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EDITORIAL: The cost of stubbornness

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St. Bernard Parish officials are clinging to their defense of a flawed home-rental ordinance, even as the legal bills pile up. That's bad fiscal policy and a disservice to a recovering community.

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The parish already paid \$32,500 to settle an anti-discrimination lawsuit against the ordinance, which was conceived by Parish President Craig Taffaro when he was a Parish Council member in 2006.

Now St. Bernard will shell out an additional \$123,000 in attorney fees to the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, which filed the suit.

These amounts don't include the parish's own legal bills, which are also rising as officials deal with another lawsuit against an amended rental restriction -- this one filed by Florida investors.

The housing center sued because the law required council permission to rent homes to anyone who was not a blood relative of the owner, in effect restricting rentals to minorities in the overwhelmingly white parish.

The council dropped that provision in late 2006, but it still requires homeowners to get a permit to rent homes that were not rentals pre-Katrina. That prompted the second lawsuit.

President Taffaro, however, remains cavalier about his brainchild.

"No, the rental ordinance is not causing us trouble," he said.

Evidently, the price of his ego is higher than the \$153,000 the parish has already lost because of his ill-conceived ordinance.

Those costs relate to a suit over one property. The second lawsuit involves dozens of homes, so the exposure for parish taxpayers could be much higher if the parish has to settle or loses.

For President Taffaro, it's all worth it.

"Like anything that's worth standing up for, we are accepting and responding to challenges" to the law, he said.

An ordinance that remains flawed even without its patently discriminatory provisions is hardly something "worth standing up for."

What would be worth something is for President Taffaro and the Parish Council to strike the ordinance and spare parish taxpayers more wasteful legal bills.