

Town of Iowa

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Monthly Mayors Report

August/September 2023

THE UGLY

Extreme Heat/ Drought: The dog days of summer have been truly that and then some! Not only do we have to be cautious about physical overheating but the continual risk of fire. Please be mindful of your surroundings and if you see something please report it. Please bear in mind that a couple of the fires that have been set were started with lawn mowers. Just a spark is all it takes during this drought and heat.

Water Lines: As some of you are aware we have had an unusually high number of water line repairs. The heat and drought have caused the ground to dry out and to contract, which places strains on the pipes leading to leaks. Please, if you do notice standing water, please call town hall to report. Our water is a valuable resource, and we need to be good stewards of our natural resources.

Ash Ridge: The repair work regarding the sink holes has come to a significant stand still. The heat/drought has presented a few complications that have prevented us from moving forward with the repairs. The ground has become very hard to dig even with the excavator, what normally would take us about 15 minutes to repair around a meter box is taking hours as we are having to scrape the ground instead of digging. The number of leaks that we have encountered over the last 7 to 8 weeks has moved our labor into making sure that we are staying on top of these repairs.

It is our hope that as we move into mid-September that we have more rain and less heat so that our repair crew can get back to this issue. It is our hope that all the repairs in Ash Ridge be completed by the 1st of December. We would like to take the time to thank you for being patient during this time.

Mayor's Report: As you can see this mayor's report covers both August and September. The month of August has been a very active one. My apologies for the delay.

THE BAD

TOWN BUDGET: Yes, it's here again, but thanks to the continued inflation it appears that this will be a trend. One of the revenue streams for the town during the month of July is down 7.4%. Our sales tax for July was also down by about 1.5%. Reports that we received back in May indicated that the revenues would trend upwards. However, based on the down numbers since January and the losses in revenue in the previous year we chose to reduce our budget to reflect the fiscal year 2021. It appears we were correct in that assumption as the numbers are closer to the year 2021 than the projected numbers for 2023.

INFRASTRUCTURE: In February of this year, I submitted over half a dozen streets into a program we were hoping would reduce the cost of overlays and street repairs. Just recently the bid that was returned did not have the cost savings we had anticipated. There are many more areas that will need to be addressed and hopefully I will be able to have a list of roads that will be slated for repair/overlay. My best guess is that we would not see any work begin on these until next September or October. This may only be one or two, but we will need to begin the process of scheduling our infrastructure needs.

Drainage is another infrastructure issue that the heat, water leaks, and manpower has brought to a halt. Provided we can catch a break from the leaks, we intend to start the jetting of the culverts. It is our intent to have all the culverts jetted by December of this year.

Waste Management: Many of you across town have had issues over the last couple of months regarding trash pick-up. We do keep a log of the issues that are reported to us, and we try and address them in a timely manner. Waste Management, over the last few months, has gotten very lax with making sure that ALL trash cans are picked up. Calling Waste Management is the right thing to do to report your trash can is not being picked up, however after you make that call, please call town hall and let us know as well so that we can follow up with Waste Management.

Lack of Community: This is a topic that will probably promote backlash, but times have changed. There are so few opportunities in today's world that give you a chance to slow down and get to know your neighbors and guests to our town. Most are very quick to complain that there is nothing to do in town, or for that matter nothing family oriented. Yet here we are about to have our 3rd Farmers Market and so few in town take advantage of it. So many people that were eager for change in our town have now drifted into the background, some clinging to racial divides. And for what purpose? So many are quick to complain about the lack of a sit-down restaurant, or things for our kids to do. It pains me to say this but if you were sincere in your words the actions would be your involvement in our community. You beg for the return of the Rabbit Festival, and I wonder why? Negativity is at the heart of the issue, as it appears it's easier to complain about something than to do something that will help. For those that have come out to support the community I would like to personally thank you. I encourage you to reach out to your neighbors and friends to become involved. When was the last time you did something that helped someone else? We wonder what has become of our children, when we should ask what has become of us as adults. Children learn from us, and it appears that we are no longer teaching them. Some of you remember days past when respect, honesty and hard work were on the menu and when the time came always a helping hand. I am not suggesting a utopia, just common decency that can help restore our family values and traits no matter where you live in our town.

Things we have an opportunity to restore or create in our town and all they need is your support and help.

Iowa Garden Club, Veteran's Day Parade/Festival, Summer work Program for Students, Litter Brigade just to name a few things.

Become involved in your local church, help families in need, let's get back to our roots by stepping away from the distractions of social media and TV. Join me in getting back to the community!

THE GOOD

Farmers Market: The September market was better than the first one in August, as we had many more vendors attend. We also had some locals come out and play some Cajun music. The market gave out some gifts with a raffle- the raffle was FREE! We are hoping that every market moving Forward will have this free raffle. We have already secured the raffle items for October, and we also have gift cards of \$25, \$50 and \$100 to give away! We will also be giving away other items, so be sure to attend, need not be present when we draw names to win.

