

Orange Water and Sewer Authority

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
For Homeowners, Developers, and Business Owners

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Link Locations

1. **OWASA's Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges:** From the OWASA Home Page at <https://www.owasa.org>, select "My Service" and "Rates & Fees" for the latest schedule.
2. **Engineering Home Page:** <https://www.owasa.org/developers-contractors-engineers/>. The bottom of the page contains many useful links in expandable lists.
3. **Service Availability Request and Project Review Form** in the middle of the Engineering Home Page (see #2 above), and at: <https://www.cognitoforms.com/OWASA2/orangewaterandsewerauthorityavailabilityrequest>.

General

4. **I want to build on a vacant lot in Chapel Hill/Carrboro. How can I learn if potable water and sanitary sewer services are available?**

The property to be served must be adjacent to the water and sewer mains. To find out about your service availability, complete the "Service Availability Request and Project Review Form" (see #3 above).

5. If my property is inside the OWASA service area but there are no water or sewer mains adjacent to my property and available for connection, how can I get water and service?

Extension of public mains by the benefitting party is required. As a non-profit provider of water, sewer, and reclaimed water services, OWASA's funding comes exclusively from ratepayers. The Agreements of Purchase and Sale with the University and Towns and formed OWASA require that benefiting parties be financially responsible for main extensions to serve their needs, therefore, growth pays for growth. Dedicated easements necessary for the public main extensions and for future orderly development of the distribution and collection systems are required when applicable.

6. My vacant lot is in the OWASA service area, and water and sewer mains are adjacent to my lot. Will OWASA install water and sewer laterals to serve my house?

OWASA makes all taps onto OWASA mains after the property owner's contractor prepares the site. The property owner is responsible for paying for the taps and the installation of the laterals. See OWASA's *Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges* (see #1 above).

- Water: The meter will be located at the edge of the public right of way or OWASA easement. The service lateral from the tap on the public main up to and including the meter box and meter is owned and maintained by OWASA. For a service connection to an existing water main for a 5/8-, 3/4-, or 1-inch meter, OWASA performs a full-service installation from tapping the main to the meter. For services for 1-1/2 inch and larger meters, a licensed utility contractor installs the service line from the main to the meter after OWASA taps the main. The remaining private water service from the meter box to the house shall be installed by a licensed plumber or utility contractor. For services on new mains that are part of a larger development project, everything is installed by the contractor.
- Sewer: The service lateral from the service tap on the public main all the way to the house is owned and maintained by the customer. OWASA will make the service tap at the main. A licensed utility contractor installs the service line from the main to a clean-out port at the edge of the road right-of-way or easement. The remaining private sewer service from the first cleanout to the house shall be installed by a licensed plumber or utility contractor.

7. **How much will it cost to have water and sewer service installed for my property?**

See OWASA's *Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges* at #1 above. Once public mains are adjacent to a property, the OWASA fees required for new service installation include a Water Main Tapping Fee, a Water Service and Meter Installation Charge, and a Sewer Tap Charge. Some projects require fees for Meter Delivery, Fire Flow Testing, or a Temporary Hydrant Meter. These fees are in addition to the fees to a licensed plumber or utility contractor for their time and materials.

Water and Sewer Service Availability Fees for OWASA will apply and are in addition to the costs to the benefitting party of completing any necessary main extensions and the service connections noted above. Service Availability Fees are calculated to recover a portion of the capital costs of providing water and sewer system facility capacity and are based on size of meter and size of house (heated square feet). A 5/8-inch meter is typical for a single-family home.

8. **I have or will have an OWASA easement on my property. How wide are easements? Can I plant or build anything there?**

Easements are normally 30 feet wide and need to remain clear of any structures or plantings which would impede access to mains and manholes. Certain types of plantings may be allowed along the outer edges of easements. Contact Distribution and Collection Systems' staff at (919) 537-4292 you would like to request permission to build or plant near an existing main or OWASA easement.

Residential

9. **My house is not near a sewer main. Can I connect to my neighbor's service line?**

No. The creation of new common sewer laterals are not allowed. Each house and lot must have a separate service line from the sewer main.

10. **If I get permission from my neighbor, can I install a private service line across their property from the OWASA main line to my house?**

Not for new construction, as water and sewer mains must be adjacent to the properties to be served. A variance for an existing home will be considered when Orange County has denied a septic system repair permit, and for situations where there may be no benefit from an extension of the public water or sewer system. Connection is required

should a public main become adjacent to the property in the future. The variance is recorded with your deed and while receiving OWASA water or sewer service under a variance, no subdivision of the lot is allowed.

11. I have water and sewer service to my house already. Can I add water and sewer service for an accessory building on my property?

In certain circumstances, a variance may be granted to allow the connection of an accessory building on the same lot to the sewer lateral serving the main building. Both buildings must be “deemed permitted” under the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality’s 15A NCAC 02T Rules. If granted a sewer variance, a water service for an accessory building generally may be connected behind the meter to a domestic-only water service (i.e., no connected irrigation/pool/hot tub) for the main building. Contact a Systems Development Engineering Technician in the Engineering and Planning Department at (919) 968-4421 for assistance.

