

In and about Washington

July 2024
FREE—TAKE ONE

Town reviews plan for hurricane season

In anticipation of one of the most active hurricane seasons on record, town administrators have been reviewing and updating plans for emergency operations.

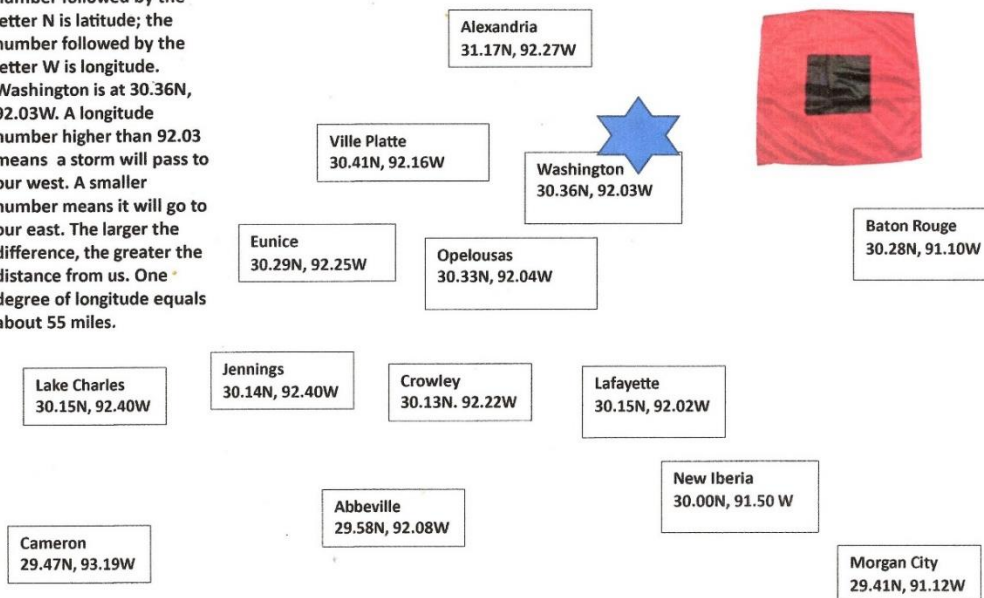
NOAA forecasters predict 17 to 25 named storms with winds of 38 mph or more, of which 8 to 13 will reach hurricane strength of 74 mph, 4 to 7 of those becoming major storms with wind of 111 mph or more. Those forecasters say there is a 40 percent-plus chance that at least one of the major storms will strike somewhere on the Gulf Coast. The first Tropical Storm of the season formed in the western Gulf June 19, but moved into Mexico before developing further.

Town administrators and parish officials met during June to coordinate plans, and members of a local hurricane committee are reviewing and updating the local response. That committee was formed in 2021 to identify resources that will be needed before, during, and after a storm, and to make a plan to have those things available when and where they are needed, Mayor Dwight Landreneau said.

“We are praying that the storm predictions are wrong, but preparing like they are right,” he said. “I urge the people of Washington to do the same.”

Hurricane tracks are predicted using the latitude and longitude of the center of the storm at a particular time. The number followed by the letter N is latitude; the number followed by the letter W is longitude. Washington is at 30.36N, 92.03W. A longitude number higher than 92.03 means a storm will pass to our west. A smaller number means it will go to our east. The larger the difference, the greater the distance from us. One degree of longitude equals about 55 miles.

Coordinates tell how close a storm may come



2-In and about Washington, July 2024

Of Note

WASHINGTON BAPTIST hosts a children and youth program each Wednesday at 6 p.m. .

THE WASHINGTON Cemetery Foundation is accepting donations via the Venmo payment app. Donations may also be made by check to Washington Cemetery Foundation, P.O. Box 42, Washington 70589.

THE HEALTH BUGGY offers free screening for blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol from 8 to 11 a.m. each third Friday on the Immaculate Conception parking lot.

BINGO IS BACK, at 2 p.m. each second and fourth Tuesday at the Martin Luther King Recreational Center.

THE AMERICAN LEGION post here has set up a GoFundMe account to help repair the Legion home. The link is <https://gofund.me/027782b8>. Send checks to American Legion Post 209, P.O. Box 45, Washington, LA 70589



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Next youth program July 5

The July 5 youth program offered by the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center will include a junior ranger angler program, Read with a Ranger, and a backyard bass fishing game. The free program for second through sixth graders will be held at the Washington recreation center on Martin Luther King from 10 a.m. to noon. Preregistration is not required.

Is this a missing relative?

Investigators are trying to identify a man who was killed in a freak railroad accident more than 60 years ago. He may have had some connection to Washington. He probably did not live here, but possibly had relatives in the area.

On October 31, 1961, the man, about 60 years old, was found inside a train car in Nebraska, buried under a load of ice that had shifted. The train had originated in Roseville, California. A cigarette pack with a California tax stamp indicates he may have lived there. A forensic artist created a picture of what he looked like.



Janel Daniels of the DNA Doe Project said many people moved West during the 1940s in search of jobs, and that the man, who would have been about 20 in 1940, may have been one of them. "If someone in your family left around that time, he could be this John Doe," Daniels said. Contact the DNA Doe Project at case-tips@dnadooproject.org

Wildflowers planned for town's entrance

The state highway department plans to plant wildflowers along Highway 103 at the entrance to Washington, from the interstate to approximately the Family Dollar store, including the area near the steamboat turnaround, according to mayor Dwight Landreneau.

