



TOWN OF BENTON
LOUISIANA

PUBLIC HEARING
MINUTES
TOWN OF BENTON
MONDAY, AUGUST 11, 2025, 6:30 PM

The Town of Benton Council met in a regular legal session on the 11th day of August 2025, at 6:30 p.m., in the Benton Council Chambers, Benton Town Hall, 105 Sibley Street, Benton, Louisiana. Mayor James Friday called the Public Hearing to order. Stephanie Collier, called the roll, with all members as follows:

Alderman Jackie Carr	PRESENT
Alderman Tiffany Manning	PRESENT
Alderman Tammy Brunson	PRESENT
Alderman Arshundae Perry	PRESENT
Alderman Terry Lawrence	PRESENT

Alderman Manning gave the invocation, and Alderman Lawrence led the pledge. Others present were Attorney Erwin, Stephanie Collier, Chief Collier, and members of the public.

Public hearing items were read on record:

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE 590 OF 2024 TO INCREASE THE RATES FOR WATER SERVICE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE TOWN OF BENTON

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN OF THE TOWN OF BENTON, BOSSIER PARISH, LOUISIANA, IN A REGULAR SESSION CONVENED, THAT ORDINANCE 590 OF 2024 BE HEREBY AMENDED INCREASING THE RATE FOR WATER SERVICE AS FOLLOWS:

WHEREAS THE RATE SCHEDULE FOR RESIDENTIAL WATER SERVICE INSIDE THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF BENTON SHALL BE SEVEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY-NINE CENTS (\$7.89) PER 1000 GALLONS, AND A FLAT FEE OF TWELVE DOLLARS AND THIRTEEN CENTS (\$12.13), AND

WHEREAS THE RATE SCHEDULE FOR COMPOUND METERS AND COMMERCIAL WATER SERVICE INSIDE THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF BENTON SHALL BE SEVEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY-NINE CENTS (\$7.89) FOR EVERY 1000 GALLONS, AND A FLAT FEE OF TWELVE DOLLARS AND THIRTY-EIGHT CENTS (\$12.38), AND

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WHEREAS THE RATE SCHEDULE FOR RESIDENTIAL WATER SERVICE OUTSIDE THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF BENTON SHALL BE EIGHT DOLLARS AND SIXTY CENTS (\$8.60) FOR EVERY 1000 GALLONS, AND A FLAT RATE OF SEVENTEEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY-EIGHT CENTS (\$17.88), AND

WHEREAS THE RATE SCHEDULE FOR COMPOUND METERS AND COMMERCIAL WATER SERVICE OUTSIDE THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF BENTON SHALL BE EIGHT DOLLARS AND SIXTY CENTS (\$8.60) PER 1000 GALLONS, AND A FLAT RATE OF EIGHTEEN DOLLARS AND THIRTEEN CENTS (\$18.13), AND

Mayor Friday read an article published by the Louisiana Rural Water Association about the costs associated with operating a public water system.

Mrs. Collier read a statement pertaining to the increase twelve years ago, when the flat rate was added simultaneously with an increase to the per 1,000-gallon rates. There have been no increases until 2024, when a federal grant required a rate study to be performed and mandated that we implement the study's results for the town to be awarded over three-quarters of a million dollars in federal funds. Mayor Friday explained that this increase is being passed down from Bossier City to the town and it consists of \$1 to the per 1000 gallons and \$3.38 to the flat rate. Bossier City had notified the town of this increase back in January. Mayor Friday called for public comments:

Mark Crouch 865 Old Plain Dealing Rd, Benton, La. Correct me if I am wrong, but are you going to vote tonight to raise the water rates in the city limits? Mayor Friday: Correct.

Crouch: Ok, May-June water bill and June-July water bill there is a notice at the bottom of the water bill saying the rates will be increased in August. Why was that put on the water bill if ya'll have not even voted yet? Did y'all discuss this in the backroom before a public meeting and y'all have decided that ya'll are gonna raise the water rates? Mayor: The council has known about this rate increase since February, when we got the letter from Bossier City letting us know there is going to be an increase. We have had several meetings and mentioned it several times.

Crouch: Are y'all going to vote tonight on the water rates in this meeting? Mayor: Didn't I answer that just a while ago! Crouch: You have not answered my question as to why the notice was put on the water bill for the last three months that y'all were going to raise the water rates. So, evidentially y'all have decided that y'all are going to raise the rates before y'all take a vote.

Mayor: We have not decided, that is why we have a public hearing. Crouch: Then why was it put on the water bill that there will be a rate increase? Mayor: It was a notice. Crouch: It is a notice that clearly states that there is going to be a water rate increase in August 2025. Mayor: I understand what you are saying. Do you have any other questions? Crouch: I don't think so.

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Mayor: Next.

