



## Orange Water and Sewer Authority

*Our community's trusted partner for clean water and environmental protection.*

April 26, 2024

Mayor Jessica Anderson  
Town of Chapel Hill  
405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Mayor Barbara Foushee  
Town of Carrboro  
301 West Main Street  
Carrboro, NC 27510

Chair Jamezetta Bedford  
Orange County Board of  
Commissioners  
Post Office Box 8181  
Hillsborough, NC 27278

Dear Mayor Anderson, Mayor Foushee, and Chair Bedford:

We are pleased to submit this update on our services, projects, and initiatives since January 2024. This report includes updates on the following items:

1. Proposed FY 2025 Budget and Rates
2. Update on the PFAS Treatment Project and Community Outreach
3. Other Key Infrastructure Investments
4. Jordan Lake Western Intake Partnership Rezoning
5. Water and Sewer Management, Planning, and Boundary Agreement (WASMPBA)
6. New Billing System
7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
8. Forest Management
9. Cane Creek Solar Project
10. OWASA Welcomes Director of Community Relations

**Proposed FY 2025 Budget and Rates:** The OWASA Board of Directors will hold a public hearing on May 9 to invite and receive community feedback on a proposed budget and rate increases for Fiscal Year 2025. If approved as proposed, the rates would increase the typical household OWASA bill by \$12.32 per month and go into effect October 1 of this year.

This rate increase is proposed to advance the most vital and timely investments in community infrastructure, operations, and people to ensure a resilient and sustainable future for our community's utilities. Projects supported by the proposed 5-year capital improvements budget would achieve ambitious goals for water treatment, including enhanced removal of PFAS from water (see below). Other important investments included in the budget are 9.5 miles of water line replacement to improve the resiliency and reliability of our water delivery system and the construction of a new drinking water clearwell—a critical part of our water treatment



infrastructure that, during its most recent inspection, was identified as having significant deficiency.

The proposed budget does not include continued participation in the Western Intake Partnership (WIP). If OWASA withdraws from the WIP, it is not expected to cause near-term water supply hardship.

The Care to Share Program remains a helpful lifeline for residents having trouble paying their OWASA bill. OWASA is in the process of increasing the level of funding assistance and accessibility of requesting funding. OWASA customers can sign up to donate to Care to Share at [owasa.org](https://owasa.org) or by calling OWASA Customer Service at 919-537-4343.

Update on PFAS Treatment Project and Community Outreach: Addressing PFAS in drinking water is essential for the health and safety of the community's water, and our plans are designed to meet the EPA's first PFAS regulations, announced on April 10. OWASA is moving forward with and budgeting for the construction of an enhanced water treatment process to significantly reduce PFAS levels in the community's drinking water. We are preparing to pilot test PFAS reduction technology, including Granular Activated Carbon and Ion Exchange, to find the most effective and affordable tools to remove PFAS during our drinking water treatment process. We estimate that this project will cost about \$75 million; over half of the FY25 proposed rate increase is required for this project.

In the meantime, we are testing different types of Powdered Activated Carbon (PAC), which has shown promise for reducing PFAS levels, although not enough to meet our goals.

We are committed to keeping the community informed and engaged on the need and our plans for PFAS treatment. OWASA's new PFAS information hub, [PFAS And Your Water](#), is now available online. The website includes monitoring data collected from source water and treated drinking water since 2018, monitoring data on PFAS in wastewater and biosolids, and resources for accurate information on PFAS regulations and public health impacts. The hub also provides updates on OWASA's progress to reduce the presence of PFAS throughout our treatment processes.

To further engage with our community on this important issue, OWASA will host a series of Question-and-Answer sessions this summer entitled "Safeguarding Our Water: PFAS Q&A." We will bring together local experts on public health, water quality regulations, and the science and engineering behind reducing PFAS to share their expertise with members of our community.

In April, OWASA also launched a quarterly PFAS newsletter, "Clear Waters: Navigating Your PFAS Questions and Concerns." Members of the community interested in this topic can [sign up](#) to receive the newsletter to stay up to date on how OWASA is reducing PFAS in water, wastewater, and biosolids.

Other Key Infrastructure Investments: OWASA continues a proactive schedule to update key infrastructure across our community. These long-term projects are expected to cause some inconveniences for neighboring customers, including increased or disrupted traffic, tree removal, noise, odor, and brief service disruptions. Using community outreach and communication, we hope to prepare neighbors for projects and establish an open line of communication for questions and concerns.

