

Mayor's Budget Message

Town of Iowa, Louisiana

This year's budget reflects our ongoing commitment to responsible spending, forward-thinking infrastructure improvements, and the continued growth and well-being of our community.

As always, spending more than we have is disrespectful to each and every person in the Town of Iowa. This foundational principle keeps our town financially stable and ensures we remain accountable to the residents we serve.

Equally important is the responsible management of our reserve funds or savings. These funds cannot be used to cover every day recurring expenses. Instead, they must be set aside for emergencies—such as weather-related events, including hurricanes, and other emergencies—that can strike unexpectedly and require immediate and significant resources. It's not just good financial policy—it's essential to our town's resilience.

With a directional change in state government, as well as a drastic change in federal spending, we should err on the side of caution. As a reminder our budget can be amended provided the funds are available. It cost nothing to be cautious, but can be devastating to bet on future funds to satisfy our wants today.

Revenues and Grants Supporting Community Investment

This year's budget is made stronger by several key grant awards and funding sources, which will support critical improvements throughout our town:

- \$35,000 grant for sidewalk and lighting improvements, which will enhance pedestrian safety and visibility in key areas.
- \$165,472 grant for culvert resetting, essential for improving stormwater flow and reducing flooding risks.
- \$235,495 from the LCDBG Clearance Program Grant to demolish several condemned structures, helping clean up blighted areas and improve community appearance.
- \$70,000 CWEF Grant for filtration media replacement and enlargement of water mains, improving water quality and system capacity.
- \$644,204 CDBG Grant allocated to the repair and upgrading of sewer lift stations, reinforcing a vital but often invisible part of our town's infrastructure.

These grants allow us to accomplish significant improvements without overburdening not only the general fund, but also other key sources such as sales tax revenue, the waterworks fund, and the wastewater fund. This helps distribute the financial impact and reduce long-term strain on our local budget. They also underscore the importance of pursuing every available opportunity to bring outside funding into Iowa for the benefit of our residents.

Infrastructure and Community Development Highlights

We are making targeted, strategic investments in projects that are essential to the safety, quality of life, and future growth of Iowa:

- Phase 1 of our new road project—with \$1,000,000 budgeted—will extend from Railroad Street to the Lateral. This is not just a local access improvement, but an evacuation route, which adds a critical layer of safety and preparedness for our community.
- \$400,000 has been budgeted for additional drainage improvements, addressing a long-standing need to mitigate flooding and protect property.
- We continue to invest in sewer infrastructure, including the \$644,204 in grant funding for lift station repairs. Sewer treatment may not get attention until it fails—but it's a key part of a healthy, functioning town.
- We're also enhancing our parks and recreational spaces. This year's budget includes funds for baseball field improvements, equipment upgrades, and land acquisition to expand the park, providing more space for families and youth activities.
- \$460,266 is budgeted in capital outlay for the replacement of water registers and installation of an antenna system, this will reduce man hours while increasing efficiency, ushering in daily leak detection as well as real time metering and billing app in the palm of your hand. This will also usher in a long-term plan to provide new fire hydrants to improve fire protection and emergency response capabilities.

Adapting to Economic Conditions

We must also be mindful of the national economic climate, which may affect our local budgeting. Ongoing global trade tensions and the possibility of new tariffs may increase the cost of materials and equipment we rely on to maintain essential infrastructure like water systems, sewer lines, and roads. We are building this year's budget with the awareness that costs may rise unexpectedly and must remain flexible and prudent.

Additionally, interest rates remain a key factor in our financial planning. While recent trends suggest that rates may stabilize or even decline slightly in the coming year, they are still much higher than just a few years ago. In light of this, it is more important than ever to be thoughtful and deliberate in how we plan and pace our projects.

Relying on borrowing to cover excessive or non-essential spending is neither wise nor sustainable—and it is simply not an option for our town. Instead, we are committed to keeping unnecessary spending to a minimum and focusing our resources where they matter most. By taking this disciplined approach, we protect our financial future and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used wisely.

Shared Responsibility and a Vision for the Future

As last years budget allowed us to work through a step-by-step plan to bring portions of our infrastructure up to date, it now allows us to move in a new direction with this year's budget.

As the revenue goes so does our town. Following this plan, we can now address those items that will allow us to attract more economic development which in turn generates more revenues. More revenues allow us to allocate more funds into departments that need the funding. To follow this plan requires another year of sacrifices, those we make today allows for less hand wringing in the future.

All of these initiatives come with a price tag, but they are not luxuries—they are priorities for any municipality that wants to grow responsibly and serve its people well.

It's important to remember that safety and security are not just police matters—they are community matters. Stability is not only about law enforcement—it's about infrastructure, planning, and the trust we build with our residents. And financial responsibility isn't just the job of the town administration—it's a shared value that we all uphold when we support wise investments and long-term thinking.

This budget is not just a financial plan—it's a blueprint for a stronger, safer, and more prosperous Iowa.

Douglas N. Watkins
Mayor, Town of Iowa, Louisiana