Mr. Bridges: Good afternoon, Mayor. Thank you, Council. 217 Country Club Drive, Benton, Louisiana. I'm kind of in a conundrum. I live outside the city limits of Bossier and outside the city limits of Benton, and I am forced to use the services of this town's water. I don't have a vote on who sits in these seats or a vote on who sits in those seats. The best I can do is to get up here and explain my concern. First and foremost, I never heard a vote taken on tonight's agenda, mayor, before you went off and read the article. Was there an actual vote taken? On the agenda? Because according to the agenda... Mayor: It's on the agenda tonight,... Attorney Erwin: It's a public hearing. Mr. Bridges: Thank you, I appreciate you, thank you.

Mr. Bridges: And the other concern I have is that Mr. Crouch covered it about that being on the bill. And then do we have a MOU? or any type of contractual agreement with the city of Bossier? Does the town have that in place? I mean, do you have some skin in the game in terms of negotiating these rate increases that the city is imposing upon us? Mayor: They won't let us. We may ask. The previous administrations have all tried to negotiate price ratings and standards with the town of Bossier, and they said they will not do that because for some reason I haven't told them. But Mayor Horton said that he had talked to the town of Bossier, and they said they were not going to put it on where it could be regulated or where we could discuss it. They wouldn't let us talk about it Mr Bridges: So, just like me as an individual, I'm at your mercy raising my rates, are you telling me that the town of Benton is at the mercy of the city of Bossier? Mrs. Collier: Yes, the contract states that they only have to give us a six-month notification of their rate increase to us. Mr. Bridges: So, my initial question was is there a contract yes there is however you have no language to, protect the town and its residents from just arbitrarily... Mayor: They got in there it's I think it's one and a half uh increase uh what they uh for the water. Mr. Bridges: I recognize the fact that we're in a conundrum as far as that's concerned but mayor I highly recommend that your administration you come to the table down there with a little bit more force this area is growing it's not getting any smaller the burden of you just mentioned it having an increased size of pipes and services to this area is coming at the hands of your constituents. I highly recommend if there's any bargaining chip or way to bargain to get into some long-term contract with the city of Bossier cannot arbitrarily just at will impose those increases on this town. Mayor: Stephanie and I discussed that this afternoon, trying to find the old contract, if we have one that says what we can do that. But I was told before I took over the administration that there was no discussion of breaking it. Mr. Bridges: And I appreciate your time, Mayor, and I recognize you haven't been in the seat all that long. Mr. Bridges: The other, they did raise the rates back in July. I tried to go back on the website to research agendas and minutes, and I called today and asked for a copy of the agenda and was told that she would put it on there. And she did. And along with that with some statement about tonight's meeting and obviously why everybody's here, but I appreciate if we could those updated to the website so that we could be done with it. Mayor: Thank you. Mr. Bridges: Thank you for your time.

Mayor: Anyone else in the audience? Ron Jones, Highway 3. I was on the city council here for 20 years and we have always been at Bossier City's mercy when it comes to water. We've tried to tie them down to contracts and all that. They just won't do it. And so, we're at their mercy. If they want to raise

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water, they can do it anytime they want to. And we have no say in it. We've been very fortunate that they've kept their rates lower, probably than they have for the citizens of Bossier City. I hope they don't find out about that in Bossier City. We are very fortunate. Our water rates are lower probably than anybody else's around, and I understand what's going on. We just raised the rates just before I got out of office last year and we were told. we were told that we needed to raise our rates, keep in touch with it like every couple years by a certain percent so we can keep up with our water construction plans and things that we have to do to keep our water plants and our towers and all that stuff and that's what we're going to have to do. This is a big jump I guess from what we usually would do but if they jumped us that much then we've got to do the same. We can't give away free water. Mayor: Well our accounting firm has already mentioned that we're on the downside right now as well as you probably know. Ronnie has been on the council as I was on the council for 20 years as he just spoken as I just said. Mr. Jones: We have tried to negotiate, but it just has not been to our advantage to get anywhere. Mr. Jones: We even suggested having our own water system at one time. That was so costly that it was way cheaper to buy Bossier City's water than it was to do that. Now, at some point in time, it might not be. It might be something we have to look at. But right now, it's not, I don't think. Mayor: Well, the thing is that the people have an option to either stay on the water system, receive good drinking water. We test, and we help Louisiana investigate. We help the management. What's the new one called? Wagner. Mayor: Wagner Group, yes. Thank you. Wagner Associates. The engineers help protect our water system and make sure that... We're getting good water, design our systems to where you folks have water that you can drink out of your faucet or you can flush your toilets so you don't have to worry about it. But the thing is, we're only saying in this meeting what they charge us. It's just simply that if we were producers of tires or selling cars or something like that, we do have some kind of advantage. We don't have any kind of advantage over it.

Mayor: So, anyone else? Thank you, Ronnie.

Mr. Crouch: So Mayor, can I say one more thing? As of right now, as it stands right now, every time, just say three months from now or six months from now, every time Bossier City raises their rates to y'all, y'all are going to raise our rates. Is that correct? Mayor: That's a good point, let me tell you. All right, they sent us a letter.

