



Orange Water and Sewer Authority

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

Good evening, Mayor and Council Members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. My name is Mary Tiger. I am the Director of Community Relations for OWASA or Orange Water and Sewer Authority.

- Over the years, we have heard from Town Council Members, including some sitting here tonight, that our community has a need for sustained water bill assistance for low-income residents. Beyond the temporary assistance provided by Care to Share, there is a growing need for regular bill assistance for some households struggling to cover the basics. The cost of living continues to rise, including water rates. OWASA is legally dissuaded from using rate payer funds for bill assistance. Unlike energy and food, there is no federal safety net for water bills, which you could argue is pretty fundamental on the hierarchy of needs.
- We've heard you, and we've heard feedback from other community members, as well. To that end, the OWASA Board of Directors identified a strategic goal to increase the adequacy and accessibility of customer assistance funding in our strategic plan.
- In an effort to start the conversation with our community partners, including the Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro, and Orange County, OWASA worked with the Orange County Department of Social Services to compare OWASA customer records with recipients of Food and Nutrition Services or SNAP.
- The analysis found that in 2024, 249 OWASA customers received SNAP benefits, 192 of whom live in Chapel Hill. Today, the cost of covering 100% of an average water bill for 192 customers for a whole year would be a little over \$266,000.
- This year, we submitted a request for about \$86,000 of outside agency funding from the Town of Chapel Hill to initiate a program that would cover a portion of the water bill for Chapel Hill residents that receive SNAP benefits.
- We are grateful for the opportunity to submit this request and for staff's helpfulness in doing so. Unfortunately, the request did not make it into the proposed budget. We understand that this is a tough budget year for the Town, and it may not be year that you all can take on support for a new initiative.
- In the meantime, we stand at-the-ready to reconsider and resubmit a request, discuss your ideas for a water bill relief program, and/or reconsider how we approach the matter altogether. The need will remain, as will the opportunity to help cover a basic cost of living in our community.

