

Minutes
Budget Hearing
115 N. Thomson, Iowa, LA 70647
June 9, 2025 at 7:00

Mayor Douglas Watkins opened the Budget Hearing at 7:08pm.

There was present, Mayor Watkins; Council Members Joe Becnel, Julie Fontenot, Gerald Guidry, Daniel Hennigan, and Vernessa Guillory; Town Attorney Eugene Bouquet; Town Clerk Cynthia Mallett; Chief of Police Keith Vincent; About 31 persons.

Mayor Watkins announced that a presentation of the Louisiana Local Government Budget Act will be presented by Town Clerk Cynthia Mallett.

Cynthia Mallett gave a presentation on the process and requirements of the Louisiana Government Budget Act.

Mayor Watkins asked if there were any comments or questions on the 2025-2026 proposed budget.

The following people came forward and made comments about the proposed budget:

Chief Vincent, Miranda Priola, Joshua Macer, Belinda Dugas, Joey Mathis, Linda Leonard, Officer Austin Peloquin, Johnathan Richdale, Al Manela, Ms. Johnson, Kevin Fix, Gabrielle Lowder, and Asia Johnson. They voiced their concern about the amount of expenses allocated to the police department and requested not to cut the police budget.

Council Member Daniel Hennigan talked about the justification of the budgeted amounts and the requested amounts. He stated that he tried to calculate what he thought the police budget should be based on what he had and that the 2 sides were not that far off.

Mayor Watkins explained the reason for cutting the expenditure of General Fund budget. He talked about the past years of spending and using the town's savings account to meet recurring expenses in the general fund.

Council Member Julie Fontenot stated that she will not vote to cut the police department budget tonight.

Mr. Alan Weishampel came forward; he summarized what he understood about the budget and suggested the budget be passed tonight and then Mayor and Chief meet with the idea of amending the budget for the police department.

After everyone made their comments, Mayor Watkins closed the budget hearing at approximately 7:40 pm.

Minutes
Public Hearing
115 N. Thomson, Iowa, LA 70647
June 9, 2025

Mayor Watkins opened the Public Hearing. There was present, Mayor Watkins; Council Members Joe Becnel, Julie Fontenot, Gerald Guidry, Daniel Hennigan, and Vernessa Guillory; Town Attorney Eugene Bouquet; Town Clerk Cynthia Mallett; Chief of Police Keith Vincent; About 31 persons.

The public hearing was for the purpose of receiving comments or questions on the below introduced ordinances:

1. Ordinance 2025-02, An Ordinance establishing for the adjustment of water and sewer bills due to municipal error, natural disaster, or pre-approved exceptional water usage, and otherwise to provide with respect thereto.
2. Ordinance 2025-03, An Ordinance Adopting an Operating Budget of Revenues and Expenditures for the fiscal year beginning July 11, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026.

He read the title of Ordinance 2025-02 and explained the purpose and need to adopt this ordinance. He asked if there were any questions or comments. There were no questions or comments. He read the title of Ordinance 2025-03 and asked if there were any questions or comments. There were no questions or comments.

Mayor Watkins closed the Public Hearing at 8:42 pm.

**Minutes
Regular Meeting
115 N. Thomson, Iowa, LA 70647
June 9, 2025**

Mayor Watkins and Town Council met in Regular session this date in compliance with all requirements as to notice. Mayor Watkins called the meeting to order at 8:42pm.

Invocation was said by Council Member Joe Becnel followed by the pledge.

Mayor Watkins called roll. Present: Mayor Douglas Watkins; Council Members: Joe Becnel, Gerald Guidry, Julie Fontenot, Daniel Hennigan, and Vernessa Guillory. A quorum was established.

Others present were Town Clerk Cynthia Mallett; Town Attorney Eugene Bouquet; Chief of Police Keith Vincent and about 31 people.

It was **moved by** Julie Fontenot, **seconded by** Daniel Hennigan to amend the agenda to add, promotions and new hires by Chief Vincent. The motion passed unanimously.

It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot to adopt the amended agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot to approve minutes for regular meeting May 12, 2025, with the amendment of striking Daniel Hennigan's name on the last paragraph and inserting Julie Fontenot's name. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Watkins read the first item on the agenda. It was **moved by** Julie Fontenot, **seconded by** Vernessa Guillory to adopt Ordinance 2025-02. The motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE NO. 2025-02

An ordinance establishing for the adjustment of water and sewer bills due to municipal error, natural disaster, or pre-approved exceptional water usage, and otherwise to provide with respect thereto.