- The West Rosemary Street Water Main Replacement Project will include the replacement of existing 12-inch diameter water main with new 12-inch ductile iron for 3,500 feet along West Rosemary Street, from Columbia Street to East Main Street. Work is expected to begin in Spring 2025 and significant traffic impacts are expected. Outreach to stakeholders to discuss community concerns will be begin this fall.
- The Morgan Creek Interceptor Project will replace 3,000 linear feet of an aging sewer collection line within N.C. Botanical Garden's property, a sensitive ecological area owned by the University. Construction began April 15 and is expected to last about 12 months. Some tree removal near the project site is necessary to access the area with construction equipment. OWASA has partnered with the town and N.C. Botanical Garden leaders to minimize impacts, including identifying special trees for protection and conserving the population of the endangered tri-colored bat by avoiding activity during the species' mating season. The project will ultimately provide environmental protection by reducing risk of leaks and breaks. Signage will be placed in high traffic areas including a QR code to access the [project's webpage](#) for further information and project updates.

Jordan Lake Western Intake Partnership Rezoning: The Jordan Lake Western Intake Partnership (WIP)'s rezoning request was approved for Conditional Light Industrial usage on March 18 by the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. The WIP is moving forward with a plan to construct a new water treatment plant and distribution infrastructure to serve its members.

Water and Sewer Management, Planning, and Boundary Agreement (WSMPBA): On April 11, the OWASA's Board of Directors reviewed the proposed service area expansion and received public comment on the proposed expansion. The Board voted to support the expansion. OWASA's review and approval were the last steps needed to authorize the service area expansion proposed to the Town of Chapel Hill by the Chamber for a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro. The Towns of Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and Hillsborough, as well as Orange County, had previously approved the amendment. This amendment allows OWASA to extend water and sewer service along the US 15-501 South corridor to the Chatham County Line. Developers wishing to have services extended to properties in the area will be responsible for the cost of extension.

In the fall of 2023, OWASA provided analysis to help inform consideration of the proposed WSMPBA expansion. The analysis estimated that the buildout development would require 7,700 feet of sewer segments to be upsized along Morgan Creek, and 4,800 feet of water main to be installed along Highway 15-501.

**New Billing System:** OWASA launched a new customer information and billing system in late January. The new system includes an updated bill for customers. It also allows us to bill in smaller increments than 1,000 gallons, which helps to more directly align customers' water use with their bill. All of customers' prior account information, including payment history, is available in the new system.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Program:** OWASA's new DEIB Specialist has hit the ground running, finalizing our DEIB Action Plan and conducting a series of DEIB training for all OWASA employees. The goal of OWASA's DEIB Action Plan is to thread DEIB throughout our organization from policy to practice. The work of the DEIB Specialist helps to facilitate OWASA's commitment to collectively advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging across the entire organization.

**Forest Management:** OWASA maintains an active Forest Management Program for the over 2,400 acres of forested land it owns. Not only does our program improve forest health in the region, but it helps to provide a diverse landscape for wildlife and reduces the risk of wildfire. In March 2024, we planted eight acres of Shortleaf pines on our Meadow Crest South tract—around 4,000 trees—and 11 acres of Loblolly pines, adding 5,500 seedlings to the area. OWASA values a forest management approach that engages the community near our forested land to garner local insights and knowledge and exchange ideas to manage these natural resources.

**Cane Creek Reservoir Solar Project:** Beginning in late 2021, OWASA launched a series of solar PV projects to power our biosolids mixing tanks and two facilities on our Jones Ferry campus, and to help pump source water from Cane Creek Reservoir to the Jones Ferry Road Water Treatment Plant. The year 2023 marked a full year of nearly full production of OWASA's entire solar fleet. In 2023, our arrays produced over 750,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of solar energy that helped power these facilities. These projects helped to push OWASA past its goal of reducing its use of purchased electricity by 35% by 2022 from 2010 levels. We are grateful for Orange County's support of our Cane Creek Solar PV project, our most recently deployed and largest solar array.

**OWASA Welcomes Director of Community Relations:** Mary Tiger has (re)joined OWASA in a new position for our organization, Director of Community Relations. Mary will focus on revitalizing our commitment to community relations, customer service, and customer assistance. She previously served as OWASA's Strategic Initiatives Manager and returns to OWASA after serving the City of Durham as an assistant director for Durham Water Management.

We would be happy to provide more detailed information on the items above or other topics of interest as desired. Please feel free to contact our Executive Director, Todd Taylor ([ttaylor@owasa.org](mailto:ttaylor@owasa.org) or 919-537-4216), or me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bruce Boehm".

Bruce Boehm, Chair  
Board of Directors

cc: Mr. Chris Blue, Chapel Hill Town Manager  
Ms. Bonnie Hammersley, Orange County Manager  
Ms. Marie Parker, Interim Carrboro Town Manager  
OWASA Board of Directors  
Todd Taylor, OWASA Executive Director