

# MEDIA EXPLAINER

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## ACCESS TO CLEAN, SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR ALL COMMUNITIES IN BRUNSWICK COUNTY

Brunswick County is responsible for access to clean and safe drinking water for residents in the County. Residents in many historically Black neighborhoods in the County report that water lines skip over their neighborhood, or that the cost to hook up to County water is too expensive. This leaves many residents reliant on well water that has sediment, iron, PFAS, and other contaminants. Residents report issues with their livers and health, and wonder if it's connected to the water quality of their wells.

Brunswick County is one of the wealthiest and fastest growing counties in terms of population in North Carolina. Longtime residents have asked for decades that the County extend waterlines into their communities to no avail, while new residents and residential developments have access to County waterlines immediately.

Brunswick County must prioritize access to clean and safe drinking water for all residents. In the past, Brunswick County has delayed in responding to or ignored residents and advocates when asked about this issue. When residents are choosing between buying bottled water or their medicine on a weekly basis, for example, we think that requires an urgent response and a plan to fix the issue.

## FEE CHART

We are concerned both about the accessibility of water lines and the affordability of the costs to hook up to the lines. Below is a table showing the exponential increase in County water installation and hook-up costs from 2019-2025.

Fees for meter installation and tap into County water by year as listed in County budget documents	
FY 2019-2020	\$650 (3/4 inch), \$700 (1 inches), \$3,500 (1.5

	inches), \$5,000 (2 inches)
FY 2020-2021	Not listed in budget documents
FY 2021-2022	\$3,500 (1.5 inches)
FY 2022-2023	\$2,600 (1 inch), \$6,650 (2 inches)
FY 2023-2024	\$3,200 (1 inch), \$9,000 (2 inches)
FY 2024-2025	\$2,900 (¾ inch), \$3,400, (1 inch), \$9,600 (2 inches)
FY 2025-2026	\$2,900 (¾ inch), \$3,400 (1 inch), \$9,600 (2 inches)

## OUR RESPONSES TO THE COUNTY'S STATEMENTS TO THE MEDIA

**Brunswick County** says that the County has applied for grants.

### Our response:

Brunswick County has applied for some grants and County representatives indicate their intention to apply for both a federal grant and NC DEQ grant for two neighborhoods this fall. Until these neighborhoods and all neighborhoods that want water have it, the water access issue remains unresolved. The County has yet to provide us with a plan to address the access issues facing several historically Black neighborhoods. People in the community have been advocating for the County to solve the water access issue for decades. Many of those communities are still without access to County water. This includes people in the Brown/Albright Road area, who petitioned the County in 2018 to get clean water access. A family in the Goodman Road/James Way Road area was specifically told to buy their own water treatment system and lease water out to their neighbors, instead of getting the County to apply for water. In the River Road area, the community has stated the difficulty of relying on the Boiling Springs Fire Department, which is farther away than the closest fire company, in order to address fire emergencies, especially because they don't have fire hydrants in their neighborhood. And the Mulberry Road neighborhood directly intersects with a road with a waterline, provided so for businesses. People need access to clean water in their homes. (See the reference maps below for these neighborhoods).

This year, we requested that Brunswick County apply for grants for these four neighborhoods, which are not the only areas that need access to County water, but the ones we suggest that the County start with (Brown/Albright Road, Goodman/James Way

Road, River Road, Mulberry Road neighborhoods). We are pleased that the County stated its intentions to apply for grants for the Mulberry Road neighborhood during the 2025 fall NC DEQ cycle and resubmitting for a federal grant for the Brown/Albright Road neighborhood. This is an important step towards the goal of clean and safe drinking water flowing out of the tap for all residents in Brunswick County.

As a final note, many of the grants that Brunswick County lists as examples of water access grants that the County has applied for, prior to 2025, do not address the issue of access to clean and safe drinking water because they do not extend waterlines to people who live in areas without them.

**Brunswick County** has claimed that it doesn't have a high chance of getting grants because of economic status

"One of the major roadblocks to Brunswick County getting grant funding is the county's designation as a Tier 3 County under the NC Department of Commerce's County Distress Rankings. As a Tier 3 County, Brunswick is considered one of the 20 least economically distressed counties in the state. Because of this, Brunswick County is already at a disadvantage before our application is even reviewed by any state departments that administer grants like the NCDEQ." - [County Spokesperson Megan Kascsak said](#)

#### Our response:

NC DEQ considers the economic status of the residents of the particular area that would receive state funding. It is not true that the wealth of an entire county impacts the ability for Brunswick County to secure grants for an economically distressed area. This was confirmed to us by DEQ.