WHEREAS, Article VII, Section 14 of the Louisiana Constitution prohibits the donation of public funds, property, or things of value by a municipality except as otherwise provided by law; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Attorney General has opined in AGO No. 17-0157, AGO No. 08-0256, and AGO No. 18-0052 that adjustments to municipal utility bills are permissible under certain

circumstances, including correction of billing errors, loss due to natural disasters, and pre-approved exceptional water usage events where a legitimate public purpose is served, and value is received in return; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Iowa desires to establish a lawful, transparent policy for adjusting customer utility bills in a manner consistent with constitutional requirements and Attorney General guidance,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Mayor and the Iowa Town Council of the Town of Iowa, Louisiana, that:

SECTION 1. PURPOSE

This Ordinance establishes the lawful grounds and procedures under which customer water and/or sewer bills may be adjusted, consistent with Article VII, Section 14 of the Louisiana Constitution and applicable Attorney General Opinions.

Adjustments are permitted solely to:

- Correct billing errors made by the municipality
- Mitigate excess charges resulting from leaks caused by a declared natural disaster; and
- Accommodate pre-approved events resulting in atypical water usage such as filling a swimming pool, without imposing improper sewer charges.

SECTION 2. BILLING ADJUSTMENTS

A. Adjustment Due to Municipal Error

If a customer has been incorrectly billed due to a clerical, meter-reading, or mechanical error by the Town, the billing shall be corrected, and an adjustment made to reflect the correct amount due.

B. Adjustment Due to Natural Disaster-Related Leak

If a customer experiences significant water loss directly caused by a declared natural disaster (such as hurricane, flood, or earthquake), the Town of Iowa may adjust the water and/or sewer portion of the bill, provided:

- The customer applies for the adjustment within [30 days] of discovering the leak,
- Provides satisfactory documentation of damage and repairs,
- The adjustment is limited to no more than [two billing cycles] unless otherwise authorized by the Town Council.

C. Adjustment for Pre-Approved Water Usage Events (e.g., Pool Filling)

When a customer provides advance written notice to the Town of anticipated significant water usage (such as filling a swimming pool), the Town may:

- Charge the full amount for water usage; and
- Adjust or waive the corresponding sewer charges based on the customer's typical usage patterns.

Notification must be made at least 3 business days prior to the event. Approved usage must be scheduled with the utility department for the purpose of water meter reading. Failure to provide timely notice may result in denial of the adjustment.

SECTION 3. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

The Town Clerk or Utility Billing Department shall develop and maintain standardized application forms, supporting documentation requirements, and internal procedures to process adjustment requests under this Ordinance.

All adjustments shall require written approval by the Town Clerk and review by the Mayor.

SECTION 4. LIMITATIONS

- No adjustment shall be granted for leaks resulting from customer negligence or ordinary plumbing failures unrelated to a declared natural disaster.
- No adjustment shall be granted for unapproved or unreported events of high-water usage.
- The Town reserves the right to inspect customer premises to verify claims prior to granting adjustments.

Section 5. Effective Date

This ordinance shall become effective upon adoption and publication as required by law.

Said Ordinance having been introduced on the 12th day of May, the title having been read, and appropriate public advertisement completed:

The above ordinance was adopted at a duly convened meeting on motion of Julie Fontenot, seconded by Vernessa Guillory, upon a vote taken as follows:

YEAS: Julie Fontenot, Vernessa Guillory, Daniel Hennigan, Gerald Guidry, and Joe Becnel

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

WHEREUPON, the presiding officer declared the above Ordinance duly adopted on the 9th day of June.

DOUGLAS N. WATKINS, MAYOR

I certify that the above ordinance was presented to the Mayor by me on the 10th day of June.

CYNTHIA MALLET, TOWN CLERK

I, acknowledge receipt of the above ordinance from the Town Clerk on this 10th day of June.

DOUGLAS N. WATKINS, MAYOR

I, hereby approve the above ordinance on this 10th day of June.

