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## **Occupational fees support economic growth**

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HOUMA -- For the past few years, money the Terrebonne Parish government collects from occupational licenses has paid for general parish expenses and promoting economic development, as well as fire and police protection in Houma.

So far this year, the parish has collected roughly \$1.34 million from the occupational-license fee, said Chris Lagarde, the sales-and-use tax director for the parish.

The net collections from occupational licenses for this year are roughly \$1.29 million after the Sales and Use Tax Office is paid for collecting the money.

That amount may increase slightly by the end of the year, Lagarde said.

Since 2005, half of the occupational-license money is split up, depending on whether the license comes from a business in the city of Houma or outside the city limits.

The licenses collected in the parish go to the general fund. The licenses collected in the city traditionally go toward police and fire protection, expected to total \$193,000 for both departments in 2007.

The other half of the occupational-license money since 2005 has been set aside for economic development.

Part of that 50 percent has gone to the Terrebonne Economic Development Authority, a public-private agency focused on luring jobs and companies to the parish, helping existing companies expand and carrying out the parish's economic-development strategic plan.

Though TEDA began receiving money from the occupational licenses in 2005, it has only gotten the money for 2006 and 2007, said Jamie Elfert, parish CFO.

So in 2005, TEDA got \$139,047 from the licenses and \$555,000 each for both 2006 and 2007.

For next year's budget, TEDA is asking the parish government for the entire 50 percent portion of the license money dedicated to economic development.

Parish finance officials say they believe that 50 percent will equal \$660,310 in 2008.

"They've submitted a request for the full 50 percent," Elfert said.

"The administration is making that recommendation to the council," he added.

Henry Richard, TEDA's board president, said the dollar amount TEDA receives from the occupational-license fee has stayed the same in the past because the organization never pursued more money.

"That was just a figure that was put there from day one. We had no reason to challenge it. It was all we needed," Richard said.

But TEDA has now taken on more responsibilities, made more business contacts and is assisting in more expansion projects.

"Now we've made some progress," Richard said.

Though TEDA has received some grants, the only income dedicated to TEDA on an annual basis is the occupational license fees, said Mike Ferdinand, TEDA CEO.

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