

Wastewater Management Program Overview

Overview

The Wastewater Management Program (WWM) is operated, maintained, and managed within the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES). The program currently includes the County-owned Noman M. Cole, Jr. Water Recycling Facility (67 million gallons per day (mgd) capacity), nearly 3,300 miles of sewer lines, 70 pump stations, and 57 flow-metering stations; and covers approximately 234 square miles of the County's 407 square-mile area. Capacity entitlement at the other regional facilities totals 89.6 mgd. A total of 373,821 households and businesses in Fairfax County are connected to public sewer as of June 30, 2024.

In addition to providing County residents and businesses with sewer service, Fairfax County provides sewer service to other nearby entities through "Sales of Service" agreements with Arlington and Loudoun Counties, the Cities of Falls Church and Fairfax, the Towns of Herndon and Vienna, and Fort Belvoir. These entities share the capital and operating costs of WWM based on actual wastewater flow and reserved treatment capacity.

Strategic planning and overall business monitoring are the responsibility of the Wastewater Management Leadership Team, whose responsibilities focus on long range planning, strategic thinking, continuous improvement processing, wastewater capacity, and financial management. This team is composed of employees from three divisions within WWM: Collections, Treatment, and Planning and Monitoring.

The Wastewater Collection Division (WCD) is responsible for the County's wastewater collection and conveyance system consisting of sewers, force mains, pumping stations, and metering stations. The WCD has a proactive sewer system maintenance program that facilitates a safe and effective wastewater collection system. In FY 2024, approximately 273 miles of sewer lines were inspected by Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) crews and approximately 447 miles of sewer lines were cleaned to ensure maximum flow carrying capacity and reduce sewer backups and overflows. Over the last six years, WCD has rehabilitated approximately 104 miles of sewer lines to protect the environment and residents of Fairfax County.

The Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) is responsible for operating and maintaining the County's wastewater treatment facility, the Noman M. Cole, Jr. Water Recycling Facility (NCWRF). The WTD continues to produce a quality effluent, meeting regulatory and permit requirements, despite major construction occurring throughout the plant site. The NCWRF has started the rehabilitation of the plant's bio-solids facilities, which includes additional air pollution control systems and complete rehabilitation of all four incinerators, which will include energy recovery.

The Wastewater Planning and Monitoring Division (WPMD) is responsible for the agency's fiscal planning, engineering planning, and wastewater monitoring. The WPMD continues to effectively monitor the long-term needs for the Wastewater Management Program in terms of infrastructure upgrades, maintenance, and expansions. The WPMD ensures that all financial requirements are fulfilled by maintaining a rate structure to adequately recover all operating and maintenance costs, capital improvements and debt service obligations. The WPMD also plans for system capacity, both in the conveyance system and treatment facilities, by initiating expansion and improvement projects to keep pace with increased wastewater flows. The WPMD safeguards the environment by ensuring compliance with water quality standards and preventing toxic discharge into the collection system.

WPMD is currently monitoring the Chesapeake Bay water quality program, which requires reductions in the amount of nutrient pollutants discharged from wastewater treatment facilities. In December 2004, the state notified the County that the renewal of the County's Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) permit included a requirement that nutrient removal be performed using "State of the Art" technology and meet a waste load allocation (cap) for the nitrogen and phosphorous nutrients. A phased approach was used to renovate and upgrade current plant facilities to

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accommodate these more stringent nutrient discharge requirements. These renovations and upgrades were completed in FY 2015. Other regional plants serving the County have also completed the required upgrades and are in compliance with the new requirements.

The Wastewater Management Program is primarily supported by Sewer Service Charges received from existing customers, which are used to fully recover program operation and maintenance costs, debt service payments, and capital project requirements attributable to improving wastewater treatment effluent quality as mandated by state and federal agencies. The five-year sewer rate plan approved by the Board of Supervisors as part of the FY 2025 Adopted Budget Plan proposed to increase the sewer charge by 5.9 percent in FY 2026. After a careful review, the Wastewater Management staff recommended increasing the sewer charges by the proposed 5.9 percent in FY 2026. The Sewer Service Charge increased from \$8.81 to \$9.33 per 1,000 gallons of water consumed based on Fairfax County's winter quarter average consumption of 16,000 gallons.

The Base Charge increased from \$49.73 per quarter to \$52.62 per quarter in FY 2026. The Base Charge provides for a more equitable rate structure by recovering a portion of the program's fixed costs. The industry practice for a fixed charge revenue rate is 25 percent to 30 percent of operating revenues. The fixed charge revenue percentage in FY 2026 is equal to 25.9 percent. The current system, including sewer lines, facilities, purchased capacity and equipment, is valued at approximately \$2.0 billion. Based on the age and required maintenance of the system, reinvestment must continue to be addressed. The implementation of the increases to the Base Charge will help ensure that all users of the system share in the fixed costs associated with reinvestment and operations.