DOUGLAS N. WATKINS, MAYOR

I certify that the above ordinance was received by me from the Mayor on this 10th day of June.

CYNTHIA MALLET, TOWN CLERK

Mayor Watkins announced that at this time Chief Vincent will be heard. He asked Chief Vincent to come forward.

Chief Vincent came forward and made the following recommendations for promotions:

- a. Jason Racca from captain to major
- b. Kristi Juarez from lieutenant to captain
- c. Austin Peloquin from ssg/acting executive officer to lieutenant/executive officer
- d. Matt Doucet from detective sergeant to detective staff sergeant

- e. Seth Whetstine from patrolman to sergeant/fto
- f. Kevin Loewer from patrolman to patrolman first class
- g. Austin Sonnier from patrolman to patrolman first class

Council Member Daniel Hennigan stated he was good with the promotions but raised the question about it, at this time during a budget fight. Chief Vincent stated that these promotions were for this fiscal year, and he had the funds for it for this year. Mayor Watkins asked if we didn't have a handbook policy that says an employee must be here 90 days before given a raise? Mayor Watkins read two of the promotions that have not been here for 90 days yet. There was discussion of the cost of promotional raises and new hires totaling an increase of over \$322,000.00. After a discussion between Mayor Watkins and Chief Vincent it was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot to approve Jason Racca from captain to major, Kristi Juarez from lieutenant to captain, Austin Peloquin, pending Mr. Bouquet's approval, from ssg/acting executive officer to lieutenant/executive officer, Matt Doucet from detective sergeant to detective staff sergeant, Seth Whetstine from patrolman to sergeant/fto, Kevin Loewer from patrolman to patrolman first class, Austin Sonnier from patrolman to patrolman first class. The motion passed unanimously.

Chief Vincent recommended to the Council for hire the following full-time patrol officers at rank of patrolman pending testing results: Joshua McCoy, Trey Loewer, Marshal Menard, Taylor Jackson, and Asia Johnson. There was a discussion between Council Member Daniel Hennigan and Chief Vincent about hiring three out of the five recommended officers. It was brought to the attention of the Chief that Marshal Menard declined the employment offer. It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot pending test results, to approve hiring Joshua McCoy, Trey Loewer, Taylor Jackson, and Asia Johnson. The motion passed unanimously.

Chief Vincent thanked everyone for attending the Iowa Police Memorial and announced the upcoming Iowa Senior BBQ being held on June 19, 2025 from 9:00am to 1:00pm at the KC Hall and invited all to attend.

Mayor Watkins read the next item on the agenda. It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Joe Becnel to adopt Ordinance 2025-03, An Ordinance adopting an operating budget of Revenues and Expenditures for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2024. The vote was as follows: Yeas: None; Nays: Daniel Hennigan, Vernessa Guillory, and Julie Fontenot; Abstain: Joe Becnel and Gerald Guidry; Absent: None. The motion failed.

Mayor Watkins read the next item on the agenda. He asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked. It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Vernessa Guillory to approve Statement of Work between Town of Iowa and CivicPlus, LLC for the purpose of a full-service supplementation subscription for the Town of Iowa Code of Ordinances. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Watkins read the next item on the agenda. He asked if there were any questions. No questions were asked. It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot to approve Cooperative Endeavor Agreement by and between the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury and the Town of Iowa for the public purpose of assisting in the Summer Feeding Program. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Watkins read the next item on the agenda. Mayor Watkins explained that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Combined Anti-Drug Team (CAT) is for a four-year period, and they wish to have the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement coincide with the same dates as the MOU instead of on an annual basis. Mayor Watkins explained that we are waiting for their legal department to send the final document. He said we were told that the only difference between what has been approved in the past and this one is the four-year term. Mayor Watkins recommended it be

approved, upon the review of Mr. Bouquet. It was **moved by** Daniel Hennigan, **seconded by** Julie Fontenot, pending final approval by Mr. Bouquet, to approve the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement by and between the Combined Anti-Drug Team (CAT) and Town of Iowa for public purposes outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding beginning July 1, 2024 through June 28, 2028. The motion passed unanimously.

With no further business to discuss, it was **moved by** Julie Fontenot, **seconded by** Vernessa Guillory, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:57pm.

Douglas N Watkins, Mayor

Cynthia Mallett, MMC