CITY OF WARD



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CHARLES GASTINEAU MAYOR

KRYSTAL RUMMEL
CITY CLERK

State of the City Report March 18, 2025

This report is presented pursuant to A.C.A. 14-58-302

To the City Council, City Clerk, City Attorney, City Employees, Planning Commission Members and of course, our citizens, I offer my 2025 State of the City Report.

To be frank¹, the State of the City is EXCELLENT, OUTSTANDING, SUPER! The city continues to grow and new businesses are opening or potentially forthcoming. As I write this, our new Doller General Market on Hwy 38 is nearing completion. With this one new business not only comes an opportunity to shop locally more often – which keeps your tax dollars in the city – but it also signals the business community that Ward is open to new retail businesses. Hopefully, more and more retail businesses will make their home in Ward. Do we have room for more growth for housing and businesses? Yes! Of Course!

As I look back to formulate this report, I want to – as always – thank the men and women that work day-in-and day-out providing services to our citizens and beyond. From the Department Heads down to our newest employee, our collective goal, as always, is to provide the best and most professional service we can. I want to thank our City Council and Planning Commission for the work they do. Without them none of what we do would be possible. While we may have disagreements from time-to-time, in the end our goal is the betterment of the city and ensuring tax-payer dollars are spent correctly and fairly. And finally, I want to thank the citizens of this great city. It is for you that we – as city employees and elected officials – do what we do. Not for one, but for all.

Please visit our website below for more information about your city government and what we have to offer for you and your family. From the website below you can link to all our other website (Fire, Water, Animal Controlas well as our Facebook pages.

https://www.wardarkansas.org/

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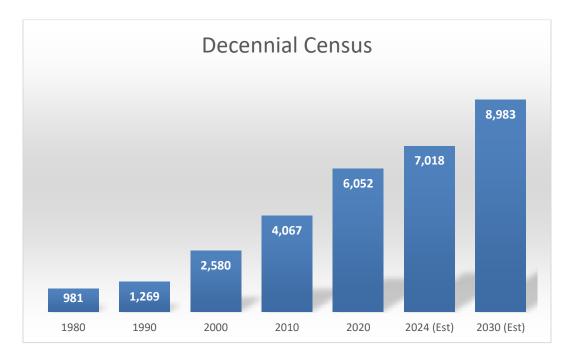
¹ The phrase "to be frank" originates from the word "frank" which comes from the Medieval Latin term "francus" meaning "free," referring to the idea of freely expressing one's opinion without holding back, essentially meaning to be honest and direct

I continue to be inspired by the words of President John F. Kennedy:

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future"

Attached you will find the 2024 Financial Statements for our General, Street, and Water/Wastewater Funds. These are presented in accordance with A.C.A. 14-59-116 and 14-237-113. Overall, the City of Ward continues to be financially sound.

The City of Ward and the region as a whole continues to grow making northern Lonoke County one of the fastest growing regions in the state. Fact is, the City of Ward is not only the 2nd largest city in the county but we are the 10th largest city in Central Arkansas. Metroplan estimated our population change was 12.6% since 2020². At a 4.2% annual growth rate, the population of Ward will be approaching 10,000 by the next census. The chart below is pretty telling of our growth pattern.



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² https://metroplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/DemographicReview2023.pdf

Some additional facts from the Census Reporter³ about our city:

• Education Attainment:

High School Graduate or Higher: 89.1%
 Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 27.5%

Marital Status: 54% Married

Median Age: 30

Median Household Income: \$78,841

Median Value of Owner-Occupied Housing: \$182,100

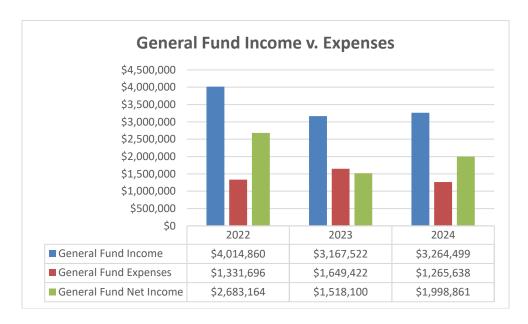
Per Capita Income: \$29,125

• Population with Veteran's Status: 6.4%

• Size: 4.4 sq miles

Financial Overview

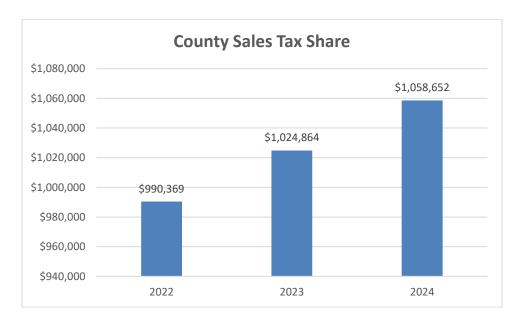
Overall, the finances for the city are in fine shape. Although general income is down from 2022⁴, it is holding steady through 2024 and expenses are down which gives us a better "bottom line." My thanks to HR/Finance Director Courtney Ruble for keeping the books straight along with our contracted Certified Public Accountant, Don Davis. My thanks also to the Department Heads for keeping expenses down.



