

TOWN OF SIMMESPORT

MAYOR LESLIE DRAPER III

DISTRICT I
GLENN GAUTREAUX



DISTRICT II
TIESHA KENNEDY

DISTRICT III
PATRICK WRIGHT

ALDERMAN AT LARGE
ROMARO TURNER

DISTRICT IV
SHERMAN BELL

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February 12, 2024 Regular Town Meeting Minutes

Minutes of a special meeting of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the Town of Simmesport held at the Simmesport Town Hall on Monday, February 12, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Presiding: Mayor Leslie Draper, III

Members Present: Sherman Bell, Glenn Gautreaux, Tiesha Kennedy, Patrick Wright, Romaro Turner

Members Absent: none

Town Attorney: Kirk LaCour

Town Clerk: Jalesia Batiste

AGENDA ITEM 1,2,3: CALL TO ORDER, PRAYER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Leslie Draper, III called the meeting to order and Alderman Sherman Bell gave the opening prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ITEM 4: APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Councilman Bell and seconded by Councilman Turner to amend the agenda to add Resolution 02-2024-01, a resolution authorizing the Mayor to enter into an agreement with the Louisiana Department of Revenue to collect outstanding monies owed to the Town of Simmesport as item 9a and to Correct the numbering of the Resolution introduce an ordinance to set the water rates for the town to Resolution 02-2024-02. All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion passed.

A motion was made by Councilman Turner and seconded by Councilman Bell to accept the agenda as amended. All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion passed.

AGENDA ITEM 5: APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 2023 MINUTES

A motion was made by Councilman Bell and seconded by Councilwoman Gautreaux accept the minutes from the January 8, 2024 meeting. All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion passed.

AGENDA ITEM 6: PAYMENT OF BILLS FOR JANUARY 2024

Councilwoman Kennedy wanted to know if the list of delinquent bills is reflecting on the current bills. Attorney LaCour explained that the delinquent balances sometimes do not change every month because we pay on them as we can. The current monthly bills are paid every month and those are submitted as a separate sheet to the Council. Mayor Draper informed the Council that since the Town has been placed under Fiscal Administration, the town government has been working with the fiscal administrator, Mr. Joel Robideaux, to develop a plan to pay off the past due balances and get the Town of Simmesport back into financial good standing.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Kennedy and seconded by Councilman Wright to pay the bills for January as posted. All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion was carried.

AGENDA ITEM 7: INTRODUCTION OF MR. JOEL ROBIDEAUX, FISCAL ADMINISTRATOR

On January 19, 2024 the district court, on petition of the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s Office, placed the Town of Simmesport under Fiscal Administration. Pursuant to La.R.S. 39:1351, Mr. Joel Robideaux was appointed by the 12th Judicial District Court as the fiscal administrator with all the powers and duties set forth in La. R.S. 39:1351-1357. Mr. Robideaux informed the Council that he has to submit a report to the Court by April 11, 2024 outlining a plan to pay off Simmesport’s delinquent bills and get the Town on a firm financial footing going forward. Mr. Robideaux said he will meet with each of the vendors we are delinquent with and either work out a payment plan or work out a settlement. Mr. Robideaux said that any reports or plans he submits to the Court will be shared with the Council. Mr. Robideaux also stated that before we can come out from under fiscal administration until the Town of Simmesport can get current in its audits. Councilman Gautreaux asked about how long a town remains under fiscal administration. Mr. Robideaux said every town is different but what we want to avoid is having to declare bankruptcy to discharge those debts. He said the time frame depends on how quickly we can pay off the debts we owe. Mr. Robideaux also said that the Town of Simmesport is now back in compliance since agreeing to undergo fiscal administration and thus eligible for state and grant funding. Mr. Robideaux also informed those assembled that the Mayor and Town Council are now in an advisory role only and that he, the fiscal administrator, is in charge. However, he did stress that one major aspect of getting out of fiscal administration is how well the town government can work together and follow the plan set forth by the administrator.

AGENDA ITEM 8: PUBLIC COMMENT

Citizen Mr. Cecil Whitmore asked what happens to those people who are delinquent in their utility bills. Attorney LaCour said there is a process through the Louisiana Department of Revenue to recover those delinquent bills. A discussion broke out about why a rate study has not done a rate study in a long time. During the discussion it was brought out that the Louisiana Department of Health required the rate study, by state law, to ensure the town can safely run its water system.

Mrs. Shelia Draper and Mrs. Jennifer Gautreaux, representatives of the RISE organization, announced the Black History Program on Saturday, February 24, 2024. The event will be held at the Bayou Chateau Child Development Center and last from 12-3PM and will feature guest speakers and refreshments. All are invited.

