# ORANGE WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

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

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** **Community Engagement Committee**
Steve Dear (Chair)
Terri Buckner
Dana Raborn
Will Raymond
Alan Rimer (*ex officio*)

**FROM**: Ed Kerwin

**DATE**: February 28, 2014

**SUBJECT:** **Background Materials for Community Engagement Committee's March 4, 2014 Meeting**

The Community Engagement Committee will meet on Tuesday, March 4, 2014 at 5:15 PM in the OWASA Boardroom.

## AGENDA

1. **Discuss Potential Pilot Program About How to Reduce OWASA Bills** (Attachment 1).

   At its January 21, 2014 meeting, OWASA's Community Engagement Committee requested that staff design "*a pilot program to engage the community/target groups with information about how to reduce OWASA bills."*

   As a starting point for discussion, Attachment 1 presents potential goals, objectives, and an approach for a potential pilot project. We request your feedback on the potential pilot project.

2. **Draft questions for survey of other utilities regarding affordability outreach and community engagement (**Attachment 2)

   Also at the January 21, 2014 meeting, the Committee asked staff to research affordability outreach programs of other water utilities. Mr. Rimer suggested after the meeting that staff survey utilities regarding their outreach/engagement programs.

   We request your feedback on the draft questions in Attachment 2. We would be glad to make changes as desired so that the survey will be of value to the Committee as well as staff.

   We plan to have the survey distributed to water utilities in metropolitan areas by e-mail, and the utilities would respond via the on-line survey service SurveyMonkey. The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) would distribute the survey, gather results and send us the results with no cost to OWASA.

**3. Other business**

**4. Next meeting**

Ed Kerwin
Executive Director

Attachments
1. Draft Pilot program for affordability outreach
2. Draft survey questions

c: Board of Directors

**ATTACHMENT #1**

# Potential Pilot Project for Engaging the Community With Information About How to Reduce OWASA Bills

(February 28, 2014)

## Background and Purpose

As our water and sewer rates have increased, so has OWASA's concern about service affordability. During rate deliberations and strategic planning meetings, the Board of Directors has concluded that water conservation should be promoted as a key strategy for customers that want to lower their water and sewer bills.

At its January 21, 2014 meeting, the Board's Community Engagement Committee requested that staff design "*a pilot program to engage the community/target groups with information about how to reduce OWASA bills."* Staff committed to present a potential pilot program for discussion and feedback at the Committee's March 4, 2014 meeting.

As a starting point for discussion, this paper presents a potential goal and objectives, and a possible approach for such a pilot project. In developing this project concept, we have had brief scoping conversations with staff of the following social service agencies: Orange County Social Services (Nancy Coston); Habitat for Humanity (Susan Levy); Inter-Faith Council (Kristin Lavergne); Orange County Section 8 housing program (Tara Fikes); and Chapel Hill Public Housing (Glenn Davis). Staff from those agencies expressed support for working closely with OWASA to more effectively inform customers about ways to reduce their water and sewer bills.

## Potential Goal and Objectives for a Pilot Project

The proposed goal of the pilot project is to help interested residential customers reduce their monthly water and sewer bills by providing them effective information and guidance about the most effective ways they can save water.

Potential objectives for the pilot project are:

1. Develop and distribute effective information about ways our residential customers can reduce bills through conservation practices and water use efficiency investments.
2. Develop information about how residential customers can do a home self-audit and seek follow-up information from OWASA.
3. Build and strengthen partnerships with other organizations to more effectively inform our target audience about ways to reduce their water and sewer bills.
4. Obtain active participation of our customers in evaluating their water use, identifying opportunities to reduce their use, and implementing conservation practices and water use efficiency investments to save water and reduce their bills.
5. Share conservation and efficiency experiences, including successes and lessons learned.

6. Use targeted surveys, focus groups, and other methods to obtain feedback from residential customers, owners of rental properties, and others regarding the usefulness of the information we provide, and their suggestions for additional ways in which we can help customers reduce their bills.

7. Engage the community in addressing water and sewer affordability challenges.

8. Implement the program using existing staff and without major expansion of the conservation program expenses.

9. Create awareness and positive perception of OWASA.

## A Potential Pilot Project for Discussion

1. Review and refine conservation outreach materials, and develop new home self-audit materials for OWASA customers. Prior to finalizing those materials, staff will request and incorporate the comments and suggestions from partner agencies and a sample group of residential customers.

2. Increase our efforts to work with applicable social service agencies to distribute conservation information and the home self-audit materials to their clients.

3. Participate in partner agency-sponsored workshops and outreach events which are conducted to provide information to the partner agency clients.

4. Provide follow-up information and technical assistance to residential customers that request additional information.

5. Work with partner agencies to contact owners of rental properties to seek their support for efforts to reduce the cost of water and sewer services to their tenants, who have minimal if any incentive to help pay for conservation investments such as replacing toilets and washers.

6. Conduct focus group meetings and/or interviews to understand issues and constraints that renters and property owners face regarding water use efficiency investments, and to identify potential strategies for increasing the effectiveness of OWASA's affordability program efforts.