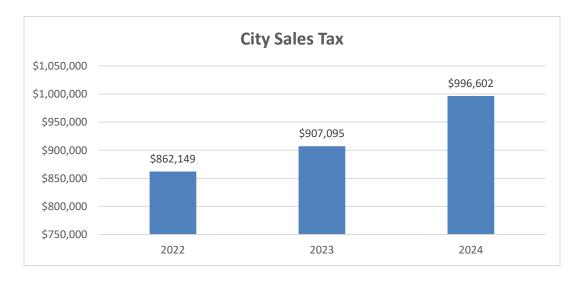
³ https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US0573130-ward-ar/

⁴ 2022 income includes American Rescue Plan monies from the federal government and the county.

Contained within the general revenue fund is the city's portion of the county's sales tax. This division between the county, and all the cities in the county, is based solely on the latest census numbers. As shown, the city's share of the county sales tax is up which is due, in large part, because of the retail growth in Cabot. Yes...please shop Ward first, but if not Ward, shop Cabot, Austin or any other retail store/restaurant in Lonoke County as the City of Ward still benefits when you shop anywhere in the county. As you can see, the growth in the area directly affects Ward. Overall, Ward's portion of the county sales tax is up 3.48% over the previous year.

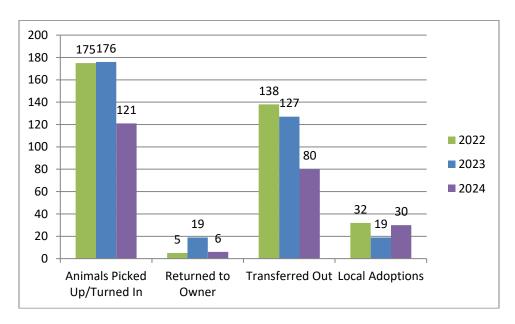


City sales tax revenue continues to rise at a moderate rate, and as stated last year, although we don't have a lot of "brick-and-mortar" businesses in town, sales tax revenue continues to rise because internet sales and point-of-delivery sales are taxed at the local rate. Meaning, whenever you buy something online or at a "big-box" store and have your goods delivered to your home, Ward sales tax is charged and remitted to the city. Overall, city sales tax revenue increased just less than 10% over the previous year.



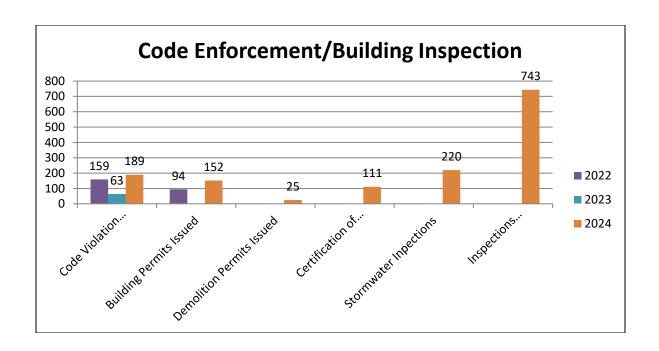
Department Summaries

 Animal Control Supervisor Taylor Barnes and Officer Clarissa Byrom provide excellent service to our citizens. They work hand-in-hand with local shelters and nonprofits across the nation to find forever homes for as many animals as possible. As with most every city in America, there continues to be issues with stray and lost animals. As such, the shelter has a continuing need for supplies and food to care for the animals such as towels, cat/dog toys, cat/dog canned food, etc. Contact the Animal Control Office at (501) 843-6351 for more information or go visit their website, https://wardanimal.wardarkansas.org/



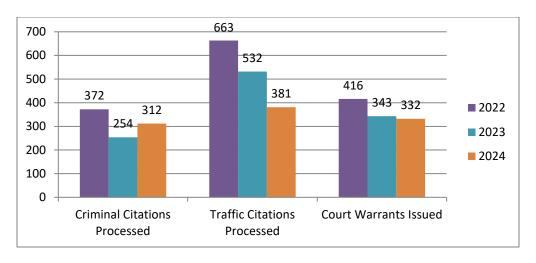
• Code Enforcement/Building Inspection: Code Enforcement officer, Michael Archdeacon and our now full-time Building Inspector, Gary Meadows, have stepped up enforcement of our city's code ordinances to clean up the city and to ensure new or remodeled properties are properly permitted and following all applicable codes. Both work with homeowner and business owners alike to ensure city codes are being followed fairly. Beginning this year with the use of new software, additional items are being tracked as noted in the chart below. In addition, the program provides a citizen portal with online access to permits, business licenses and code violations. This portal also calculates fees and generates invoices that can be paid directly through the portal. All inspection reports, building permit forms, code violation notices, inspections and much more are available through the portal below.