Dear Mayor Friday, This letter serves as a notice to inform that this was dated, January 17th, 2025. Dear Mayor Friday, this letter serves as a notice to inform the town of an upcoming rate increase for water that will be effective August the 1st, 2025 and January 1st, 2026. They were gonna do it twice. Now, we went ahead and combined August the 1st and January the 1st together and just set a fee, whether we lose or win with Bossier City, then that's the way it's gonna be. Because the next water rate increase from us, unless there's a dramatic change from Bossier City will be in about three years.

Mr. Crouch: I agree with Mr. Bridges, there is, y'all have, now and in the past, y'all have tried to negotiate a contract with Bossier City to get up to where they can't do this, and there's no progress on that. They will not discuss. Mayor: I was not mayor at the time. As far as I know, that's correct. And

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we have tried before. Mr. Crouch: Have you tried it since you've been mayor? Mayor: No. To talk to them? No. Mr. Crouch: Is that something in the works that you're going to try to talk with them? Mayor: Yes, I will see Tommy tomorrow. Mr. Crouch: And see if y'all can get a set contract. Mayor: We will talk to him and see what he says, because he has to go before his council, just like us, we have to go to our council. Mr. Crouch: Reading Mr. Redford's comments, and I agree with him. Hey, if Bossier City raises the rates to the town of Benton, y'all got to pass it on to the citizens of Benton to operate. I understand that. And this hasn't been your administration. As Mr. Jones said, this has been going on for 25 or 30 years that y'all are at the will of Bossier City. I'm not blaming you, and I'm not blaming the past administration, but I agree with Mr. Bridges. Something should have been settled on this a long time ago. I mean, everything's going up. I mean, there's people out here on the fence. Mayor: Okay, but not to cut you short, but you're getting off the subject of what we're talking about here. I appreciate your time, and I appreciate you coming back forward to bring that up. Thank you.

Mayor: Anyone else? Yes, ma'am. My name is Erica Ballew, and I'm in 914 Wright Ave., I didn't get a rate sheet, but I swear this water has been raised recently, not in the last five years. And I just, I agree with everybody else. If we're beholden to Bossier City, then we're screwed. Like, they can just raise their rates at any time, and we just have to take it. And that's not really going to work for the people, you know. Also, this is my first time coming to a public hearing, and I have to just be honest that I really don't like the way you're combative with the residents. And we're all affected, just as you are. And I don't care that Mark Crouch has been online saying things. I haven't seen anything that you say, by the way. But everybody gets a little bit more respect, and I think we can all work together. But right now, that's not what I feel like. It's happening and I feel like it's at the detriment to our town. So that's all I have to say. I feel like we have to, Mayor: We are not here to talk about character, we are here to talk about water rates. Ms. Bellew: I heard you, I heard you. Don't get rude with me because I'm not gonna stand for it. So, at this point, you work for us, you are a public servant for us, us. We are not being, I'm not being rude to you. Mayor: Im not being rude. Bellew: No, okay, you are. You're cutting me off and I haven't finished what I'm saying and it is a little bit about character. Because we are trusting you to go to Bossier on our behalf and if this is the attitude you have, I can tell you now, Tommy Chandler's not gonna listen to you, cuz I know him. He's not gonna hear anything you have to say. We have to go and make an agreement so we are not beholden to Bossier City. We are now paying, because you guys are gonna vote for this tonight. It's gonna go through, cuz we didn't really have a choice, did we? You just had to notify the people, cuz that's your bylaws, but you did put it on our bills two months ago. And so you had every intention of pushing this through without really us coming here and saying anything. Bellew: So it's not personal, it's business. A lot of people are on fixed income and cannot afford these rate increases all the time. So if we can get to the table with Bossier City, that's our best bet, and I'm hoping your administration will do that. So that's all I have to say, and thank you so much. Mayor: Thank you, appreciate your time.

Mr. Jones: I wanna say one more thing. The reason why Bossier City probably doesn't want to sign the contract, from being on the council, I saw how much the chemicals went up over the last few years to treat the water. And they don't know how much it's gonna go up in Bossier City to treat the water that comes to us. So they could give us a price and then their chemicals go way up and they would lose money. I'm just saying, they don't know either. We don't know and they don't know. There's just a lot of things that we don't know.

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Mayor: Next? I'm Mike Collier. I live outside the city limits. I have seven buildings inside the city limits. I pay a lot of water. I have no problem with the increase. I got to pass on costs just like you do. That's just business. We can't grow if we go in the hole. We got to stay even right here every time. I have no problem with the rate increase.

Mayor: I'll tell y'all out in the audience, we do have a public hearing before every meeting, and you're welcome to come at any time.

