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Councilwoman convicted for stealing \$37,000 from town

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(Photo: contributed)

A jury has convicted a former Arcadia town clerk — and current member of the town council — of theft for stealing cash collected from residents paying their water bills.

The jury convicted Councilwoman Patricia C. Hampton on Thursday of felony theft in connection with the theft of more than \$39,000 from 2007 to 2010, Assistant District Attorney Russell Davis said Tuesday.

The six-person jury returned the verdict at 10:15 p.m. after a four-day trial in the courtroom of Judge Glenn Fallin of the 2nd Judicial District.

Hampton testified during the trial that she didn't steal the money, Davis said.

Davis said Hampton stole cash by pocketing customer payments and then adjusting town records to conceal the thefts.

The judge set Hampton's sentencing for Nov. 8. She faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$3,000 fine. She also could be ordered to repay the Town of Arcadia the stolen money.

Hampton was fired from her town job in February 2011. In 2014, she won a seat on the Arcadia Town Council. Under state law, conviction of a felony automatically suspends her from office without pay pending any appeals, according to the Bienville Parish District Attorney's Office.

Hampton was second of two former Arcadia employees to be convicted for the theft of town funds. The other former employee, Theresa Burris, pleaded guilty to felony theft in 2014.

Davis said Burris wrote checks to vendors and then diverted the money to herself — more than \$50,000 in all. She received a four-year prison sentence, with three years suspended, and was ordered to pay restitution, Davis said.

He said town audits after Hampton's thefts were brought to light led investigators to Burris's thefts, although the two acted independently.

"Hampton is the last of two former employees of Arcadia to have either been found guilty or pled guilty to felony theft," Bienville Parish District Attorney Danny Newell said in a statement Tuesday. "The Town will begin recovering these stolen funds through restitution payments from both defendants."

Newell thanked Inspector General Stephen Street and investigator Tom Boulton, both of the Louisiana Inspector General's Office, for their help in investigating the case. He also praised Davis's work as prosecutor in the Hampton case.

"It's been going on forever," Davis said.