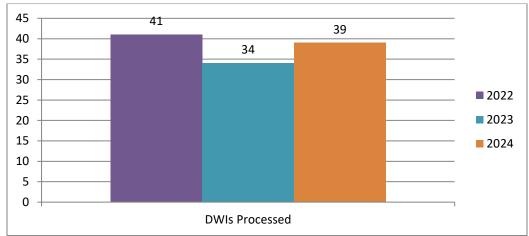
https://wardar license.portal.iworg.net/portalhome/wardar license



***The next City -Wide clean-up day will be held on May 3, 2025 (Sat). Dumpsters will be set up at the Water Operations Facility at 404 E. 2nd Street (Hwy 367) from 8 am to 3 pm. To avoid traffic issues on 2nd Street and to ensure the process flows smoothly, we respectfully ask that you line up on North Street and follow directions of those helping. More information will be posted on our website and social media closer to the event. ***

• **District Court:** Chief Court Clerk Beth Glover and Assistant Court Clerk Angel Williams provide excellent support to the Judge and Court. In 2024, Angel was accepted into the Arkansas Court Management Program for 2026 and already started working toward becoming a Certified Court Manager this year. Beginning this year monthly Court Dockets are posted to the city's website (https://www.wardarkansas.org/monthly-court-docket) and Facebook page.





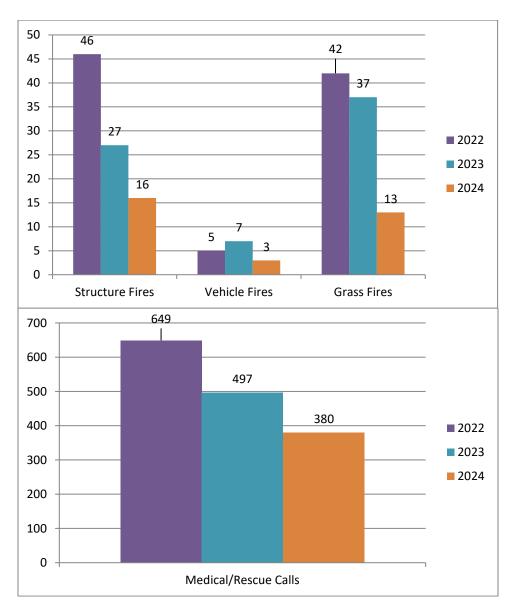


Fire Department & EMS: Chief Tony Reaves and the men and women who volunteer for Ward Fire Department provide outstanding emergency response to our city and those who live in our Fire District. The 2025 budget allocated funds to hire two part-time firefighters as well as implementing a pay-per call system to pay volunteers for their time. Although several years away, this is a step in moving the department to a full-time department. As the city continues to grow, this will be needed.

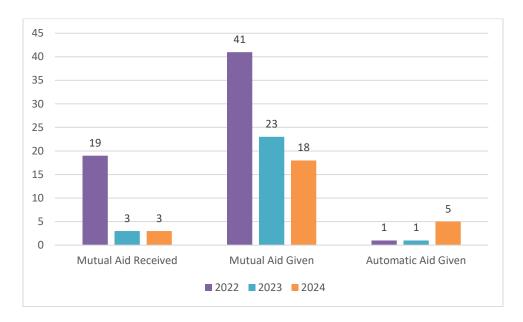
Go to https://fire.wardarkansas.org/ to view the Department's website. View their YouTube Channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSMiN5r-GPIcrDrOleyDX A or find them on Facebook to learn more about your Fire Department



While structure fires and grass fires are down, as always, the vast majority of our calls are EMS/Medical related although they are down too from previous years.



WFD has Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid Agreements with all surrounding Fire Departments and their districts.



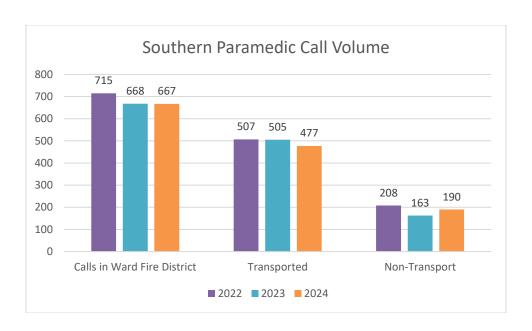
 Emergency Medical Service (EMS): Southern Paramedic Service (SPS), our contract Ambulance service, continues to provide high-quality pre-hospital care for our community. Overall, they cover approximately 25,600 acres, which includes the City of Ward and its Fire District, the City of Austin, CS&Z, and Mt. Springs Fire Districts. SPS also participates in many city events to include the "Meet the Machines" event this past May.



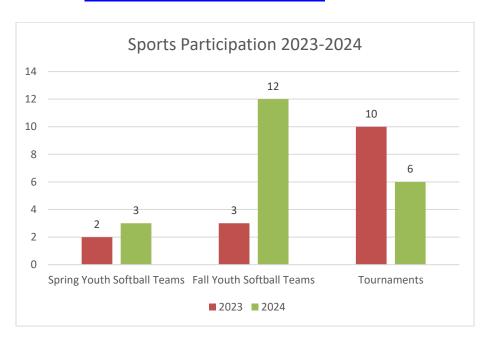
This year, almost 30% of all SPS calls within our Fire District resulted in no one being transported. As is a problem for the EMS communities nationwide, the number of "nontransports" that tie-up EMS resources delays their response time to other calls and reduces their revenue. Like a lot of services, SPS and every other EMS provider across the nation are also running short of qualified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and Paramedics,

which also affects response times and levels of care available.

