said. "It's typical of how busy it gets every four years. People call and want to know why they have a tax bill for the first time, or why it has gone up."

Property values increased dramatically from 1978 to 1982. But most property tax bills remained the same because the Legislature increased the homestead exemption from \$5,000 to \$7,500 in 1981, Chehardy said.



Things to come?

A partially covered sign on the West Bank Expressway may or may not warn motorists of what lies ahead. The Louisiana

legislature is expected to decide this week whether money will be available to avoid placing the tolls on the Greater New Orleans

Bridge, which would be \$1 for most motorists.

STAFF PHOTO BY ALEXANDER BARKOFF

Port commission chief faces tough fight for job

By KRISTIN GILGER
River Parishes bureau

South Louisiana Port Commission Director Robert Egan is expected to have a fight on his hands when commissioners meet Wednesday to decide whether he'll stay or go.

Most observers say that Egan probably will lose his \$51,529-a-year job. But several of Egan's supporters insist that the battle isn't lost until the votes are in.

Egan's contract doesn't expire until Feb. 21, but it requires commissioners to make a decision about whether to renew his contract 90 days ahead of time.

That decision is to be made at a 6 p.m. meeting Wednesday at the port office in LaPlace.

Egan has been controversial during his two-year tenure as director of the commission, which oversees Mississippi River activity in St. Charles, St. John the Baptist and St. James parishes.

He has been unpopular with St. John and St. James officials, who believe he has tried to run the port single-handedly. They

also have said Egan has concentrated on building a multimillion-dollar dock in St. Charles Parish to the exclusion of development in the other parishes.

The feud between Egan and those commissioners peaked last summer shortly before the Legislature stepped in and reduced the size of the commission from nine to seven members. The change means that the majority of the commissioners are state-appointed rather than appointed by parish councils — a move legislators hoped would eliminate the infighting among parishes.

But on most issues, the line remains drawn: Egan and the two commissioners who are residents of St. Charles Parish versus the other five commissioners.

Some expect Wednesday's vote to divide along the same line. That would mean a 5-2 vote against Egan, with commissioners Neal Clulee and Paul Cardinal siding with Egan.

Clulee could not be reached for comment Monday. Cardinal would not say how he will vote, but he said he believes Egan has done a good job as director.

St. Charles Parish President Kevin Friloux, an ardent Egan supporter, said he expects both Clulee and Cardinal to vote for Egan. He thinks he can convince at least two other commissioners to vote for Egan as well.

He said that in October, Egan had four votes to renew his contract, but then two commissioners abruptly changed their minds.

"They got some bad information that Egan was not cooperating with certain commissioners and elected officials when, in fact, he was," Friloux said. "I'm hoping that before the final vote is taken, the correct information comes out."

St. John Parish President Arnold Labat predicted a 6-1 vote, with only Cardinal supporting Egan. He said that he believes Clulee, despite being a St. Charles Parish resident, will side with the other state-appointed members. Clulee, Antoine Folsch from St. James and Henry Sullivan from St. John were appointed by Gov. Edwin W. Edwards.

The other state appointee is



Robert Egan

Controversial port director

Secretary of Commerce Kay Jackson.

Labat said he hopes Egan's contract is terminated.

"The last straw" was the layoff last week of Assistant Port Director Earl White, Labat said.

Egan has forced out three top port administrators, Labat said. They are White; another assistant director, Malcolm Donaldson; and head accountant Lee Culotta. All three were supported by officials from St. James or St. John parishes.

Egan is convinced that somehow he will get the votes necessary to keep his job.

City board OKs plan for 250 to retire early

By SHEILA GRISSETT-WELSH
Staff writer

Up to 250 New Orleans city employees could take early retirement without loss of benefits under a one-shot plan approved Monday by the City Retirement Board.

Under the plan, which requires City Council approval, the city could save almost \$2 million in personnel costs in 1987 and even more in subsequent years if the workers are not replaced, Retirement Board members said.

Early retirement would be offered to qualified employees from Jan. 1 to April 30 under an ordinance that could be presented to the council as early as Thursday. The council could not vote on it before Dec. 18.

The plan would be open to workers with a minimum of 15 years of city service and whose age and number of years with the city total 70. For example, a 52-year-old worker could retire with full benefits if he has 18 years of service. At present, only employees 55 or older with at least 30 years service can retire without being penalized.

Employees taking early retirement during that four-month period would also be required to add, or convert, any accrued sick leave to their length of service with the city. The employee would not receive cash payments for sick days, as they might in normal retirements, because city officials hope to hold down immediate cash costs of the plan.

Paying retirement benefits on the converted sick leave will cost the city about \$4 million more over 17 years than it would to buy out the sick leave in a lump sum.

Mayor Sidney Barthelemy's administration asked the Retirement Board several months ago to consider offering an early retirement plan in 1987 as a way of helping to reduce personnel costs by trimming the payroll.

Board consultant Richard Camus said between 200 and 250 employees will be eligible to take advantage of the plan. Those employees now earn combined salaries of almost \$6 million.

Administration officials have said they will fill as few of those positions as necessary in an effort to keep down personnel costs in succeeding years.

