

Item Title: Temporarily Waive Selected Well Water Testing Fees for Eligible Low Income Households

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners waives selected well water testing fees for households with incomes less than 250% of the federal poverty guideline through February 29, 2020.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Board of Commissioners approves the waiving of service fees.

Background: In June 2019, Wake County sent notices to roughly 15,000 well user households in eastern Wake County to alert well users to the potential for naturally-occurring uranium, radon, and radium contamination in well water. To date, roughly 1,100 households have obtained the recommended tests, or about 7% of all households receiving the notice.

The Human Services Board and Board of Commissioners enacted an income-based sliding scale for well testing fees in FY2015 and expanded it in FY2016. Under this sliding scale, households earning less than the federal poverty guideline (FPGL) qualify for an 80% discount on well testing fees, and those with incomes between the FPGL and 250% of the FPGL qualify for a 50% discount.

Since the notice was mailed on June 24, 2019, 73 households have applied for discounted well testing, 71 of which qualified. The Department of Environmental Services estimates that this is just 2% of households that could qualify for reduced-cost testing under the existing program. This action temporarily eliminates selected fees for households earning less than 250% of the FPGL, helping more lower-income households obtain recommended well water tests. The Human Services Board approved the waiving of fees at its October 24th meeting.

Board Goal: This Board action supports routine County operations.

Fiscal Impact: The estimated revenue impact of waiving the fees is \$32,000. This assumes the temporary fee waiver will bring participation for low-income households to approximately 7%, in line with participation for all households receiving the notice.

The estimated expense impact is approximately \$140,000 and is already appropriated in the adopted budget. No additional appropriation is required. Expenses would consist of contracted

sample collection and testing, outreach materials, and temporary contracted labor.

Additional Information:

In order to ensure that lower-income residents are aware of the opportunity for free well water testing, Environmental Services is working with the Communications Office to develop press releases, printed materials, and web content to advertise the fee waiver. Environmental Services staff will also work with community partners to raise awareness about the fee waiver.

Environmental Services is currently performing a regular annual fee review. The response of well users to this temporary fee waiver will be considered along with other factors in the fee review process. Following this comprehensive review, the Board will be presented with recommended well testing fees for FY2021.

Current and proposed temporary fee schedules for the most commonly recommended tests are shown below.

Test/Service		Current Fee Schedule			Proposed Temporary Fee Schedule	
		Income more than 2.5x FPGL	Income above FPGL but less than 2.5x FPGL	Income at or below FPGL	Income more than 2.5x FPGL	Income less than 2.5x FPGL
"First Timer's Package"	Coliform Bacteria	\$25	\$12.50	\$5	\$25	\$0
	Full Inorganic Panel	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
	Volatile Organic Compounds	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
	Pesticides	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
"Rads Package"	Uranium	\$40	\$20	\$8	\$40	\$0
	Gross Alpha	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
	Radon	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
	Trip Fee	\$50	\$25	\$10	\$50	\$0
Total		\$365	\$182.50	\$73	\$365	\$0

Attachments:

1. Presentation
2. Current Fee Schedule