7. Survey customers to determine the effectiveness of the information we provide.

8. Evaluate and report on progress of the pilot project after it has been in place for six months. Potential metrics for evaluating the success of the pilot project are listed below.

## Partnerships for Success

We have limited information about customers that have difficulty paying their OWASA bills, or that receive financial assistance from other agencies in order to pay their bills. Therefore, we

will need the support of social service agencies to more effectively reach customers that have limited financial resources or that may otherwise have difficulty paying their OWASA bill.

We would request support from the local media in reaching target audiences with desired messages at little or no cost to OWASA.

Since Duke Energy has financial incentives for installation of appliances that are both energy- and water-saving (e.g. low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators) we would also contact that utility to explore potential partnership opportunities.

## Evaluation Plan

The pilot project should be evaluated after an appropriate amount of time to determine if it is providing real benefits. Examples of potential evaluation measures for the pilot project are:

1. % of our customers that receive our information about ways to reduce their OWASA bill
2. % of residential customers that report completing the home self-audit
3. % of residential customers that request follow-up information and assistance from OWASA about ways to reduce their monthly bills
4. % of residential customers that report having reduced their water use as a result of the information they received
5. Average % reduction, and total gallons/day savings in water use reported by residential customers as a result of their conservation measures
6. % of customers that rate the usefulness of the information we provide as good or better
7. % of partner agencies that agree to distribute the information to their clients
8. Number of partner-agency workshops and outreach events we participated in
9. Number of owners of rental property that made water use efficiency investments to help their tenants reduce their water and sewer bills
10. Number of dwelling units retrofitted in response to this pilot project
11. Number of focus group meetings were held and number of people participating
12. Have successes and lessons learned been shared?

## Next Steps

The above proposal will be revised as needed to incorporate the Committee's comments and guidance. Depending on the extent of the revisions, the Committee will reconsider the proposal at a subsequent meeting, and/or present the proposal for consideration by the Board of Directors at a future Board meeting. We believe we can implement the pilot project as described above with existing staff and without major expansion of the conservation program expenses. Major additions to the proposed scope could require additional staff and/or funding for the project.

**ATTACHMENT #2**

# Survey of customer/stakeholder engagement practices including water conservation/affordability

The Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) in Chapel Hill-Carrboro, NC wants to know how you engage your customers in interactive communication in general and specifically regarding water conservation.

To participate in this survey, please click on the following link: **[link to survey monkey page.]** Your responses will be very helpful. If you wish, we will be glad to e-mail you a report on the survey results. Please see the question about this near the end of the survey.

If you have questions about the survey or meaning of the questions, please contact Greg Feller, OWASA Public Affairs, at gfeller@owasa.org or 919-537-4267.

## General questions

1. Name of your utility
2. What services do you provide? (Water, wastewater, reclaimed water, electric, gas)
3. Your name and title
4. Geographic area you serve
5. Number of accounts
6. Annual revenues
7. Annual budget
8. Population served

## Community/stakeholder engagement in general

9. Which stakeholder groups do you seek to engage? (Please check all that apply)

    a. Residential customers in conventional homes
    b. Residents in multi-family neighborhoods who are utility accountholders
    c. Residents in multi-family neighborhoods who are not utility accountholders
    d. Businesses (if yes, which sectors?)
    e. Non-profit organizations (if yes, what types?)
    f. Other:
    g. We do not target specific stakeholder groups; we engage the overall community

10. Which of the following methods does your utility use?

    a. Website blog
    b. Facebook
    c. Twitter
    d. Following community leaders and/or other local stakeholders on Twitter (such as people who follow your utility on Twitter)
    e. YouTube
    f. Pinterest
    g. Instagram
    h. Other social media: _____
    i. Other social media: _____
    j. Group interviews (focus groups)

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11. How do you rate the cost-effectiveness of the following methods
    (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, and Not used would be the rating options for each)

    a. Website blog
    b. Facebook
    c. Twitter
    d. Following community leaders and/or other local stakeholders on Twitter (such as people who follow your utility on Twitter)
    e. YouTube
    f. Pinterest
    g. Instagram
    h. Other social media: _____
    i. Other social media: _____
    j. Group interviews (focus groups)

12. What has been your one most cost-effective action to engage the community/stakeholders in dialogue?
13. What other engagement actions have been highly cost-effective?
14. What actions have been least cost-effective?
15. What have been your most important lessons learned about your utility's stakeholder engagement efforts?
16. Other comments or information for us?

**Water conservation/affordability outreach**

17. What are the primary topics you inform customers about in your conservation/affordability outreach program?
18. What has been your one most cost-effective action to help customers conserve water and reduce their water/sewer bills?
19. What other actions have been highly cost-effective?
20. What actions have been least cost-effective?
21. What have been your most effective partnership strategies for addressing affordability through water conservation?
22. What have been your most important lessons learned regarding your utility's affordability efforts?
23. What performance indicators do you track to measure the success of your affordability outreach efforts?
24. Other comments or information for us?

**Conclusion**

25. Do you wish to receive a summary of responses to this survey?

26. If yes, please give your e-mail address

**Thank you for your help!** We would be glad to participate in your future surveys or research about water utilities.

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