Anyone else? Ms. Carr? Mayor: Go ahead. Mrs. Carr: So, Mayor, I understand what you're saying. But I understand what Stephanie just read. But my understanding, because I would understand. So, my understanding is when we raised the rates last year, they had not been raised in about 13 years. Okay? But in those 13 years, Bossier has increased, passed the price increase up to us. We didn't run and let the citizens know. Okay, another thing we've got all this brand new equipment. I love it. A brand new system that we should be able to use. We have not used any, so I'm just saying, waste. I also was the 27 tahoe repair over \$8,000. Stephanie, the guy that they took it to, Precision, that's your brother. Mrs. Collier: What? Precision, the \$8,000 for a 2017 Tahoe. Is that not your brother? Mrs. Collier, yes, it is. Mrs. Carr: I would think that's a prohibited transaction. Mayor, you come in here, you have all these really nice shirts. Your daughter made those. Then you got all these other fees that you expect the citizens to pay. We never had all of those fees, so it just makes me wonder. Are y'all passing all of this so that you can cover up all the misuse that appears to be going on? Because that's what it seems to me. You're paying your daughter, you're taking Mr. Chance, and you're taking them out to eat. All of that is on them. We're paying Stephanie, brother. How do we know that that was a fair price on a 27 tahoe? But all of that's been passed off. The beginning of the year, you knew Stephanie needed an assistant. Stephanie got a 12% raise, and she got an assistant. Somebody had to pay for that. And when Ms. Vickie was here during the audit, and she was talking about, you know, I asked her specifically what some of that, what she was talking about, was in payroll. Because we have people up inside of the office that are getting overtime. But we have an answering service for all of that. So I'm just, I don't care what was on social media. I'm just confused. Because in those 13 years, we didn't, y'all didn't pass on all of these rates. And I understand what Mr. Crouch is saying. You put that on those water bills like you passed a final say-so. So, I'm just, I'm trying to figure out, I wanted to know why it was on the water bill. But because you do be combative, I just let because I knew this day was coming. So, I'm just saying, it seems like there's a lot of waste going on, but then you want to put in money to pay. Mayor: I understand that, but my question is to you, Mrs. Carr, you've been on the council for nine years. Nine years. Mrs. Carr: I have. Mayor: And you're now just speaking up? Mrs Carr: Mayor, because it's you. No, no, no. You are the one that increased the water bill. You are the one, as long as I've been on this council, the town clerk never had an assistant before. At the last meeting, I asked Mrs. Debbie to go get me something. Bless her heart, she didn't know what I was asking for. Mrs. Carr: So, what is she doing? Is she being paid overtime every time she's at this meeting? That's what it is. Because we all know you tend to not really give us what we need. Mayor: I do give you what you need. Mrs. Carr. No you don't. When it comes to this expenditure report. On this balance sheet right here, is not reflected in the expenditures. Mayor: I don't understand. Mrs. Carr: I know you don't, but your clerk do.

Mrs. Collier: And what are you insinuating by saying that? Mrs. Carr: No, you don't want to go there. Mrs. Collier: Yes, I do want to go there because I don't want you insinuating any kind of misuse of money around here when that is not the case. Mrs. Carr: (inaudible) Mrs. Collier: Don't overspeak me. Mrs. Carr: Oh I can. Mrs: Collier: I'm telling you right now, there is no kind of inaccuracies with the balance sheets. And if you want to point them out after the meeting, you are more than welcome to come to my office after the meeting.

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Mrs. Carr: Oh I will. Mrs. Collier: good. Okay, well, I'll be in my office. Mrs. Carr: So while we're paying all of the repair shops are running. Mayor: Ok, We're getting off of the public hearing on the water. Mrs Carr: Oh, of course we are. Mayor: So let's get back to what's on there, and we'll get on the other part here and the other regular business.

Mayor: Ms. Manning? Ms. Manning: Okay, I do remember last year when we raised the rates and Mr. Jones I do agree with you on that. And in that meeting, one of the things he said was, that we would raise the rate every couple of years. So let me make sure I read what I wrote. So just because, Ms. Carr made a good point, just because Bossier raised the rate doesn't automatically require the town of Benton to raise its water rates. It's for- Just because the supplier increased their rate. And the fact that the town was alarmed, and the fact that the town alarmed the citizens, of the presumptuous notice before the public hearing, has been very chaotic. We just had a water rate increase last June or July, I believe, and with that increase, the council had several workshops. We did a water study. I remember a young lady, she came, and she did a PowerPoint presentation, showing us what was going on and why this was important for us to ensure the best practices [inaudible] before we made it public. However, I know you said, Mayor, that you verbally stated to us about the rate increase in January, and in other meetings, however, I do not recall this board having any workshops or any rate studies conducted or any cost effectiveness concerning this increase to discuss the increase amounts before it got to this point. Yes, the auditors made a recommendation. Even with that, there has not been any discussion with the town board member concerning these rates that are in the ordinance. So my question is, who came up with these numbers because we did not, and what financial justification was used to make the decision of the amount of these rates? Because in 2024, we met and discussed, and we said there were different numbers going out. Because in 2024, we met and we discussed and we said there was different numbers going out, \$5, \$3, \$1 here, \$1 there, but we did not, this board did not have an opportunity to have any input on the amount. I know you said that the amount is coming from Bossier. So, what is the amount? Mayor: And their amount, whatever they're charging us over the water system. And then, but you gotta remember, they sell water. We got it. So, they have a product, they sell it. I know. We don't. We have to in order for you to have a account, we have to increase our rate of all the things that goes into the maintenance, the piping, the pump, the medication of the water. Everything so that you have good, healthy water. So, all of that is built into an amount of water. Now to detail it out, I would have to get with my superintendents. and stuff, pro-rein and everything that go into this to give you some kind of answer. Ms. Manning: So, Bossier gives you.... Mayor: Bossier City increased per thousand a certain amount, and then whatever that amount was, we put it on the agenda, and we passed it on. Ms. Manning: Okay, so we don't know what the amount is, but you can, somebody can, because this board didn't. We can, it can be said that we're going to charge \$7.89. So, my question is, how did you come up with these numbers? Because the board wasn't presented with the amount. Like, for instance, when mayor horton was here, he said we're going up this amount and then we discussed it. You know, you was a councilman at that time. And we all discussed, like, what level would be reasonable or the position was because we hadn't had a rate increase in a very long time. And we all agreed on that, but we all came to the table with a workshop discussing these numbers. So my question is, what was the increase for Bossier, and how are these numbers justified?