Southern Paramedic Service is a valued partner with the City of Ward. Go to https://www.southernparamedic.com to learn more about SPS and what they have to offer.



• Parks and Recreation: Michelle Fitzgerald's management of the city's Parks and Recreation programs continues to be nothing short of outstanding. She and her staff are always looking for better ways to serve the community and in particular the children with more and more sports activities geared toward kids. Michelle is also involved in other city events, such as Harvest Fest, Halloween activities, as well as our annual Christmas Parade. Go to https://www.wardparksandrec.com/ to view their website.



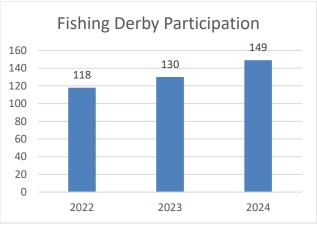


Great American Eclipse – April: This much talk about event turned out to be much
of nothing, for us. We planned and planned and was prepared to turn the Sports
Complex into a temporary RV park. In the end, we may have had about 75 visitors
who showed up. Oh well, it made for a very nice and relaxing Eclipse event that for
some...will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



In May, the Annual Youth Fishing Derby was held after the lake was stocked with almost 500 pounds of catfish. A total of 149 kids participated in this year's event, and we gave away 72 fishing poles, 41 tackle boxes, and several other fishing-related items due in large part because of the generous donations. The biggest fish caught weighed in at 3 pounds and was caught by a 6-year-old.







In May we showed "Star War -The Rise of Skywalker" for Movies in the Park Night and even offered a "Star Wars" themed concession stand menu. About 45 people came out to enjoy the movie and participate in the trivia contest. In October we had another event showing "Hocus Pocus" with more than 60 people watching. Expect more Movies in the Park this year!

Also, in May we held our first "Meet the Machines" event which allows kids (and kids at-heart) to get close to some of their favorite machines. Some 100 people came out for this event and it would not have been possible without our vendors; First Electric Co-Op; Zellas Trash Service, Connect2First Fiber, Ward and Austin Fire Departments; Ward Police Department and Southern Paramedic Service.





In July, we were able to celebrate our nation's birthday and capped the evening with the Annual Fireworks Show. After great success last year, we contracted with a company to shoot the firework show which allows our

volunteer firefighters to engage with the community while enjoying the show with their families. Because of

generous donations, we were able to expand the number of water attractions and included a Chair Lift Carnival ride which was very popular again this year. We gave away 500 hot dogs and over 33 cases of water and had 19 vendors and five food trucks. Thanks to the "90 Proof" band for providing the music all day and the Little Rock Air Force Base Honor Guard for presenting our nations colors. All in all, it was a GREAT time as always and we look forward to this year's celebration on the 4th.





In October, in conjunction with the Ward Chamber of Commerce, we held our annual Harvest Fest in the Sports Complex for the first time. We had 13 vendors, several food trucks and a carnival rides. It was a great success for all and we will hold future Harvest Fests here.

Also, in October, we held our second Annual Pumpkin Float event at Busby Lake. About 50 people with 26 pumpkins participated.

Although Mother Nature caused us to cancel our annual Christmas Parade on December 8, Santa and his Elf helper did come by on the 15th to help pass out cookies and hot chocolate and "threw the switch" to light the Christmas tree. Despite the bad weather on the 15th, 25 or so folks came out.



The Sports Complex has something for everyone besides the event's Michelle and her staff put together. There is a fenced-in ADA playground, a quarter-mile cement walking track around the ball fields and in the works...a Radio-Controlled track!



Police Department: Chief Steve Benton, Lt. Eric Sims and the men and women of the Ward Police Department provide police protection and emergency response to our city and its citizens in an outstanding and professional manner 24/7. WPD routinely assists Austin Police and the Lonoke County Sheriff Office, and vice versa. The various Law Enforcement agencies in our area – to include Beebe PD – work hand-in-hand to protect and serve all of us.

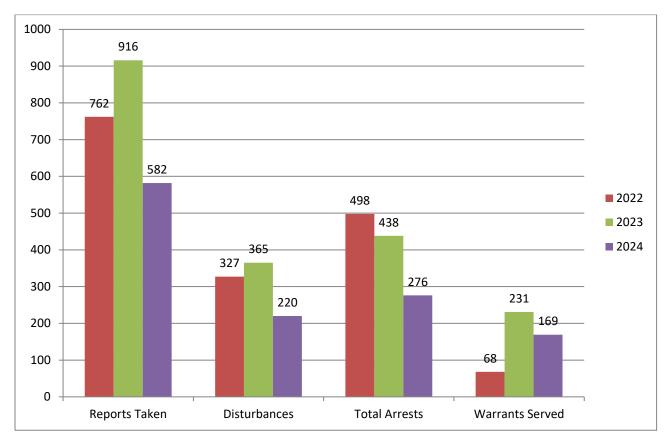
Our Patrol officers and Criminal Investigations Division (CID) continue to work hard to protect each of us, as well as actively and aggressively investigate cases. Again, this year, while the use of illegal drugs continues to be an issue in any city, cybercrimes are on the increase from foreign actors and governments notwithstanding current and on-going events in the Ukraine and Russia.

