



# Efforts to Provide Water and Sewer Rates Relief

The Town of Hillsborough is committed to providing quality and reliable water and sewer service. It is also committed to finding ways to help relieve customers from the high cost of funding this service.

## Rates study

State law prevents the town from charging different rates to customers based on income. A rate study is slated for Fiscal Year 2019-20 to begin evaluating the town’s rate structures and exploring other options.

## Lower minimum usage

In 2013, the town implemented a four-year plan to reduce the minimum number of gallons of water and sewer use that customers are charged for each month. By 2016, the monthly base use dropped from 3,000 to 2,500 gallons. This change provides cost savings for the town’s lower-volume users and was achieved without raising rates for customers who use more than the minimum.

<b>Savings from Change in Water and Sewer Usage Minimum for Customers Using the Minimum or Less</b> The minimum usage that the town charges for dropped from 3,000 to 2,500 gallons.			
	Water	Sewer	Combined
<b>In-town customers</b>			
Monthly savings	\$4.63	\$6.85	\$11.48
Yearly savings	\$55.56	\$82.20	\$137.76
<b>Out-of town customers</b>			
Monthly savings	\$9.03	\$13.34	\$22.37
Yearly savings	\$108.36	\$160.08	\$268.44

## Water Assistance Program

The Water Assistance Program was started in March 2006 to help eligible customers with paying water and sewer bills. The candidates must be recommended by the Orange County Department of Social Services or a local church.

The program, which is administered through a partnership with the local nonprofit organization Orange Congregations in Mission, is funded through donations from utility customers. One-time donations may be made to the fund, or monthly pledges of up to \$20 can be added to water and sewer bills. Donation forms may be completed online through the town’s website.

In 2018, the program assisted 70 households with an average of \$101.87 per household. The donations to the program in that year totaled \$3,741.27.

The town started the program with \$5,000 of seed money and provided another \$5,000 for the following year.

**“For those concerned about the affordability of living in this area, especially for people on fixed incomes or facing family emergencies, our Water Assistance Program is a good way to help.”**

— Hillsborough Mayor Tom Stevens

### **Water and Sewer Advisory Committee**

A water and sewer advisory task force was formed after large rate increases were required in the early 2000s to pay for the construction of the West Fork Eno Reservoir and to make up for the loss of the town’s largest water customer, which represented 25 percent of the town’s water and sewer revenue. The members were tasked with evaluating the situation that led to the large rate increases and with evaluating the management of the town’s utilities operations and finances.

The task force has continued as a permanent advisory board — the Hillsborough Water and Sewer Advisory Committee, which is composed of four in-town and four out-of-town water customers. The committee provides guidance and oversight for the town’s water and sewer operations, making recommendations to the Hillsborough Board of Commissioners and town staff. Its members represent water and sewer customers and hear the concerns and suggestions of fellow customers.

The committee has committed to exploring options in Fiscal Year 2020 for providing water and sewer cost savings to Hillsborough’s customers.

The Water and Sewer Advisory Committee page on the town’s website includes information on the board’s membership and meetings as well a contact form.

### **Innovation**

Hillsborough utilities employees regularly are recognized for efforts to reduce costs. Among efforts is work to reduce the number of pump stations that the town operates. These pumps are used to keep sewage flowing in low areas. They are expensive to operate, and failures can result in sanitary sewer overflows and fines from the state. Hillsborough has more pump stations than a typical municipality because of its terrain and likely because the infrastructure was preferred decades ago due to low upfront costs. Since 2005, two pump stations have been eliminated.