Neighbors irate over permit for yogurt shop

By FRANK DONZE
Staff writer

The prospect of frozen yogurt sales along Esplanade Avenue in Faubourg St. John has some neighbors burning.

Residents are upset over a recent decision by Safety and Permits Director Ulysses Williams to issue an operating permit for a Zack's Famous Frozen Yogurt franchise at 3201 Esplanade Ave. They say they will take the matter to Civil District Court on Wednesday.

The Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association, which represents about 3,000 households, lost its bid to have the Board of Zoning Adjustments overturn the permit last month. But the 1,100-square-foot building at Esplanade Avenue and Mystery and Maurepas streets remains vacant while the appeal continues.

Fast-food and drive-in restaurants are prohibited under the area's Neighborhood Business District zoning. And residents say Williams broke with department policy in October when he overruled three of his employees, including the city's chief building inspector, who had denied the request after separate inspections.

Williams said he stepped into the matter because his employees were being pressured by people on both sides of the issue. He also said he found that Giovanni's Cafe, the business at the site until it closed in September, was a fast-food operation, establishing the legal precedent for another fast-food establishment to open there.

"I don't think it's unusual for me to overrule three people, especially when the preponderance of information indicates that this was a fast-food restaurant," Williams said.

But association President Ron Ellington said Giovanni's and previous occupants of the site were never considered fast-food outlets. He said Giovanni's had

"all the trappings of a standard restaurant," including regular plates, metal knives and forks and a minimum of take-out service.

"All he (Williams) is doing is using smoke and mirrors to justify what he did," Ellington said.

According to zoning regulations, the only way a fast-food restaurant would be allowed to operate in the area is for the Safety and Permits Department to have on record that a fast-food establishment existed at the site under the previous ownership.

Ellington said there is no file at City Hall that shows any previous use of the building classified as a fast-food establishment. Moreover, Ellington said, even if Giovanni's owner had been operating the business as a fast-food outlet, it was being done illegally because the permit was for a standard restaurant.

Williams agrees there is no record on file in his office and that it does not matter whether Giovanni's was a legal fast-food operation. The city only needs prior knowledge that a fast-food restaurant existed at the location to issue the permit. "We just didn't document it," he said.

The dispute over Zack's has strained what has been a smooth working relationship between the neighborhood association and Councilman Mike Early, who lives in and represents the area.

Association members are upset that Early asked Williams to examine the building to determine if it was a fast-food restaurant. Early said he requested the inspection only because he had been told that one of the department's inspectors had merely driven past the business.

The Board of Zoning Adjustments voted 3-1 to revoke the permit on Nov. 24. But the neighborhood group lost because four votes are needed to overturn a permit. There is one vacancy on the five-member board.

GOP advised to criticize waste if it wants more N.O. members

By FRANK DONZE
Staff writer

If Republicans want to recruit in New Orleans, they should stress perceptions of waste in government rather than play on President Reagan's popularity or the upswing in the nation's economy, a poll by the University of New Orleans shows.

The poll surveyed 223 registered Republicans and 545 Democrats between Oct. 13 and 20. The larger sample has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points, and plus or minus 6 points in the survey of Republicans only.

UNO Professor Susan Howell, who coordinated the poll, said her research shows there is a limit to Reagan's influence in recruiting New Orleanians to vote or register Republican. She said the most

potential for recruiting lies with working-class white Democrats.

The poll showed that 78 percent of the Republicans surveyed strongly approve of Reagan's performance as president. But only 49 percent of white Democrats with less than a high school education felt the same way, while the number was 36 percent for those with more than a high school education and only 7 percent for black Democrats.

Asked if the nation's economy has gotten better over the past year, 48 percent of the Republicans surveyed said yes. Only 30 percent of the better educated white Democrats agreed, while 25 percent of the less educated Democrats said yes and only 10 percent of the black Democrats agreed.

The GOP should focus its recruiting efforts on a belief that there is waste in Louisiana's

Democrat-dominated state government, the poll shows.

According to the survey, 63 percent of the city's better-educated white Democrats believe the state wastes a lot of money, with 54 percent of the less-educated white Democrats agreeing and 51 percent of the black Democrats. The poll shows that 76 percent of the Republicans agree that there is much waste.

Continued attacks on Gov. Edwin W. Edwards, a Democrat, apparently don't have appeal among Orleans Parish voters, the poll shows.

While 73 percent of the Republicans strongly disapprove of Edwards' performance, only 48 percent of the better-educated white Democrats felt that way. The number drops to 25 percent among less-educated white Democrats and to 18 percent among black Democrats.

Slidell man booked with 2 robberies

St. Tammany bureau

A Slidell man was held under \$25,000 bond Monday on charges of robbing a Slidell convenience store clerk twice in two weeks.

Shelton Brumfield, 37, 1150 Claude St., was arrested about four blocks from the Check In-Check Out store at 1800 Old Spanish Trail within minutes of a hold-up there Saturday night, St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Patrick J. Canulette said.

Police and sheriff's deputies patrolling near the store when it was robbed just after 7 p.m. chased Brumfield to a car dealership in the 2200 block of Old Spanish Trail, Canulette said.

Brumfield also is accused of robbing the same clerk in the store on Nov. 23.