This market is about our community, if you have time come out and support it, even if you are on a spending freeze it is still an enjoyable time, meet your neighbors, listen to music and just visit. Also, a reminder free face painting for the kids.

Assessment: Currently we are in the process of having our wastewater system assessed, this assessment will be used to help us identify deficiencies as well as what is needed to increase our capacity for the system. We will accomplish the same task on the water system as well in the near future.

Comprehensive Plan: Growth in our town of Iowa is inevitable, so we are developing an Economic Development Plan for the town of Iowa. An integral part of this plan is to develop a 30-acre plot of land between East Miller and I-10. During the last administration the council authorized moving forward on what will be known as the "Stephen Vincent Emergency Operation Center". As many of you know, between the town staff and the police station town hall has been outgrown. This E.O.C. will be the new home of the police department. As the information shows that the growth of the town will be to the northeast, we feel this was the ideal central location for the police department. Additionally, we are looking at a potential public/private partnership to help erect a structure on the north side of this property that would be seen as you drive along I-10, It is my hope to have some sort of easel and board located at town hall that shows the "ideas" of the potential development.

This plan is merely a guide to the future growth of the town of Iowa and in no way stipulates specifics any other projects save the EOC for the time being.

I continue to have conversations with both business developers and businesses about our coming to our area. I am encouraged by the possibilities that lie before us. This is not something that occurs overnight, and I would be ecstatic if construction of new businesses began within the next 2 years!

Once the survey of the land is completed, the capital outlay/ grants will be processed in hopes that we can begin construction on the E.O.C. in the fall of 2024.

Funds: I am happy to report that in this last legislative session that the town of Iowa was given additional funds that will go to purchasing needed tools and equipment that will allow the town to provide better and more efficient processes to maintaining our town. One of the pieces of equipment we are looking at is a walk behind ground penetrating Lidar so that we can locate underground utilities.

Geographic Information System Mapping (Gis): What is this? This is one of the ways that the town of Iowa can be more efficient in locating items such as water valves, sewer taps, manhole locations, etc. With an iPad the maintenance workers can locate any of the items that are part of the Gis by using coordinates. Recently I requested a re-assessment of a grant in hopes of repurposing the grant for equipment that collects data points needed for our infrastructure locations. I am happy to report that the equipment has been purchased and we have taken delivery. It is our hope we can begin this process in the last week of September. We are not sure about the time frame for the completion, but as the town grows, we will be able to add data to keep it current.

Capital Outlay: As part of the E.O.C. for the town, and in conjunction with the project we are also in parallel fashion having our street engineer submit a capital outlay request for the 3rd lane and boulevard that will run north from East Miller to the extreme north side of the property.

REMINDER - IOWA FARMERS MARKET: Saturday OCTOBER 7th. 8am-12 noon! Farmers Market is every first Saturday of the month. Please note the heat has created an issue with having fresh vegetables!

ADMINISTRATION

I have been very encouraged by the sporadic support of the people here in town as well as our elected officials. I would like to personally thank Senator Mark Abraham and Representative Troy Romero for all their support for our town. If you have time reach out to them or if you see them let them know you appreciate all they do for southwest Louisiana.

I am very excited to share with you that progress is being made in getting some of the damaged structures in our town cleaned up. It continues to be a slow process, but I am confident that the people of town are appreciative, as is evident by the calls and discussions had. I have been working on one particular property since the end of January and I am thrilled to say we are on the home stretch. One of our locals lives on property that has not had a succession for a couple of generations. The extended family members that do not reside on the property refused to work with them regarding the property. However, through a local businessman in town a lot has been purchased and gifted to the gentleman and the Mennonite Disaster Service will be building him a new house on his property. It does my heart good to see that there are people in our community that have both the ability and heart to help others. In the near future the old property will be cleaned up and the damaged structures will be cleared. Just one more step in taking pride in our town. There were others that were integral in helping make this happen and I personally would like to thank all involved.

As a reminder, on September 20, 2023, from 2-4 pm at the Iowa Community Center located at 207 Hwy 90 Iowa Louisiana. The District VII Garden Club invites all to attend. There will be refreshments and door prizes as well as an opportunity to "bid" on items created during the event. Please help support this endeavor and consider joining this organization.

Also, in the park we have begun the repairs needed on the back ball field. We are hoping that this project will be ready in time for the league play in March. I would like to thank councilman Daniel Hennigan for his help in this matter!

Regarding local businesses, when you can try and shop locally. Dollars spent here help all of us.

Mayors Chat: As a reminder, prior to each council meeting, I am making myself available for open conversations starting at 5:30 and ending at 6:30 pm. I simply request that we have respectful conversations, regardless of the topic.

Mayor Watkins