ORANGE WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

A public, non-profit agency providing water, sewer and reclaimed water services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community.

MEETING SUMMARY
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
December 2, 2014 at 5:30 PM in the OWASA Boardroom

Committee Members present:	Steve Dear, Chair; Terri Buckner, Quinton Harper, John Young (Ex-Officio)
Staff:	Ed Kerwin; Todd Taylor, P.E.; Mary Darr, P.E.; Stephen Winters, CPA; Patrick Davis; Greg Feller
Citizens:	None

1. Open discussion of current and past methods for community engagement considering the Board's Community Engagement Goals

The Committee agreed to recommend that the Board of Directors discuss the desirability of authorizing staff to draft a scope and process for a customer research program.

Committee members commented that conducting new research would be consistent with the following goal from the Strategic Plan:

> *Engage stakeholders to understand their perceptions and expectations so that we make well-informed decisions about our services and so that we maintain their trust.*

Committee members also commented that the scope could include multiple research methods, such as survey(s) and focus group interviews.

The Committee discussed staff's summary of OWASA's current and past topics, purposes and methods for engaging and informing stakeholders. Comments included:

- OWASA should focus on enhancing the quality of engagement, and on "real" versus superficial engagement.
- Soul searching is needed to evaluate OWASA's commitment to community engagement.
- Engagement should be defined.
- OWASA should consider a goal for engagement such as "*The community truly believes that OWASA is a community utility that cares about what customers think and want, and that customers care about what OWASA does and how it does it, and are actively engaged with OWASA.*"
- OWASA should understand its overall impression in the community; a cultural shift is needed.
- Public engagement has improved in the last two years.
- The pilot program on affordability is a great example of engagement.
- OWASA should seek to have liaisons in neighborhood listserve groups who would relay OWASA information.

- Ms. Buckner stated that a few customers have told her that they have had less than positive experience in interactions with OWASA. Other Committee members said they had perceived OWASA's interactions with customers more positively.
- Many customers may not desire to engage in discussion with OWASA.
- OWASA should be more visible at community events.
- OWASA's engagement program should include (1) ongoing activities as summarized by staff; (2) project engagement on matters such as Advanced Metering Infrastructure; (3) engagement on community projects and needs such as sewer service in the Historic Rogers Road Area and submetering; and (4) customer research.

Ed Kerwin said that in advance of the December 11th meeting, he would send the Board information regarding the questions and results of the 2012 customer survey.

2. Next meeting

The Committee agreed that the timing of the next meeting will depend on the Board's discussion on December 11th.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Greg Feller

Greg Feller, Public Affairs