Mrs. Collier: Can I answer that? Mayor: Yes, please. Mrs. Collier: In 2024, Mayor Horton brought it to the council because the rate study produced the fact that we needed to add \$5.25 to our rates. We brought it to the council to figure out how we were going to add it. Were we going to add it to the per thousand gallons, a dollar here, a dollar there? And the council chose to put the majority of it on the outside customers versus the inside customers. So, the bulk of it went to all the flat rates. We didn't do any per 1,000 gallons upon y'all's decision, and it went to the flat rates, and the bulk of it went to the outside customers. That was the \$5.25 rate. This year,

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the way we came up with the numbers was exactly what Bossier City was increasing us by. Ms. Manning: And what is that increase again, I'm asking? Mrs. Collier: You can do the math. It's on the paper. You've got the paper in front of you.

Ms. Manning: Who came up with these numbers? Mrs. Collier: Bossier City did. Ms. Manning: Bossier City came up with what we're going to charge the inside customers \$7.89. Is that what you're saying, Mayor? Do you have to do that? I'm just asking. Well, all I have is the water rate fee that was presented to me, the same one that you have, where it was before. Ms. Manning: So that we can have an understanding, I'm asking, is this what Bossier City sent to us? That's what I'm asking. Mrs. Carr: So Bossier City is telling you that you need to raise the rate by these amounts? Mayor: Yes. Mrs. Collier: Because that's what they increased ours.

Mrs. Carr: But at the last meeting Mr. Friday said that what you all were doing was what you were taking the last few months in the year, and he said that that was going to raise the water rate. I think you know, next year, and you added that to, and that how you came up with that amount. Yeah, you just said that the rates was going to be raised in August 4th first, and then January 1st, and so you took those two amounts to come up. Mayor: Yes, town of Bossier is going to do that, and so we only went on the basis of what it would cost for this year, 2025. The 2026, we went with the sort. There would not be another rate increase.

Ms. Manning: Okay, I just wanted to make it clear to the public so we can know that from what I understand and hear you saying, we did not come up with these rates. Bossier City came up with these rates. Mayor: This is just an add-on to what we already have. Okay. The rates that you... You and I voted on last year, and we're just adding on...

Mrs. Carr: But 2026 is not here. Mayor: That's correct so we will absorb any difference. Mrs. Carr: So what I'm saying is, so what you did was, you took the last few months, August, September, October, November, December. So, inside of those amounts right there, but you also added January through December of 2026. Mayor: Yes.

Ms. Manning: Oh, okay.

Mayor: Instead of bringing it back to y'all. Mrs. Carr: Okay, but do you know what, how much Bossier gonna charge you for next year? In 2026? Mayor: No. Mrs. Carr: Okay. It just don't make sense. It just... Mayor: I know it doesn't. Mrs. Carr: They may not even give us this next year, in 2026, but we're going to increase everybody's cost. Mayor: If it was a large amount, I would say it's not that big of an amount.

Ms. Manning: It is a big amount. I do. It is. I'm sorry. Thank you for allowing me. But it is a jump because it's affecting the amount that we currently pay. And my concern is, and I think where it undermines this board, is that we did not come together to have a workshop to discuss this. Even when, because I've only been on, this is my second term, and I know for certain that the last administration, we labored on this a couple of meetings to discuss. And so I think. I think that undermines this board that we did not have that opportunity. So the bottom line that I have is that raising rates may be necessary since the suppliers increase significantly, since the suppliers increase us, but how significantly would this impact our water budget and this shouldn't be based on well they raised their rates but it should be based on policy to make the decision and not just because they raised their rates because we know that we do not have to raise the rates because there's been gaps in the time frames that we have raised the rates. And so I have a couple of questions from my district.

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Q: What steps have or have been taken by the town to reduce expenses before passing on this cost to the residence? Ms. Manning: Have you looked at that? Mayor: The cost of upgrading, as we have Core and Maine coming in to discuss upgrading the water system, we have spent X number of dollars out changing meters and fixing meters. People had registers that were not working, and we didn't have the personnel to do that. So we spent two days or three days, we had people out working eight hours a day, six o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, to change out registers off meters that needed to be changed so that we could get an accurate water reading. We were losing money because the meters were not accurate.

