

Town of Iowa

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Greetings All,

Under the circumstances we find ourselves in as a nation I trust that through these difficult times with a higher cost of living you remain a resilient person. If the early history of the Town of Iowa is any indication of the spirit of the individuals living in this town today, we will be able to push through the hardships and find success over the next years.

I am pleased to report that over the last 2 years we have erased the nearly half million dollars in debt in our "City Water Works" fund. This fund encompasses all utilities: water, sewer, and trash collection. This reversal can be attributed to regulating chemicals, labor efficiency and routine scheduled maintenance.

As everyone is aware we were required to make the move to metered water so that we can participate in "Water Sector" funding through the state for upgrades to our system and without meters we would not qualify. As this was something that we as a town had never done, we had to use the information that we had available from surrounding municipalities regarding rates.

As both the council and I stated in several council meetings, we would do a review of our rates. I am happy to report that we did have a review with LRWA, and we were extremely close to the requirement for water sector funding. The good news for the "water" rates is that we should not have a need to increase rates at this time.

Also, more good news is that many water leaks have been repaired over the course of the last six months and because of the metering we have made a difference when it comes to conserving our natural resource- water

The much better news is that those pesky sewer rates that none of us liked will be adjusted down. I am extremely excited by the work done by our workers that oversee the oxidation facility. Our chemical use has dropped more than two-thirds since 2021-2022. We are working on not just the lower rates for the sewer but to also address some of the other issues as "metering" is not an option. I appreciate everyone's understanding as we work through this and patience knowing that not everyone's use is the same. Some water lawns, some have pools, so equality is something that will not be achieved. We will attempt to be as fair as possible, knowing that those at opposite ends of the spectrum may feel it still unfair.

PARK

Last year we appropriated around two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars to make repairs that lingered from Hurricane Laura and Delta. As many of you know, the park still had repairs that needed to be made this year as well and we appropriated a little more than seventy thousand dollars. The lag in having this done sooner was due to delays in monies due to insurance claims. We not only appreciate the good folks of the town of Iowa for your patience at bringing our park back into shape but also those in the surrounding area that use the park. At the time of this letter, we still have a couple of weeks' worth of work to be ready for the beginning of next year's league play in the park.

As is the case with most things changes and repairs take time, and we have now laid out a plan to help make our park and leagues not just viable but create the economic footing to build towards self-sustainable parks and recreation league. It is our hope that this can be done using less local tax dollars, by emulating programs that we see in other municipalities. We feel this can be achieved by sponsorships from businesses from our surrounding area, relying on grants and adding more league play can bring about the change that we all want to see, so I encourage you to champion the Town of Iowa. Remember our children are our future, and we have some of the best schools in the state. What we do in our park with leagues can be the fuel of successful sports teams in our schools.

SENIOR CENTER

For those of you that are not aware, at the request of the Calcasieu Council On Aging, I was able to negotiate a deal between a private landowner and the CCOA. This will give the seniors of Iowa their own building and property. Additionally, Senator Mark Abraham and Representative Troy Romero secured additional funds to help with the construction of this new facility that will benefit our elderly for many years to come.

For any of our seniors in the Town of Iowa or beyond, this is a great bunch of folks, and they are always having a great time. For more information reach out to Mrs. Colleen Johnson at 337- 312-1781.

ASH RIDGE SUBDIVISION

I would like to thank the folks in Ash Ridge for their patience regarding the repairs that have been made over the past 12 months. We have managed to fix most of the drainage issues that had presented itself, repairs to the road at the main intersection. I know the main entrance had been tricky with the traffic limited to one lane. So again, thanks for your patience.

CONDEMNATIONS

I am thrilled that we were able to apply for the LCDBG grant and if the environmental review is accepted, the grant will help with the condemnation process within our Town limits. As many of you know, after the hurricanes of 2020 we had multiple damaged properties and as of this writing we have condemned 27 properties over the last 21 months and to date 9 of those have been cleared. This is a very lengthy process on each property. Fortunately, with the grant a lot of the process has been done and the remaining 17 properties. We are hoping the cleanup will be completed within the next 6 to 9 months.

ROAD REPAIRS

Over the past 21 months we have spent over fifty thousand dollars on nearly 60 different areas in town with asphalt issues. We do have more of these small repairs to do and will continue to do so until we begin the major repairs of resurfacing. With limited funds we will need to be proactive in acquiring funding for major road resurfacing. Thanks for your understanding as we continue to work through these issues.