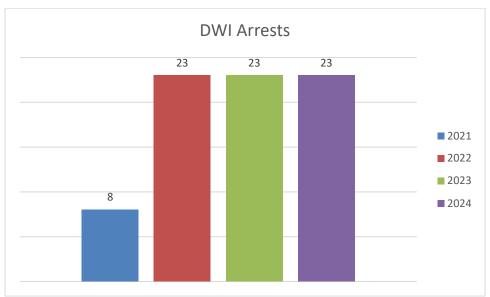
In February 2024 we continued to upgrade our Police Department fleet with the purchase of three (3) new Dodge Durango Police Pursuit vehicles for our officers. It is our goal to continue to purchase new or only slightly used equipment for our department as our officers deserve the very best that we can afford to purchase. To that end, council budgeted for one additional Police unit in 2025. All new PD vehicles are purchased under the State's vehicle contract which ensures we are getting the best price possible.

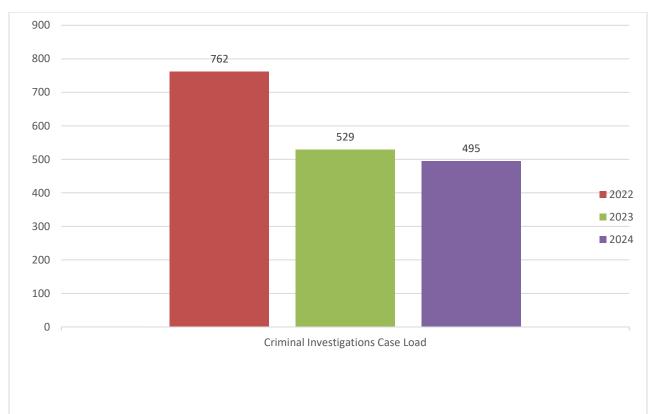


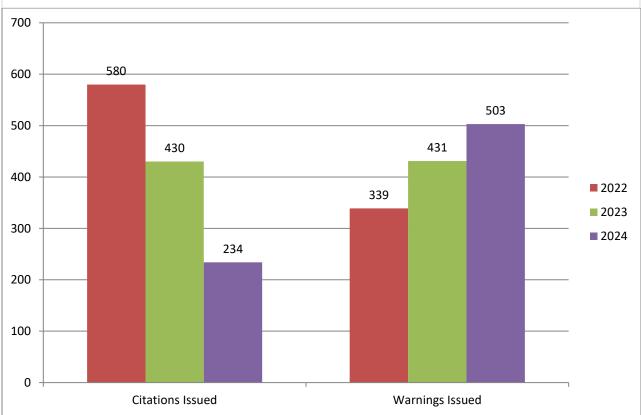
Annually, our officers participate in the Torch Run for Special Olympics. As the torch comes through Ward on its way from Little Rock to Searcy where the games are played, our officers have an opportunity to carry the torch as it comes through town. It is a pretty spectacular site and effort for a very good cause.

Below are various statistics from last year as compared over the two previous years. Again, I think our officers are doing a great job protecting each of us. And...I thank them.

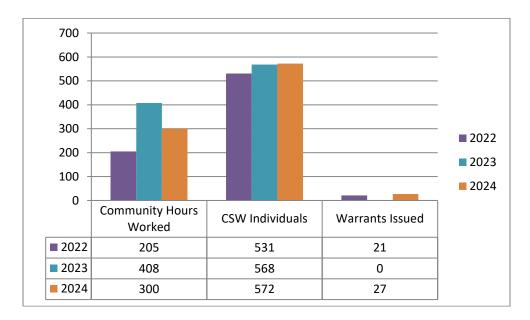








• Probation: Probation Officer Melissa McNair manages the Court's Probation Program in a professionally firm manner, while mentoring probationers (Community Service Workers (CSWs)) as they perform community service to pay off their fines. In addition, Melissa is our liaison with Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC) during their quarterly USDA commodities distributions and helps to ensure those in need are afforded the opportunity to receive goods. Officer McNair also augments the Ward Police Department.



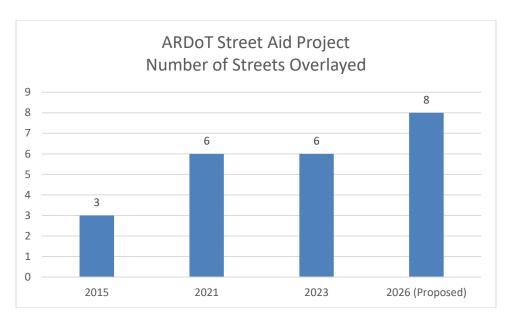
CSWs are required to pay a \$20 Probation Fee for each month they are on probation.



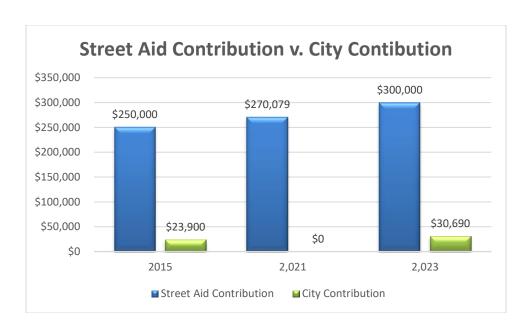
Street Department: Ward's Street Department (Public Works), works day in and day out
to ensure that not only the city streets are maintained as best they can be, but they are
also responsible for ensuring the city-maintained drainage ditches flow freely and keep
the grass mowed in certain areas in town. They are also the primary crews for snow and
ice preparation and removal.