AGENDA ITEM 9A: INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTION 02-2024-01: A RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN OF SIMMESPORT TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE OFFICE OF DEBT RECOVERY TO PROCESS AND COLLECT OUTSTANDING FINES ORDERED BY THE MUNICIPAL COURT OF THE TOWN OF SIMMESPORT

This resolution will allow the Louisiana Department of Revenue to collect outstanding debts owed to the Town of Simmesport. The LDR adds 25% to the collection and the Town of Simmesport gets 100% of what is owed. The LDR does have the authority to take the money from citizens’ Louisiana tax returns.

A motion was made by Councilman Turner and seconded by Councilman Bell to pass RESOLUTION 02-2024-01: A RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN OF SIMMESPORT TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE OFFICE OF DEBT RECOVERY TO PROCESS AND COLLECT OUTSTANDING FINES ORDERED BY THE MUNICIPAL COURT OF THE TOWN OF SIMMESPORT. A roll-call vote was taken.

All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion was carried.

AGENDA ITEM 9A: RESOLUTION 02-2024-02: A RESOLUTION TO INTRODUCE AND ORDINANCE TO INCREASE WATER RATES.

A discussion began over commercial versus residential rates. The ordinance as presented in the resolution does not charge differently between commercial or residential usage. Several residents asked why this was. Also, there are three apartment complexes who pay a flat rate for water usage. A discussion was had between the council and Attorney LaCour about differing rates for commercial customers. Administrator Robideaux said the flat-rate water charges is not a good way to charge customers and be suspect to violating a municipality’s inability to give away products and services. Mr. Robideaux also stated that the resolution is only a statement that an ordinance will be introduced at the next meeting and the rates need not be fixed for the resolution to pass. Attorney LaCour told the Council the ordinance may well have different numbers and even if it is passed with certain numbers, the Council can certainly amend and change the numbers in the ordinance as it feels appropriate. Mr. Robideaux said he would try to call other towns of similar size to Simmesport and see what that do about commercial customers and multifamily apartments.

A motion was made by Councilman Bell and seconded by Councilman Gautreaux to pass Resolution 02-2024-02, A RESOLUTION TO INTRODUCE AND ORDINANCE TO INCREASE WATER RATES. A roll-call vote was taken.

All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	X			
Alderman Gautreaux	X			
Alderwoman Kennedy	X			
Alderman Turner	X			
Alderman Wright	X			

The motion was carried.

AGENDA ITEM 10: DEPARTMENT REPORTS

A. UTILITY DEPARTMENT

Mr. Dana Smith reported that the gas leak near the levee was fixed with the help of the Town of Moreauville. Mr. Smith said that he and Ms. Fredrick were attending classes next week to be certified gas operators. Mayor Draper said he was looking over applications to hire two employees to replace the two that recently left.

B. SEWER PLANT

Mr. Charles Carter was absent.

C. FIRE DEPARTMENT

Mr. Cody Jackson was absent.

D. POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Firmin said there were 41 tickets written for 73 violations and 36 reports filed with 3 arrests made. Chief reported that one of the units is leaking oil. He also thanked the Tunica-Biloxi tribe who recently made a contribution to the Police Department. Chief Firmin also asked everyone to pray for the family and victims of the house fire on Railroad Ave. Councilwoman Kennedy also thanked the fire departments who assisted in fighting the fire. Chief Firmin said officer Lee was still in the police academy and doing well.

E. TOWN CLERK

Mrs. Jalesia Batiste said daily deposits were being made. She also informed everyone that for some reason the computer system did not import the current readings and quite a few bills went out with incorrect charges. The staff was working hard to manually input the correct readings. Attorney LaCour suggested the Council pass a resolution to waive the late fees and cut-offs this month because the error was on the Town of Simmesport.

A motion was made by Councilman Gautreaux and seconded by Councilwoman Kennedy that all utility bill late fees for the month of February and cutoff's be suspended and resumed in the month of March, 2024. A roll-call vote was taken and all present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Gautreaux	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderwoman Kennedy	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Turner	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Wright	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

The motion was carried and the resolution passed.

F. TOWN ATTORNEY/MAGISTRATE

Magistrate LaCour said there was a great turn out to city court last month. The only outstanding lawsuit was the MPERS and there was no movement on that one.

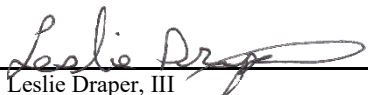
*Mayor Draper also informed those attending that the Town of Simmesport was incorporated as a village in 1925. Next year would mark the 100th anniversary of Simmesport's founding and Mayor Draper told all assembled that a schedule of events to mark the anniversary would be held. Mayor Draper said announcements and calls for volunteers would begin late this year.

ITEM 12: ADJOURNMENT


There being no further business, a motion was made by Alderman Bell and seconded by Alderwoman Kennedy to adjourn. All present voted as follows:

	YES	NO	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
Alderman Bell	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Gautreaux	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderwoman Kennedy	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Turner	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
Alderman Wright	<u> X </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

The motion was carried, and the meeting was adjourned.



 Leslie Draper, III
 Mayor



 Jalesia Batiste
 Interim Town Clerk