The annual average customer bill increased from \$762.76 in FY 2025 to \$807.60 in FY 2026, an annual cost increase of \$44.84 or 5.9 percent. The FY 2026 average bill in Fairfax County is competitive compared to the average bill in other regional jurisdictions even with the proposed increases. The increases in the Sewer Service Charge and Base Charge from FY 2026 to FY 2030 will partially offset the increased costs associated with capital project construction, system operation and maintenance, debt service and upgrades to meet new, more stringent nitrogen discharge limitations from wastewater treatment plants.

Year	Sewer Service Charge Per 1,000 gallons of water	Base Charge Per Quarterly Bill	Sewer Charges Percentage Increase ¹	Fixed Charge Revenue Percentage
2025	\$8.81	\$49.73	5.80%	25.5%
2026	\$9.33	\$52.62	5.90%	25.9%
2027	\$9.88	\$55.78	5.90%	25.9%
2028	\$10.46	\$59.08	5.90%	25.9%
2029	\$11.08	\$62.57	5.90%	25.9%
2030	\$11.74	\$66.27	5.90%	25.9%

¹ This value is based on Fairfax County's winter quarter average consumption of 16,000 gallons and corresponding service and base charges.

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The Wastewater Management Program is also supported by the Availability Charge, which is a one-time charge to new customers for initial connection to the system. The revenue from the Availability Charge is used to offset the costs of expanding conveyance and treatment plant upgrades and interjurisdictional payments that result from population growth, more stringent treatment requirements, and inflation. In FY 2026, the Availability Charge increased to \$9,218 from \$9,038 in FY 2025 for single-family households. Rates are based on requirements associated with conveyance and treatment plant upgrades and interjurisdictional payments that result from population growth, more stringent treatment requirements and inflation.

The FY 2026 rate is consistent with the recommendations of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), and the analysis included in the December 2024 [Wastewater Revenue Sufficiency and Rate Analysis](#) report. The following table displays the rates by category:

Category	FY 2025 Availability Charge	FY 2026 Availability Charge
Single Family	\$9,038	\$9,218
Townhouses and Apartments	\$7,231	\$7,374
Hotels/Motels	\$2,260	\$2,304
Nonresidential	\$452/fixture unit	\$461/fixture unit

As part of the [FY 2020 Adopted Budget Plan](#), the Board of Supervisors approved the establishment of charges to recover a portion of the cost of disposal and treatment of hauled wastewater at the County's septage receiving facility (SRF), which is located at the NCWRF.

The County's SRF was constructed to receive and treat septage from local onsite sewage disposal systems in accordance with [Code of Virginia](#) Ann. Section 15.2-2123. In addition, the SRF receives landfill leachate, portable toilet waste, restaurant grease, and recycled carwash water. Hauled septage and wastewater used to be received and treated at no cost to pump and haul contractors to encourage proper disposal. This cost used to be covered by the sewer charges paid by the customers of the County's public sewer system. The charges for hauled wastewater improve equity among customers served by the sewer system and those served by the pump and haul contractors. Also, the charges recover a portion of the costs of operation, maintenance, and upcoming necessary improvements to the SRF.

The charge for high strength waste such as septic tank, restaurant grease, and landfill leachate remained at \$27 per 1,000 gallons of the hauler's truck capacity in FY 2026. The charge for low strength waste remained at \$7.72 per 1,000 gallons of hauler truck capacity in FY 2026. Wastewater Management is reviewing these charges, and both could be adjusted in the future. The projected FY 2026 revenue from charges for hauled wastewater is equal to \$200,000.

This level of revenue in FY 2026 allows the system to meet permit conditions, meet and maintain each of the required financial targets through FY 2030, maintain competitive rates with neighboring utilities, continue to preserve its AAA bond rating, and require less debt to support capital projects.

The table on the following page reflects the Wastewater Management Program's projected fiscal health in FY 2026 and FY 2027. The financial planning process incorporates the following indicators that are interrelated and structured to identify the adequacy of rates from a cash flow, business, and compliance standpoint. These indicators are used by the rating agencies to determine the Program's credit rating.

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Calculated Financial Indicators			
Financial Indicator	Target	FY 2026	FY 2027
Net Revenue Margin	45% to 65%	49%	50%
Days Working Capital ¹	150 to 200 days	218	216
Debt Coverage Senior ²	Min. 2.75x	2.97x	2.62x
Debt Coverage All-in ³	1.80x to 2.20x	1.91x	1.80x
Affordability (% of median income spent on sewer bill)	Less than 1.2%	0.63%	0.66%
Debt to Net Plant in Service	Below 40.0% Never above 50.0%	39%	40%
Outstanding Debt per Connection	Max \$3,000	\$2,480	\$2,670
Anticipated Sewer Bond Sale in FY 2026 - \$230.0 Million			

¹ The Days Working Capital financial indicator is exclusive of Availability Charges in Fund 69000, Sewer Revenue, debt expenses in the Wastewater debt related funds, Fund 69300, Sewer Construction Improvements, and Fund 69310, Sewer Bond Construction. It is calculated based on Operating Expenses and 360 days per year.

² Assumes conservative assumptions for bond financing and will be reconciled following the FY 2026 bond sale results. Coverage still exceeds bond covenants and financial policies.

³ The Debt Coverage All-in financial indicator is exclusive of Availability Charges.