The State Aid Street Committee Administers the State Aid City Street Program to assist cities and towns in improvements to city streets. The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDoT) provides technical assistance to the Street Committee and for projects approved by the Street Committee, ARDoT designs, procures construction contracts, and inspects City Street Program funded projects. The City of Ward has been awarded Street Aid funding in 2015, 2021, 2023 as shown below. We applied for funding for the calendar year 2025; however, that application was disapproved (probably because we had just had one approved for 2023) and will carry over to the 2026 cycle.

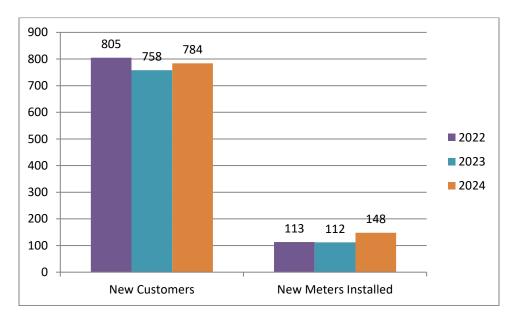


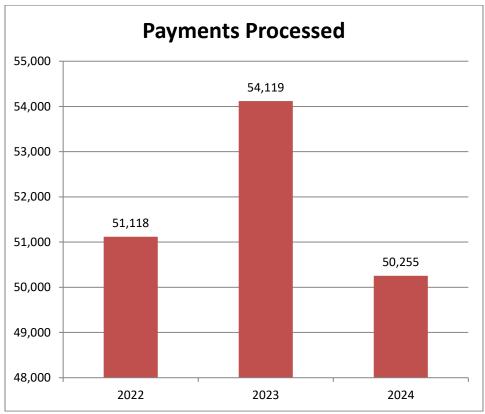
2015	2021	2023
Brewer St	Wilson Loop (Brewer St to	Markham St (Hwy 367 to
(Hwy 319 to county line)	Weatherwood)	Brewer St)
Moon Rd (Wilson Loop to county line)	Lakeside Dr	North St (Hwy 319 to Hwy 367)
Old Austin Rd	Willow Lake Dr	Moore St (Hwy 367 to RR
(Austin City Limits to Hwy 38)	to Lakeside Dr	Tracks)
	Willow Cir	Owen St (RR Tracks to Markham)
	Helen St	Elm St (Hwy 367 to Hickory)
	Opal St	Marshall St (Hickory to Griffin
2026 (Proposed)		
Scott St		
Washington St		
4 th St		
3 rd St		
Elm St/Front St		
Corner St		
Spring St		
Griffin St		

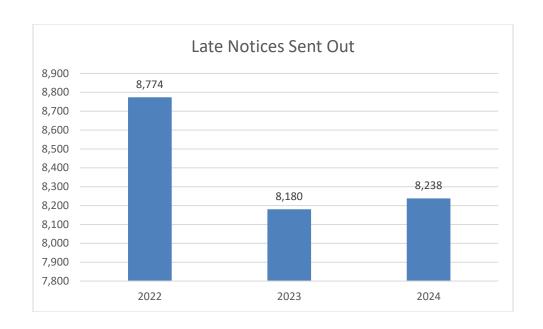


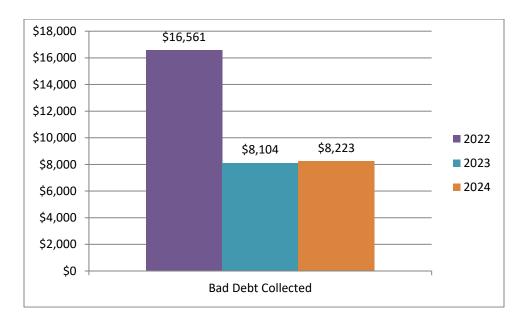
- Water and Wastewater: Public Works Superintendent Bruce Jones, along with Foreman Don Fitzgerald, and Office Manager Brittany Gibson, continue to do outstanding jobs to ensure our Water and Wastewater systems continue to operate within the guidelines set by the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) and the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment's Division of Environmental Quality (ADEQ).
 - o In 2024, the long-awaited \$1.8 million project to change out all 4,000+ manually-read meters with radio-read meters was completed. While we are still working out some "bugs" in the system, when all is complete, the system will also allow the Water Office to monitor meters in real-time and notify customers of a potential leak before learning about it when they receive their bill.
 - Also, in 2024 we implanted new water and sewer rates that were a direct result Act 605 which required us (and all other public water utilities) to have a rate study conducted by a state-approved entity. As we had not raised water rates since 2014 and wastewater rates since 2016, the new rates now reflect the true costs of providing these utilities while planning for the future. Act 605 also requires rates be raised annually by the current Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) or 3%
 - Water Office: Office Manager Brittany Gibson and her staff continue providing outstanding service to our customers. They take in payments, prepare and send out the water bills, issue building and business permits, and much more. As a reminder, you can use the online bill pay service at https://water.wardarkansas.org. You can also sign up for notifications so that you are promptly informed via email and/or text if there is a problem or concern with the city's water or wastewater operations.

o Go to https://water.wardarkansas.org/subscribe to sign up. To date, 2,809 have signed up to be notified either by text or email or both.