The department began a seed bank at UL-Lafayette in 2018 to produce native seeds for planting along state roads. The town participates in a project to maintain butterfly habitat in public places.

THE WEATHER

NOAA Forecast:
Hotter and wetter than normal July, August, and September.

June 1-27

High: 94, June 8, 15
Avg. High: 86.7
Low: 66, June 13, 14
Avg. Low: 68.9
Avg. Temp: 77.8
5-year Avg: 80.3
June Rainfall: 4.71
Avg. for June: 4.98
Rain for 2024: 40.24
20-year Avg.: 28.06



Hurricane meeting

Washington administrators were among officials who met with weather service advisors and parish officers in Opelousas on June 18 to learn how to better prepare for the hurricane season. Parish president Jessie Bellard said St.Landry “is taking every necessary step to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents. We have strengthened our emergency response plans, coordinated with local agencies, and are fully stocked with essential supplies.”

Town adopts conservative budget

The town finished the fiscal year that ended June 30 with a surplus – the fourth year in a row after years of overspending. The budget for the new fiscal year that began July 1 projects another surplus, even after finally paying off some \$750,000 in old debt.

The 2023-2034 budget year ended with a surplus of nearly \$43,000, due in large part to a tight rein on spending. The new budget adopted by the Town Council at its June meeting anticipates total income of about \$2 million and expenses of about \$1.9 million.

Almost half of the income comes from the utility department, as do almost half of the expenses. The new budget includes a 6% increase for town employees except the police department.

Mayor Dwight Landreneau described the budget as conservative. Utility revenue is based on a fee schedule adopted in January 2023 and other spending on actual income and expenses over the past two years.

Anticipated tax income dropped slightly because the town received a one-time electric franchise renewal fee last year that is not in this year’s budget. Other income makes up for the decline.

Funds will go to infrastructure, park

Washington has received a \$325,000 state appropriation to be used mostly for infrastructure improvements, and additional funding that will allow for improvements to Joubert Park and the museum and tourist center.

From Town Hall

THE ST. LANDRY Tourist Commission approved a grant for reprinting Washington’s walking tour brochure and to send copies through the Louisiana Travel Association to all the visitor centers in the state. The brochure will also be featured on the LTA Digital Visitor Center website.

STEVEN (BUZZ) DURIO has been appointed the new town attorney. He is the founding partner in a Lafayette law firm and has family ties here. He replaces Chris Granger, who resigned because of the demands of other business.

SUBSTANTIAL renovations were made at Town Hall in June to repair water damage to floors and walls. Insurance covered the cost.

A POLICE UNIT, some old office furniture, and a portable building are being offered in an online auction through the surplus property program of the Louisiana Municipal Association.

UTILITY CUSTOMERS are reminded that bill payments are due on the 17th of each month and that payments received after 3 p.m. are posted on the next business day. A \$10 late fee is charged if the bill is not paid on time.

4-In and about Washington, July 2004

'Progressive education' brought 'open warfare'

The *Opelousas Daily World* described it as "open warfare" in 1954 after Robert Olivier, assistant principal at Washington High, began a campaign against so-called "progressive education." The argument became so heated that the school had to be closed for a week, Olivier lost his job, and the inevitable lawsuits dragged on for years.

School superintendent Curry Couvillion and Washington High principal W. K. Baillio were for the new way of teaching that Olivier so vehemently opposed. The fireworks started on March 24 at the end of what had been a routine Parents' Day program. The meeting was about to adjourn when Olivier, who was not scheduled to speak, took the microphone to give heated opposition "to what he called 'progressive education'."

There was already some discontent in the community. A week before the meeting, Father Patrick Regan, Immaculate Conception pastor, wrote a letter to the editor claiming that "under ... 'progressive' education very few students fail." Superintendent Couvillion said that was what the new method was all about. There were fewer failures "because the teachers took the time to help the lagging students."

Olivier was summing up his view that "if a pupil refuses to work, he should fail," when "his talk ended abruptly when it appeared that local police officers might interfere," the newspaper said.

The issue came to a head two days later when Olivier was suspended "pending a dismissal hearing." The *Daily World* said the four-hour school board meeting "almost erupted into fisticuffs between Olivier and member Garland L. DeJean," over "an amazing, almost unbelievable series of charges that Olivier ... had deliberately organized students ... to disrupt ... [the classes] of other faculty members." The board closed the school "pending a full investigation into recent friction and troubles."

Closing didn't help. The newspaper reported "residents ... [remained] more divided than ever ... and the school board [was] faced with the probability of community trouble no matter what they do."

The school reopened on Monday, April 5, after being closed for six school days, "during which raged one of the strangest and most heated disputes ever centered about a Louisiana public school," in the *Daily World* view. Classes ran smoothly, although only half of the school's 334 students showed up. But that wasn't the end of it. The school board formally began proceedings to fire Olivier.

"A near capacity crowd" filled the St. Landry Parish courtroom for the dismissal hearing. Olivier defended himself in four hours of testimony. Legal motions and counter-motions were filed afterward, and it wasn't until June 25 that the board voted 10-1 to fire Olivier. By then, he'd found a new job at the Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Opelousas, but still decided to sue the board.

The lawyers argued for three years before reaching a compromise that undid Olivier's 1954 dismissal and gave him \$14,000 in back pay, on the condition that he would not return to the parish school system. He continued at AIC, where he later became principal, and less notorious. In 1986, his obituary described him as "a well known educator," but did not mention the progressive education dispute.



Looking Back

In and About
Washington

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