Ms. Manning: What steps has the town taken to reduce expenses to avoid passing the costs on to residence? So what you're saying is the meters are out? Mayor: You can't do a reduction when everything is going up yeah everything that we talk about is going up there is there's no way we don't manufacture this we are at the mercy of buying water we're at the mercy of Bossier and we're we have to do that with chemicals we have to do it with piping with repairs if your water line breaks down the street and you're out of water. Who are you going to call? Are you going to go down there and repair it or are you going to call the Town of Benton to go down there? And if they find out some have the equipment, we'll have to contract to a contractor that can fix it rapidly and quickly enough to get your water back on.

Ms. Manning: Yeah i understand um the importance of having a water rate I do but it's not automatically just because the, Bossier parish raises our rate it doesn't mean we automatically have to raise our rate on our constituents. We can... We can hold off another couple of months or to next year to see. We have that capability because when I look at the water budget, we're not hurting. We're not hurting by any means. The town of Benton is taken care of very well with this administration and with past administrations. So my concern is because we recently just had an increased rate, I would consider us holding off having another rate so close in proximity so that we can allow more time to process. And do research. Alternative funding, I mean, we can look at grants, we can look at, what can we look at to help offset this cost for our residents? Because like you say, everybody knows that we have inflation. However, is it necessary at this time for us to have it when we just did it? And my answer would be, you know, my answer would be to that, no, it's not necessary right now because we just had increases. And I think somebody said that there are more fees that are going to be coming down the pipeline that can affect our pockets as well. So I'm, I'm, we're not voting, but I definitely support my constituents. I definitely support the time of vote. I've been and understand that we do need water. And I know water is not free, but I think that we can't wait because we're not in, we're not in the desert. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you so much. Mrs. Tammy? Mrs. Brunson: No

Mayor: Okay. Mrs. Perry? Mrs. Perry: No

Mayor: Okay. Mr. Mayor? I mean, sorry. I'm sorry. All right. Well, that will, we will call an adjournment to the meeting, so if you like, you can go. If you don't, whatever you'd like to stay, the public hearing will be.

Ms. Manning: Before we close, before we close, my question was not answered. Who, let me make sure the question was answered. You said, Bossier City. I just want to make sure, because I want my constituents are clear, that Bossier City came up with those numbers. Mayor: No, no, they didn't tell us what to raise the rate at. In the contract, in any contract, when they sell us the water, it is left up to the town to do their rating of, set the rate as per cited for the town. Ms. Manning: Okay, and so, that's a no. Now, my question is, who came up with this rate? Because the council board did not, we did not have any input in these numbers. Mayor: The water department and the clerk. Ms. Manning: The clerk and the water department decided to do it.

Mrs: Collier: They were based and increased only by the amount that Bossier City increased us.

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Ms. Manning: So the... Board members, Mr. Ron and Ms. Carr can attest to that when their water rate increases, the board had input on the amount. And it was not an isolated decision. I...I... I'm baffled now that that has been revealed. I'm baffled that the clerk made the decisions for all the residents of the town of Benton.

Mrs. Collier: You're misconstruing it, right there. Ms. Manning: That's what I just said. Mrs. Carr: I doubt it. Because you cant answer the question as to why your brother...

Mrs. Collier: That is not part of this discussion. The discussion is Bossier City increased our rates and we passed the exact same, no more, that was increased us. onto the customer. Mrs. Carr: Ok Stephanie Mrs. Collier: That's it. There's not one penny more on there. There's not one cent more. The amount was what Bossier City increased us. That's it. No more. Mrs. Carr: All we got is your word and it don't mean a lot to me.

Mayor called for a motion to adjourn the public hearing. Alderman Carr made a motion seconded by Alderman Brunson to adjourn.

All in favor: 5 Ayes. All opposed: None

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**REGULAR SESSION MEETING
MINUTES
TOWN OF BENTON
MONDAY, AUGUST 11, 2025, 6:30 PM**

Mayor called the Regular Session Meeting to order.

Mayor called for a motion to approve the Regular Session agenda. A motion made by Alderman Lawrence seconded by Alderman Perry to approve the regular session agenda. Mayor Friday called for public comments. There being none the following vote was recorded.

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

Mayor called for a motion to approve the July minutes. A motion made by Alderman Carr seconded by Alderman Perry to approve the July minutes. Mayor Friday called for public comments. There being none the following vote was recorded.

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

OLD BUSINESS:

Ordinance 609 of 2025 it is considered a final vote. This is for Ordinance Amending the water rates. This is an Ordinance Amending Ordinance 590 of 2024 to increase the rates for the water service inside and outside of the Town of Benton.

Before we have comments, do we have a motion and a second?