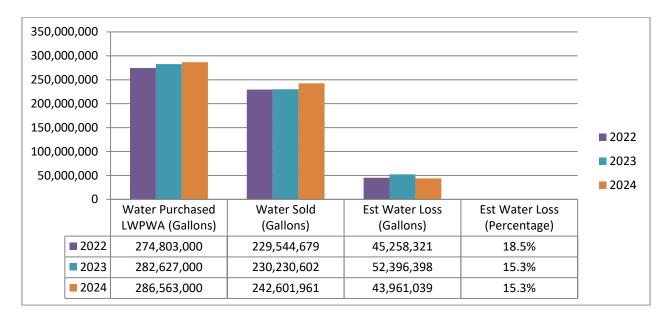




O Water Operations: The water operators work daily to ensure fresh clean water flows from Lonoke-White Public Water Authority (LWPWA) ⁵ to our homes and businesses. As we receive 100% of our water from LWPWA, the city does not add any chemicals or additives to the water. It is simply passed through our meters to your home or business. On occasion, leaks do occur which require us to shut down a portion of the service area to repair the leak. Sometimes these leaks are just caused by ground shifting and/or old supply lines that fail. Other times, people and/or contractors fail to call "One-Call" (by dialing 811) before digging and they break a line. Depending on the size of the line and other factors, we sometimes

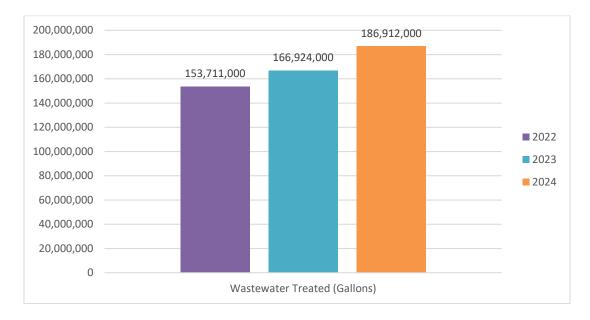
⁵ The City of Ward is a Charter Member of LWPWA and is represented by the Mayor on the LWPWA Board

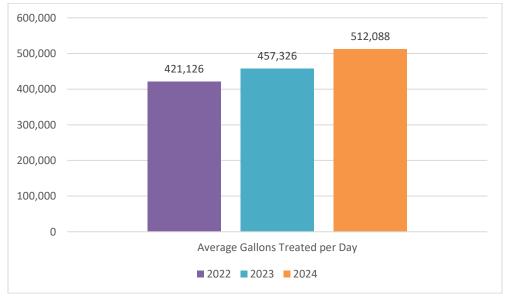
have to place a "boil-order" in effect until we can repair the break and ensure the water is safe to drink afterwards. These boil-orders are initiated following Arkansas Department of Health rules.



NOTE: The 2024 January to June water loss ratio was estimated to be at 20.4%. After the new meters were installed, the loss ratio was reduced to 10.2%. Meaning more water was actually being read the meters and accounted for.

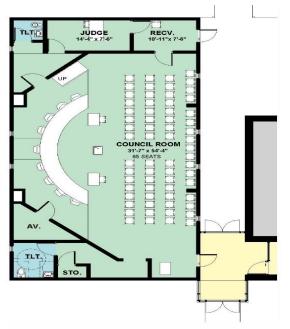
 Wastewater Operations: Our wastewater crews work hard each day ensuring wastewater is flowing properly from your home to the treatment plant. With 25 lift stations and approximately 290,000 feet of wastewater pipe, ensuring the flow runs smoothly is a never-ending process.





