



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

July 7, 2014

TOWN OF SIMMESPORT

Officials of the Avoyelles Parish town of Simmesport may have violated the state constitution by selling a 2.49-acre tract of town land without getting a formal appraisal, according to a report released Monday by Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera.

The report by Purpera's Investigative Audit Services division said the town-owned parcel, located in an industrial park, was sold for \$10,000 to Coastal and Highway Erosion Control on Feb. 14, 2011.

The town's board of aldermen passed an ordinance and resolution authorizing Simmesport Mayor Ed Rusk to sell the land on "such terms and conditions as he may, in his own discretion, deem proper and advisable" for the town. Rusk said the city could not afford a formal appraisal, auditors reported.

Town records indicated the lot was advertised for sale at a required minimum bid of \$10,000. The town received one bid for \$10,000 from Coastal and Highway Erosion Control. However, in 2012, the town sold a second parcel of nearby land, 1.01 acres, for \$19,050, almost twice what it received from the 2011 sale.

In 2012, Simmesport got appraisals for three parcels of town land across the street from the parcel sold in 2011 – including the 1.01-acre site and two others that were not sold. The unsold land included a tract of 1.39 acres appraised at \$20,000, and a second parcel of .986 acres appraised for \$16,000.

The report said Simmesport Mayor Pro Tem Charles Austin "indicated that he proposed getting the appraisals because he felt the appraisals would help the town obtain the best price for the lots." The lot purchased by Coastal and Highway Erosion Control, the report said, "sold for significantly less than the appraised value of similarly situated town-owned lots of comparable size, indicating the lot (sold in 2011) may have been sold for significantly less than its fair market value," which could be a violation of the constitutional provision that prohibits donation of public property.

The state auditor's office recommended that the town develop a policy on land sales that requires formal appraisals of Simmesport-owned land before a deal is struck "to ensure fair market value is obtained" in keeping with the state constitution.

For more information, contact:

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On Twitter: Simmesport mayor sold land without formal appraisal.