A motion by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Perry to open the discussion

Mayor Called for public comments before we vote:

Mark Crouch: Mrs. Brunson are you my council person? Alderman Brunson: Yes Crouch: Why haven't you commented on this rate increase? Alderman Brunson: I have not been able to talk to you about it. It costs money to run the town. We don't get water for free. Crouch: I understand. Mrs. Brunson, you represent me, which you have not done. Ms. Manning and Mrs. Carr represent people in their district and why haven't you gotten up and spoke about the concerns either yeah or nay. Mrs. Brunson: I am not going to be in no conflict.

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Again, Mr. Bridges, 273 Pennsylvania Drive. Again, I live outside the city limits, so I don't have a vote whether it sits on this board or not. I think, though, it's important to recognize that there's some things that came to light in the previous meeting prior to this meeting where a vote would be taken regarding the water rate increases. And I think the council should reconsider putting this before a vote tonight and table it for at least another month. I'm not opposed to water rate increases. I understand that all my questions were answered tonight regarding how the city of Bossier has the town of Benton hamstrung. I don't agree with that, but... It's 20 years they've done it. I can't answer that myself. Yes, but today's a new day, and I think today's a new day when you start having citizen input to the level that you have back here regarding one particular agenda item, and I think it sounds like the process and how this is being put forward to the council is slightly flawed, but that's a good way to put it. I agree that the council should be the ultimate say-so and in terms of rate increases, if in fact it went down as it was stated here in this meeting. I'd recommend the council have the ability to amend what's on this agenda or you just like you did prior to being approved. They have the ability. You can voice your opinions about tabling this for another month at least until further information is gathered. I don't think 30 days is going to hinder any of the other time to proceed forward with any maintenance or any other problem thank you.

Mayor: Thank you appreciate it all right now what he just said uh when we go to vote probably takes three of you right now to approve, now this is if you decide to table this thing here you need to speak up and say so and then we'll and it only takes three of you to turn it down or approve.

Ms. Manning I think we know the procedure on voting. I am really really concerned that the board did not have a workshop to have input and this says a lot about how this administration of how things are operating. And I'm very concerned that this was an isolated incident. And it really speaks to, I think someone said it today, the administration of how things are operating. And I believe in the administration, and I believe that we will do what's right for us, for the city. But for us to not have input on this decision, when I know we could have had input on this decision, baffles me. And it undermines this board. And I will... The table is, but my real answer is it's going to be in the book. I mean, I'm disappointed, Mayor, because we did not. We did not. We did not post this. We mentioned. We did not have a workshop. The board members did not have the opportunity to discuss this with you. We did not have any input in this. And you have said so many different things, so many contradictory things tonight about this whole process. It concerns me. I know we need to raise the rate, I mean, increase the water rate. And I don't have a problem with it. But the transparency, I do have a problem with that. And the honesty to our constituents. I do have a problem with that, because we are here to serve, and we want to be transparent, open and honest, but no, we did not, the board did not have an opportunity to discuss this in a workshop. It was mentioned by pass.

Mrs. Carr: My constituents, they depend on me to do the right thing, and of course they don't. I think there's been a lot of mismanagement, a lot of excess spending, unnecessary spending, that if all of that hadn't happened, maybe this increase these last four or five months would be enough. So I would suggest they do this.

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I have a motion and a second for the final vote, and now we have a motion to table this, for another, at the next meeting or the meeting after that. Do I have a motion to table this? Alderman Carr made a motion to table Alderman Manning seconded to table Ordinance 609

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence

Nays: None

Abstain: None

Mayor Friday stated it will be set for a workshop before the next council meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

My name is Ricky Ruffino, I'm with Core and Main. I'm the water meter specialist for the state of Louisiana, the great state of Louisiana. And what we propose, and I work with my team, my local team, is kind of getting the town of Benton to the next step in the efficiency of water meter reading. And currently, what y'all do is y'all drive by, you get a read once a month. So you have one data point per month of when they could get there. So what we're proposing and talking to the town about is moving to an advanced meter. So what that looks like is you're putting up a tower basis to where you're collecting and pulling information from your water meters on a more routine basis. And what that allows is, as we know, we just talked about water rates are going up, right? Water is getting more expensive, right? So we want to have more efficiency and a better understanding of where things are going. So one thing is we could look at putting a meter where it comes in from Bozer, so you know what your input is, right? So you know what your input is, and then once you know your system, your meters within your system, then you have a good understanding of what you're out for. What are you billing for? What are you not billing for? What's being missed? So what we're looking at is creating that umbrella over the city to where you can pull that information in with an advanced meter and infrastructure so you have that . You can see, you pull up a report in the morning. You can look at your top ten people, top ten users. If Ms. Jones is in there and you know it's usually ten businesses, you know something's going wrong at Ms. Jones' house, right? And you can have a courtesy to call on Ms. Jones and say, Ms. Jones, something's not right. You can do that now, but when you're going over to drive-by systems, you can get a flag. It's down the road. It damages them. It's already probably been discovered and fixed. Well, this gives you more of a closer to a real-time look into your system. So that's, and this would be the building block to start really towards. So we're just proposing that to start with the system, start with the AMI system, get more real-time data, a better understanding on a daily basis of where your outflows are, what your inflow is, so you can better manage your system. So we can, run more efficiently and also you alleviate having to drive so as you know labor is hard nowadays, it's so you're not having to spend a whole lot of time driving around it's done through the basis okay are we able to use this with our current meters because the mayor just said we got some new meters yes so about more than half of your system is the newer style master by the way thank you for being enough to customer for many years so you have an aged system. So about half of those are a newer style that are finding more power. The older ones are not as powerful, but it will pick up some of them. Ms. Manning: So we'll have to change those out? Eventually, yes. And we'll look. Once you get it up and you start hearing and seeing what you're reading and what you're picking up, we have an external antenna that goes through the lid and we've offered to give, I forgot how many, but a bunch of them for free to y'all. It's a considerable savings in having those, but only existing ones to help boost that savings. But yeah, to answer your

