

Road tax on hot seat

BY ALEXANDRIA BURRIS • ABURRIS@DAILYWORLD.COM • OCTOBER 1, 2008

In the final stretch before Saturday's election, St. Landry Parish President Don Menard urged a small group of residents to support proposals aimed at fixing parish roads.

"Unless we get money from heaven and this proposal doesn't go through on Saturday, you can forget about road improvements in St. Landry Parish," he said during a meeting held at the Posse Building on Airport Road.

A 10-mill, 10-year property tax for homeowners living in the unincorporated areas of the parish is on the ballot.

All voters also are being asked to approve a rededication of a portion of the funds generated from an 8/10 cent sales tax currently designated for the Solid Waste Disposal Board.

If approved, the property tax would generate roughly \$3 million. Another \$500,000 a year would be generated from the tax rededication. Roads would be paved according to priority.

But the proposals are the target of staunch criticism from skeptical citizens unwilling to endure another tax and members of the St. Landry Parish Solid Waste Disposal Board who consider the rededication a raid of the board's funding.

"I'm not going to vote for something if it doesn't benefit me," said Alvin Auzenne, a member of the road commission for special taxing District 4.

According to the proposal, money generated from property taxes collected within the nine taxing districts will be placed in one pot that will be used to maintain and improve local roads.

Work may begin as early as January if the proposals are approved, Menard said.

"We're asking you to give us the opportunity to do what we say we're going to do," he said Tuesday.

Currently the money can only be spent within the district it is collected. Districts with major industries, such as the refinery in Krotz Springs and a lumber plant in north St. Landry Parish, collect the most money. But Menard called the current method "wasteful spending." Residents have nothing to show for it, he said.

"We cannot continue to spend the money the way it's being spent," Menard said. "If you continue to do it your roads will continue to be bad."

The parish president said engineers have prioritized roads based on traffic volumes, businesses and agricultural necessity.

He said the priority listing would make it difficult for those in control to pave roads because of political promises.

"This is the only planned and prioritized road plan that St. Landry Parish has ever heard of," Menard said.

Engineers intend to divide the parish among two or three contractors, who would work simultaneously.

Menard put the "Roads for Our Future" proposal before voters in 2006, but it was defeated.

Changes have been made to the proposal, but some people still are not convinced. "The priority is not fair the way they're doing it," Auzenne said. "If they would change the priority list I would support it."

Beatrice Greene said she supported the proposals and had already voted for it during the early voting period.

"I'm tired of the bad roads. It's time for a change," she said.