Brunswick County has also received funds from NC DEQ to fund replacement projects and systems takeovers for Southport and Oak Isle Beach.

**Brunswick County** has said that EarthRights needs to provide more information, including addresses of people who want water access, to the County.

#### Our response:

Brunswick County officials have stated numerous times that they need EarthRights to provide a list of addresses that want County water to be able to begin. We see this as a delay tactic because we have provided addresses to the County. Residents have also provided addresses to the County years prior to ask for access to water. This includes a 2018 petition organized by the residents in the Brown/Albright Road area.

The County has only recently been responsive to EarthRights' and the local NAACP's attempts to collaborate and requests for information.

The information and correspondence that we've shared with the County includes the following:

1. In May 2023, EarthRights and Brunswick County NAACP sent a [petition](#) with 408 signatures to Brunswick County requesting the County apply for Community Development Block Grants. The petition includes addresses of people that want water or are in solidarity with people that don't have access to water right now.
2. July 19, 2023 - EarthRights and Brunswick County NAACP sent follow-up information to Brunswick County with eligible census tracts. Brunswick County did not respond. By the end of the year, Brunswick County did not apply for grants to address the drinking water issue.
3. May 2024 - EarthRights contacted the County regarding the Longwood/Ash Sewer Project and requested additional information on the application and materials and asked them to apply for similar grants to water lines. The County never responded.
4. October 4, 2024 - EarthRights and BC NAACP emailed Mr. Steve Stone requesting that Brunswick County apply for NC DEQ's DWSRF and CWSRF. No response from Brunswick County.  
October 15, 2024 - NC DEQ DWSRF and CWSRF fall deadline. Brunswick County did not apply for grants to expand access to clean safe drinking water to historically disadvantaged communities.
5. **Mar 10, 2025** - EarthRights and BC NAACP sent an email to Mr. Steve Stone requesting that Brunswick County apply for the NC DEQ DWSRF and CWSRF Spring 2025.  
Brunswick County did not respond.
6. April 7, 2025 - EarthRights and former County Commissioner **Charles Warren** met with Commissioner Mike Forte, Public Utilities John Nichols, and County Manager Steven Stone in person to discuss access to water in Brunswick County.  
**Apr 11, 2025** - EarthRights and Mr. Warren followed up with Brunswick County via email regarding next steps from the April 7th meeting. The County did not respond.  
April 29, 2025 - EarthRights sent another follow up email to Brunswick County regarding next steps from the April 7th meeting. The County did not respond.
7. April 30, 2025 - NC DEQ DWSRF and CWSRF Spring deadline. Brunswick County did not apply.

8. July 15, 2025 - EarthRights emailed Brunswick County requesting that they apply for the fall 2025 grant cycle. EarthRights again provided information on four specific neighborhoods with maps and addresses.
9. August 8, 2025 - Brunswick County responded to EarthRights' email, confirming that County officials would attend a DEQ information session for fall application grants. County officials did not confirm whether or not they would apply for grants in the fall cycle. County officials also confirmed that they would re-apply for federal funding for the Albright/Brown road area for the next federal fiscal year.
10. August 14, 2025 - EarthRights responded to the County, again encouraging the County to apply for state DEQ grants for the other underserved areas not covered in the federal grant.  
EarthRights followed up after two weeks on August 27 requesting a response from the County.
11. September 2, 2025 - Brunswick County responds and confirms that the County is preparing a fall cycle application for the Mulberry Road neighborhood. The County states its willingness to meet with us again.

## MAPS OF SELECTED NEIGHBORHOODS AND NEARBY WATERLINES

Four neighborhoods were identified by the NAACP and EarthRights as critical areas for water access. While we submitted information to the County in 2025 for four neighborhoods that lack access to county water, there are many others that must be surveyed and planned for, and the county must take steps to ensure comprehensive planning for water access. The petition that we submitted in 2023 included addresses for people in other neighborhoods not in these neighborhoods.