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question directly, more than half should be fine, the older half is we'll see. I don't want to say, I'm going to guarantee all of them. I'd rather set the bar here and overachieve than set the bar here. So yeah, so that's kind of where we are. Is this something, Mayor, that we're considering, or is this something, okay. And if I need to come back and do a full-blown demo of it?

Ms. Manning asked if there is a proposal presented to the mayor?

Ricky: No Not yet.

Mayor: The cost of the first stage of doing this is how much?

It's a little over \$100,000. Is this in, out, city limit? That's in and out. Our population study covers every water service. Mayor: We're saving money in the long run. Yeah, we have at least 50% of your meters are still relatively new and have life left to them that you can use live. And the existing meters that we already have do have access to put the antennas on them.

Mayor Friday stated that we will table the approval of the project resolution until a more accurate proposal has been presented. A motion was made by Alderman Carr seconded by Alderman Perry to table. Mr. Bridges suggested that the town attorney review the contract documents. Mark Crouch asked if there will be someone in the town to monitor this new system. Mayor Friday: Yes There being no other comments: The following vote was recorded to table.

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

Mayor Friday stated that this item will need to be tabled due to they have to complete the process with the MPC. Alderman Carr made the motion to table. Seconded by Alderman Lawrence. Any comments. There being none the following votes to table were recorded.

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

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Mayor Friday called for a motion to approve the official journal. Alderman Manning Carr made the motion seconded by Alderman Parry Any comments. There being none the following votes to table were recorded.

Ayes: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, Alderman Brunson, Alderman Perry, and Alderman Lawrence
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

A motion made by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Lawrence to approve the financials.
Public Comments:

Ms. Manning asked the Mayor about Mrs. Kathy and that we would no longer need her services. Mayor stated that we had several employees out that week and Debbie did work to help as well as Mrs. Kathy. She asked about the town visa and was this the only line item purchased were the software subscriptions and are we paying monthly subscriptions per month. I would like to see an itemized list for these items.

Ms. Manning asked town attorney about if town staff using family if this is best practices. Chief Collier stated that he made the decision to use Precision Collision and that he cleared it with the Board of Ethics. Manning asked if he is our contractor. Chief stated no. He also explained that it was an insurance job and it was reimbursed.

Crouch stated that he agreed with Manning and the council should set a limit like \$500 and anything over should be bid out. Mayor stated that that is the police budget is the Chiefs responsibility and it is his decision.

Manning asked about the Transportation add. The mayor explained that it was a company that called the town and misled town staff. Mrs. Collier stated that it was an misunderstanding and they misled town staff and we had to pay them because they had ran the ad. They were told to not contact the town again.

Manning asked to look at the general fund because when she comes up here to get information and she talks with the ladies in the office they are either busy or don't have what I am looking for.

Mrs. Collier stated that was not true that Manning had set an appointment and was an hour and forty-five minutes late and did not bother to call and let us know that she was going to be late and by the time she came we were busy.

Manning then questioned the Community Garden and that the town paid a consultant to assist with structure of the programs and the layout of the garden to present to the council. Manning disputed the Community Garden consultant fee of 2400.00. Mrs. Carr mentioned that Stephanie had talked to her about doing a community garden but the land in question is a wet land. Mayor stated yes it is that we cannot build on it but it can be a garden. Mrs. Collier stated that we are trying to organize the proposal for the council to approve and she plans on working with us for two years. Manning asked about the new code in the general fund for community beautification

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and asked if the budget needs adjusting? No it doesn't to make a code. Manning asked about building maintenance code being over . Mrs. Collier stated that she keeps asking the same question about that code, and that it has already been explained to Manning that equipment purchases were made and coded to building maintenance, which should have been equipment purchases. Manning stated that she wants every item itemized on the expense reports. Crouch asked if the council should approve purchases? Crouch suggested that the town clean house.

Ayes: Alderman Brunson and Alderman Lawrence

Nays: Alderman Carr, Alderman Manning, and Alderman Perry

Abstain: None

Absent: None

A motion by Alderman Carr seconded by Alderman Lawrence to adjourn

In favor 5 ayes

Opposed 0

POSTED BY:

Stephanie Collier

Stephanie Collier

CAO/ Town Clerk

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