Current and Planned Major Projects

- 1. (OPEN) SRTS IV: Approved in April 2022, Phase IV will extend a portion of the Phase II project down Wilson Loop to the north-end of Gold Meadow Circle. Phase IV also extends a portion of Phase III from midway down Chantileer Ln. to Castleton Dr., and then down Castleton Dr. to the Green Apple Phase III portion. This will create the first complete sidewalk loop in any existing subdivision in Ward. The total cost for this Phase is estimated to be \$345,127 with the city paying \$44,000. There is no start date for this Phase.
- 2. (OPEN) SRTS V: Approved in March 2023, Phase V was to extend the Phase III sidewalk from the intersection of Moon Rd Ext and Peyton St down Brewer St to Markham St. However, because of FEMA Floodplain issues on Brewer, the project has been scaled back to terminate at Wilson Loop and the cost will be reevaluated. There is no start date for this Phase.
- 3. (OPEN) Vacuum System Rehab: In August 2023, the Arkansas Economic Development Council (AEDC) awarded a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to the City or Ward Water and Sewer System to remove the remaining homes off the antiquated vacuum system and to put each home either on a grinder-pump system or utilize gravity lines. In October 2023, an application was submitted to Arkansas Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) for \$791,000 in grants and/or low-interest loans to complete funding for the project. In July 2024, ADNR approved a \$791,000 low-interest loan; however, because using the loan would require yet another water rate increase, we are working to ensure we can pay for the project from existing reserves and not take out a loan. As of this publication, our engineering firm is working up the construction cost.
- 4. (OPEN) Consolidated 911 Communications Center: In 2019, The Public Act of 2019 legislated the reduction of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) from 112 to 77. In 2021, the Statewide PSAP Consolidation Plan Report was released which outlined the current status and provided some guidelines to consolidate. In January 2022, the PSAP Consolidation Plan was published which outlines how counties are to consolidate and establishes deadlines to follow. In January 2023, Lonoke County submitted their PSAP Consolidation Plan to the state, as required, and in February 2024 completed an Interlocal Agreement to create the Lonoke County 911 Communications Board. This Board will oversee the Consolidated 911 Center which will be located in the Cabot Justice Center currently under construction and is scheduled to open by May 2025. Once complete, all the county's 911 services will be handled by this one PSAP.



5. (OPEN) Remodel City Council/Court Room: In February, City Council approved a capital improvement project to completely remodel and renovate the city's Council/Court room. This project, which is estimated to cost \$339,200, will be paid for with existing reserve general funds and will be completed in 2025. This is Phase 1 of an overall project to remodel City Hall over the next few years.

- **6. (PENDING) 2025 Street Overlay Project:** We anticipate overlaying one or more yet-to-be-determined streets this year.
- 7. (PENDING) 2026 Street Aid Overlay Project: See Street Department Section.
- **8. (ON-HOLD) Regional Pedestrian/Bike Pathway:** The Ward to Austin segment of this long-term project is on hold for the foreseeable future due to issue with obtaining proper rights-of-way. The Austin to Cabot and beyond is on-going. The full map of the project can be viewed at https://www.centralarkgreenways.com/plan-map.

What does the Future Hold for Ward??

Ward continues to be primarily a bedroom community with most of our residents working outside the city. Fact is, 77% of Ward's working-population drives to and from work alone and drives approximately 29-minutes getting to and from work. 11% of Ward's population works from home. Its who we are and I don't believe that will change anytime soon so we will continue to work on building our community. With the opening of the new Dollar General Market, other retail businesses will look at Ward as an opportunity to grow. Additionally, with US 67/167 being rededicated I-57, the I truly believe more businesses for Ward are on the horizon.

Where do we go from here? As I said last year, we – all of us – must work together for the common good of all. Whether it is voicing your opinion at a public hearing (as opposed to just on Facebook), or standing in front of City Council letting them know what is on your mind (good/bad, for/against), to even just a simple email, text or even a telephone call to clarify something, WE are all in this together.

We will also continue to overlay streets, install more sidewalks, enforce building codes, identify areas that need cleaned up, patrol the streets, respond to emergencies and so on and so forth. The work of the city is continuous.

Ward continues to be a GREAT place to live and our census numbers prove that. As I've stated year-after-year, neither I, nor your city staff, can do this alone. We are blessed to have a fantastic workforce who will go above-and-beyond to get the job done and ensure it is done correctly. From the office to the boots-on-the-ground workforce, WE work for you...the tax-payer.



We are also blessed to partner with several other cities and organizations to make Ward, and the surrounding communities better, for all of us.

City of Austin, Mayor Chamberlin	City of Cabot, Mayor Kincaid	
Lonoke County, Judge Erwin	Lonoke County Sheriff, Sheriff Staley	
Bank of the Ozarks	Arkansas Municipal League (ARML)	
Cabot Public School System	Cabot Chamber of Commerce	
Central Arkansas Planning and Development District (CAPDD)	Centennial Bank	
Central Arkansas Regional Solid Waste	Central Arkansas Development Council	
Management District	(CADC)	
First Arkansas Bank and Trust	First Security Bank	
Lonoke White Public Water Authority (LWPWA)	Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance (MAWA)	
Metroplan	Local Churches	
Local Boy and Girl Scout Troops	Southern Paramedic Service (SPS)	
Ward Chamber of Commerce	Circle K Stores, Inc	
Lonoke County Safe Haven		

As always, I urge you to get involved in your city government and community! If you have ideas, concerns, want to volunteer, want to learn more about the city and government so you can maybe one day run for a position, want to get involved in planning events, etc., we want to hear from you! City Council meetings are held every 3rd Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm in the Court/Council room adjacent to City Hall. You are invited to attend in person or watch via our YouTube Channel⁶. If attending in person and you wish to speak about anything, we provide time at the end of the meeting for public comment. Planning Commission meets every 4th Monday at 6:30 pm. All are invited to attend.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about your city's government, please feel free to stop by my office, call or text me at (501)-743-2501 (c), or send me an email at mayor@cityofward.com. I am here for you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Charles Gastineau

Mayor

Attachments:

2024 General Fund Financial Statement; 2024 Street Department Financial Statement; 2024 Water/Wastewater Financial Statement

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/@cityofwardarkansas