DEQ / WATER SECTOR

In our most recent council meeting the town was given the authority to move forward with a pre-application with DEQ and to proceed with a Water Sector grant opportunity. These are two separate opportunities for funding a singular project. We feel confident that with the need we have; this is something that will become reality. The project itself is our Wastewater Facility/ Oxidation Pond. As some of you know, after the hurricanes of 2020 the town had to pursue legal action for insurance pay out. Having finally completed the repairs some 5 months ago, we had major damage again to the million-dollar UV resistant cover. Some 6 weeks later a severe thunderstorm created tree and limb damage throughout town. As this was not a named storm the insurance will not cover the damage, so we reassessed the facility. Moving forward with what we are calling the "Wastewater Facility Hardening and Upgrading Project". This project will eliminate the UV cover with a system that will not be susceptible to minor thunderstorms and will be more beneficial to the outfall. The upgrade will also double the capacity of our system. This will give us years of additional growth. If you have any questions or concerns, as always, I can be reached by email at mayor@iowala.org or phone 337-513-5221.

CAPITAL OUTLAY

Once again, this year we are moving forward with outlay requests and high on our priority list is the Stephen Vincent Emergency Operation Center. This will eventually house the police department. We have been made aware that there is limited funding available through the state this year so we will be presenting the project scope and splitting into phases for funding. Additionally, we will be requesting funds for a proposed road that will help relieve school traffic congestion as well as access away from the railroad tracks in the event of an emergency.

At the time of this writing, we will be holding a special meeting, related to submitting another outlay request regarding a new street that will connect West Miller with Railroad Ave. This is something that has been discussed for years. This is very vital to reduce traffic congestion which in turn will help encourage economic development. This will also benefit middle and high school congestion during sporting events. This road would give our current fire station a direct route to HWY 90, also allowing our residents on north storer a way out in the unlikely event of a rail issue.

We are highly aware that the state has very little funding available, our aim in submitting again this year is to have these items given a priority number for funding/partial funding the following year.

Related to but not part of "Capital Outlay" is a possibility of other funding mechanisms that I will continue to pursue, as it is my opinion these are vital aspects to economic development.

OTHER GRANTS/FUNDING

CITY LIFT STATION Outfall Improvement project will be starting the 2 or 3rd week of November – Residents on North Storer please take note and keep an eye on the town Facebook page or sign up for town alerts via the website iowala.org for updates as the entrance of N. Storer will be shut down for a handful of days. The alternative route will be to enter and exit through the park. Please be mindful and respectful of the posted speed limits and be aware of pedestrians.

SEWER MANHOLES is a project to raise several of the manholes. This project will help stop storm water infiltration into our wastewater pond, thus reducing the amount of labor and chemicals. This will be systematic over the next few years, tackling the worst issues first.

SOUTHLAND ESTATES- I am excited to announce that we have executed a task order with Blue Wing Civil and they will begin the survey process that will lead to contracts to fix the drainage issues that have plagued this area for years. The town has been awarded funding for this project through the CPPJ Trust fund. I would like to thank Mr. Tony Stelly with the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury in his support for this funding.

CITY HALL & WWTP SEWER PUMP STATION REHABILITATION UPGRADE -This is a vital part of our infrastructure that we have given priority to for the town's overall ability to handle economic growth. This is part of the plan to continue to stabilize our wastewater system through methodical upgrades and repairs. These 2 specific pump stations will be completely rebuilt and will also have backup generators as part of our storm hardening. As we've completely rebuilt one pump station last year, completing these 2 will leave us 6 lift stations to upgrade over the next few years. This is also a project that CPPJ helped acquire funding through the CDBG-DR.

TOURISM GRANT- This is the second year in a row that we have received this grant, and we are excited that this year a portion of these funds will help us with both the Chili (December 7th) and Gumbo cook-off (January 4th). Each will have a 1st place cash prize of \$500 and trophy, 2nd place prize of \$200 and a 3rd place prize of \$75. We will have live music for both occasions. All proceeds for these events will help support the cost of the Mardi Gras Parade/Chicken Run.

IOWA FIRE DEPARTMENT

A huge shout-out to Chief Lantier for all her efforts over the past year, her attention to detail has improved our Volunteer Fire Department. I am happy to announce that through the efforts of my office, Chief Lantier is now working out the details to rebuild the old fire station on HWY 90. More information will follow. I also would like to recognize Fire Board Chairman Phil Mallet with the fine job that he is doing in his capacity. I do know that the continued struggles of staffing with volunteers has become more of an issue, due to the change imposed by the new insurance company. If you know anyone that is willing to volunteer to reach out to Chief Lantier at 337 244 5408. Also, a few tickets remain for the "Purses & Pistol Bingo" on November 2nd. Call for your ticket before it's too late!

CLOSING

In closing, I am thankful for the opportunities that I have had over the last couple of years to serve the people of Iowa. I look forward to the future and will continue to be fiscally responsible, and ethically motivated to be a better servant of the people of Iowa.

May God bless you and your household over the next couple of months as we celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I am reminded in our time of need as a country, of the scripture/verse Luke 1:37 "For with God nothing shall be impossible".

Remember to vote November 5th if you haven't already!

God bless Iowa and the United States of America



Mayor, Douglas N Watkins