It is anticipated that the rates in FY 2026 will support the County's ability to maintain high bond ratings (AAA by Fitch Investor Service and Standard and Poor's Corporation and Aaa by Moody's Investors Service, Inc.) from the rating agencies. These high credit ratings have enabled the County to sell bonds on behalf of the Program at interest rates lower than those obtained by most sewer authorities, thereby achieving savings throughout the life of the bonds. The Wastewater Management Program has issued debt to fund major expansion and upgrade projects for both its own plant and its portion at the "Treatment by Contract" facilities.

In FY 2026, the County is projected to provide for the treatment of 97.4 million gallons of wastewater per day. Approximately 38 percent of this flow is treated at the NCWRF. The flow is distributed between the NCWRF and the interjurisdictional facilities as detailed in the following table. The table below also includes the capacity utilization percentage and the available (unused) capacity for each plant.

Treatment Plant	Capacity (mgd)	FY 2026 Projected Daily Average (mgd)	Capacity Utilization (%)	Available Capacity (mgd)
DCWASA Blue Plains	31.0	28.5	91.9%	2.5
Noman M. Cole, Jr. Water Recycling	67.0	37.8	56.4%	29.2
Alexandria Renew Enterprises	32.4	16.3	50.3%	16.1
Arlington County	3.0	2.2	73.3%	0.8
Upper Occoquan Service Authority	22.1	12.6	57.0%	9.5
Loudoun Water	1.0	0.0	0.0%	1.0
PWC Service Authority	0.1	0.0	0.0%	0.1
Total	156.6	97.4	62.2%	59.2

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To ensure that WWM remains competitive and provides a high-performance operation, including improvements to the technical and managerial capacities that will continue to enhance service quality, customer service, and financial planning, WWM closely monitors the following areas:

	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Adopted	FY 2026 Adopted
Sewer Service Charge, \$/1,000 gallons	\$8.46	\$8.81	\$9.33
Treatment Costs, \$/MGD	\$2,597	\$2,800	\$2,900
Number of Sewer System Overflows	13	15	15
Odor Complaints per year	11	15	15

The WWM comprises seven separate funds under a self-supporting fund structure (Enterprise Funds) consistent with the Sewer Bond Resolution adopted by the Board of Supervisors in July 1985. For more detailed information on the operational aspects of the various programs, please refer to the narrative of Fund 69010, Sewer Operation and Maintenance, which follows this Overview. The following is a brief description of the seven active funds:

- **Fund 69000** - Sewer Revenue is used to credit all operating revenues of the system, as well as most of the interest on invested fund balances. Revenues recorded in this fund are transferred to the various funds to meet their operational requirements. The remaining fund balances are used to set aside funds for various reserves and future system requirements.
- **Fund 69010** - Sewer Operation and Maintenance provides funding for the three divisions responsible for the management and operation of the program supported by a transfer from Fund 69000.
- **Fund 69020** - Sewer Bond Parity Debt Service is used to record principal, interest, and fiscal agent fees for the 2014 Sewer Refunding Bonds, the 2016 Sewer Refunding Bonds, the 2017 Sewer Revenue Bonds, the 2021A Sewer Revenue Bonds, the 2021B Sewer Refunding Bonds, 2024A Sewer Revenue Bonds, and the anticipated 2026 Sewer Revenue Bonds in accordance with the current Sewer Bond Resolution supported by a transfer from Fund 69000.
- **Fund 69030** - Sewer Bond Debt Reserve provided debt reserve funds for bonds issued by the Sewer System in accordance with the Sewer 1985 General Bond resolution. On May 21, 2024, the Board of Supervisors approved the release of the Sewer Bond Debt Reserve after 57.4 percent of the outstanding Sewer bondholders, through two series of bond sales, provided consent to eliminate the Sewer Bond Debt Reserve. The funding from this reserve will be used in the same manner as any tax-exempt bond proceeds, namely payment for Sewer capital projects. The County's Sewer Revenue Bonds hold triple-A bond ratings from all three bond rating agencies, and the County's Financial Advisor viewed this reserve as an unnecessary requirement given the strong financial status of the Sewer Fund. Fund 69030, Sewer Bond Debt Reserve, was subsequently closed as part of the *FY 2024 Carryover Review* and resulted in a transfer out of \$36,660,067 to Fund 69310, Sewer Bond Construction, to support Sewer capital projects.

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- **Fund 69040** - Sewer Bond Subordinate Debt Service provides debt service payments for the Upper Occoquan Service Authority (UOSA) revenue bonds and the Stormwater/Wastewater Facility Economic Development Authority (EDA) revenue bonds. All future issues or refinancing of debt arising from interjurisdictional capacity rights may be treated as subordinate obligations of the system as provided by the General Bond Resolution for Sewer Revenue Bonds. Funding is supported by a transfer from Fund 69000.
- **Fund 69300** - Sewer Construction Improvements provides funding for the repair, rehabilitation, and improvement requirements of the entire program's infrastructure, and is supported by a transfer from Fund 69000.
- **Fund 69310** - Sewer Bond Construction provides for major program construction projects, which are funded from the issuance of sewer revenue bonds and/or program revenues.

Organizational Chart