12. I already have water and sewer services to my house, and I would like to install an irrigation system. Can I branch a connection from the private section of my water service line?

For most ¾-inch domestic service lines, a separate tap to the water main, a new service line, an irrigation meter, and a reduced pressure zone backflow prevention assembly (RPZ) will be required. In some situations, a tee behind the domestic meter can supply the irrigation system with the addition of an RPZ on the OWASA side of the tee. For 1-inch and larger domestic service lines serving only one building, it may be permissible to tap into or ‘split’ to supply the domestic and an irrigation meter with the installation of an RPZ. One-inch services that are already being utilized as a dual service for domestic service (i.e., already have two 5/8” meters connected) cannot be further ‘split’ for installing an irrigation meter. Permitting is required. Connecting to the water service lateral on the OWASA side of the domestic meter for any purpose is strictly prohibited. Submit a “Service Availability Request and Project Review Form” (see #3 above). See #1 above for fees.

A backflow assembly shall be installed above grade and 5 feet from the meter in an insulated enclosure affixed to a concrete pad. The concrete pad shall be a minimum of 4 inches thick and have a minimum strength of 2,500 psi. The backflow shall be tested by a certified tester within 10 days of installation and annually thereafter. A list of certified backflow prevention device testers can be located at the bottom of the page at #2 above.

Protection for the backflow assembly against freezing and damage is required. OWASA does not mandate heated enclosures for backflow prevention assemblies on ¾ or 1 inch service lines for residential backflows, however, if not winterized, they may freeze and

break, leaving the customer with repair bills. If the backflow breaks, the customer is solely responsible for its repair and is subject to fees from OWASA to shut the service for repair and the leaked water. OWASA recommends heated enclosures for any backflow that is not winterized to prevent freezing and breaking.

There is no impact to the sewer service lateral for an in-ground irrigation system. Since customer sewer use is unmetered and sewer fees are based on the amount of metered water use, irrigation water that passes through the domestic meter is charged for sewer. Having a dedicated irrigation service lateral and meter means there are no monthly sewer use fees charged on water used for irrigation.

13. I plan to install a pool or hot tub on my property. What does OWASA require?

Permits are required for the installation of a backflow prevention assembly and for any discharge to sewer needed for the backwash water. Plan review and approval and inspection fees apply. Contact OWASA Plan Review and provide drawings for review and to pay any required fees prior to beginning any work on site.

Water for a pool or hot tub is typically supplied through a tee off the primary domestic supply between the backflow prevention assembly and the house. A backflow assembly shall be installed above grade and 5 feet from the meter in an insulated enclosure affixed to a concrete pad. The concrete pad shall be a minimum of 4 inches thick and have a minimum strength of 2500 psi. The backflow shall be tested by a certified tester within 10 days of installation and annually thereafter. A list of certified backflow prevention device testers can be located at the bottom of the page at #2 above.

Protection for the backflow assembly against damage and freezing is required. OWASA does not require heated enclosures for backflow prevention assemblies on $\frac{3}{4}$ or 1 inch service lines for residential backflows, however, if not winterized, they may freeze and break, leaving the customer with large repair bills. If the backflow breaks, the customer is solely responsible for its repair and is subject to fees from OWASA to shut the service for repair and the leaked water. OWASA recommends heated enclosures for any backflow that is not winterized to prevent freezing and breaking.

Swimming pools, hot tubs, and area drains are not allowed to discharge into the OWASA sewer system. The backwash water may be discharged to public sewer after a permit is issued. Backwash from saltwater pools may not discharge to public sewer. Pools using cartridge filters which are not backwashed and have no sewer discharge to public sewer are popular to avoid sewer discharge permitting.

14. My house lies at the bottom of a hill, much lower than the road where the sewer main connection must be made. Can I install a pump?

Yes. While privately pumped connections are allowed, they are discouraged due to maintenance requirements and the possibility of raw sewage flooding the home. In addition, pumped connections must fall by gravity from the last cleanout to the OWASA sewer main. Options for a traditional, “gravity” sewer service should be thoroughly explored. OWASA does not own or maintain the pump.

15. I want to subdivide my lot for development. What should I know?

All parcels must be adjacent to water and sewer public mains after subdividing. See questions 4 and 5.

Property Development

16. I need to extend water and sewer mains to my project. How do I get started?

Contact an engineering associate for plan review at (919) 968-4421 to discuss the project before design drawings are created. With main extension(s), the project requires state permits in addition to OWASA permits.

17. We are planning a very large project. Can your system take significant additional water and sewer demands?

System capacity will need to be evaluated for each project. The developer may be required to pay to model the project impacts in OWASA’s water and wastewater models. Developers are responsible for any improvements necessary to accommodate the new project.

18. What is required on engineering drawings?

Refer to Sections 3 and 4 in our *Manual of Standards, Specifications, and Design* and the “Plan Review Checklist” found at the bottom of the Engineering Home Page (see #2 above) under “Standards, Policies, and Forms.” While not covering everything in the Manual, the checklist summarizes the most common errors which result in resubmittal.

19. How long will it take for you to review my engineering drawings?

OWASA has a small staff, and projects are reviewed in the order received. While turn-around time is dependent on workload, our goal is to respond within 15 working days of submission. If the drawings need revision, additional review time should be allotted for the new submittal.

20. What fees will I have to pay and when?

In addition to the fees outlines under Q&A #7 for new services, Plan Review and Construction Observation fees apply. Plan Review fees are paid at the time that the construction drawings are submitted for OWASA review. Construction Observation fees are paid to OWASA prior to receiving a Permit to Construct or scheduling the mandatory preconstruction conference. The amounts are based on the lengths of main extension and are subject to change each year. See #1 above for latest fees.

As of the date of this FAQ, the following OWASA fees apply:

- Plan Review
 - \$3.63 per foot.
 - Minimum charge of \$100 for water and \$100 for sewer, as applicable, including stand-alone backflow, grease control, or discharge permits.
- Construction Observation
 - \$3.69 per foot.
 - Minimum charge of \$100 for water and \$100 for sewer as applicable, including stand-alone backflow, grease control, or discharge permits.
- Water and Sewer System Development Fees for commercial meters vary by meter type and size, and are paid prior to OWASA invoicing for or setting a meter.

Checks for fees for North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) for permit review are submitted with the state permit application packages. As of the date of this FAQ:

- Water main extensions fees are \$150 when less than 5000 ft, and \$200 if longer.
- Sewer main extensions fees \$480.

21. After my drawings are approved, when can we begin construction?

Plan approval by OWASA is only the first step and will be issued only after all required documentation is received. See the "Plan Review Checklist" at the bottom of the

Engineering Home Page (see #2 above) under “Standards, Policies, and Forms” for details. Applications must be submitted to and approved by the appropriate section of the Division of Water Resources within the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality if public main extensions are planned. After approval is issued and remaining documentation has been approved, OWASA will issue a Permit to Construct. The developer shall have a mandatory preconstruction conference with the OWASA construction inspector before beginning any utility work or work which may impact existing mains or services. The Permit to Construct will contain the name and contact information for the assigned inspector.

22. [How can I get water for construction?](#)

A temporary water meter can be installed on the existing service connection if water service does not need to be maintained to an existing structure. If no existing water meter is available, a temporary meter can also be installed on a fire hydrant. Contact OWASA Customer Service at (919) 537-4343 to request a hydrant meter and an Engineering Technician in the Engineering and Planning Department for use of an existing service for temporary construction water.

23. [When construction is complete, when can I get my meter?](#)

Once the contractor has completed all punch list items, the OWASA Inspector has issued Tentative Acceptance, and all close-out documentation—including the Engineer’s Certification(s), Asset Letter, Dedication Letter, onsite easements, and record drawings--have been received and accepted by NCDEQ (as applicable) and OWASA, an invoice for the meter will be issued. Once the invoice has been paid, the meter installation is typically completed within one week.

24. [Who installs the water meter?](#)

OWASA will install meters 2 inches and smaller. Meters 3 inches or larger must be installed by the contractor under supervision by OWASA.

Commercial Projects

25. [I plan to open a restaurant or food service establishment in a building where water and sewer service are already established. What review and approval do I need from OWASA?](#)

A grease/oil control device(s) for the sewer service and reduced pressure zone (RPZ) backflow protection for the water service meeting the current code are required. If a

grease trap/interceptor and/or backflow prevention assembly existed prior to the new restaurant, contact OWASA to determine if they meet current code or need to be relocated and/or replaced. Submit information required by our “Grease and Oil Control Standards,” found at the bottom of the Engineering and Planning Department home page (see #2 above), under “Standards, Policies, and Forms.” If intending to reuse a sewer service lateral, you will be required to collect video (CCTV) footage in the lateral to determine if it is fit for service or needs to be repaired/replaced.

26. I plan to open a business. Are there any special requirements for water and/or sewer service?

Yes, a backflow prevention assembly is required for the water service. Food establishments, and businesses with parking structures, hydraulic elevators, pools, trash rooms, or trash pads which drain to the sanitary sewer also require grease/oil control devices. Other requirements may apply to certain types of businesses. All discharges must be within the limits listed in the OWASA Sewer Use Ordinance, at the bottom of the Engineering Home Page (see #2 above) under “Standards, Policies, and Forms.” Contact OWASA early to determine what is required for your business.

27. Can I install a backflow prevention assembly inside?

New backflow assemblies shall be installed exterior to the building and five feet away from the meter vault or meter box. A variance may be requested in existing highly developed areas where exterior locations create safety concerns, the assembly is placed just within the first exterior wall closest to the meter, and the length of pipe between the meter and backflow is short. New development shall provide adequate space for exterior installation. For more information, review the Backflow Prevention Ordinance and Manual at the Engineering Home Page (see #2 above) under “Backflow Information.”