

## **Sunshine Meeting briefing**

### **Pluris-Wedgefield Project**

**Tuesday, July 18 from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm**

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#### **Summary**

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#### **Overview**

The purpose of this meeting is to thoroughly discuss the Pluris-Wedgefield project. The Commissioners will receive updates on the progress made in the Wedgefield community and the collaborative efforts between Commissioner Bonilla's office and OCU to advance the project. The scope and rationale for presenting the project to the Board will also be covered. Additionally, the feedback from Wedgefield residents will be reviewed and discussed. To ensure transparency and community involvement, Wedgefield residents will be invited to attend the Sunshine meeting. The invites for this meeting were sent to the Commissioners, OCU, and Wedgefield residents.

#### **Objective**

Commissioner Bonilla aims to equip the Commissioners with a comprehensive understanding of the issue and the current progress in the Wedgefield community. This information will be instrumental in enabling them to make an informed decision during the upcoming BCC Meeting on July 25th.

#### **Agenda**

- I. Background – led by Commissioner Bonilla
- II. Purpose: Discuss the purpose of the project – led by Commissioner Bonilla
- III. Progress: Discuss updates on the progress made so far – led by Commissioner Bonilla
- IV. Next Steps: Outlining the next steps – led by Commissioner Bonilla
- V. Public Comments and Discussion – led by Commissioner Bonilla
- VI. Final Thoughts and Comments – led by Commissioner Bonilla

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#### **Background/Research**

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- Demographics: Wedgefield, Florida, is located in Southeast Orange County. According to the 2010 census, it has a population of approximately 6,705 people with a median age of 36.4 and a median household income of \$76,000, and per capita income of \$31,695. The median property value in Wedgefield, FL, is \$242,200, and the homeownership rate is 87.9%.
- Background: Since its inception in 1962, Wedgefield's water and wastewater services have been privately owned. In 1996, Wedgefield Utilities, Inc. sold to Pluris Holdings, LLC, and in 2009 Pluris Holdings, LLC sold to the current owners, Pluris. Over the years, Orange

County has received complaints from Wedgefield residents as follows: water quality, water aesthetics, high rates/pricing, and lack of responsive customer service. Pluris was involved in a lawsuit, settled in April 2023. Since late 2016, when I took office, I have continued Orange County's effort to resolve this issue.

- Issue: Of most importance, the results of our 2018 consulting report shows that Pluris charges rates over 154% higher than OCU rates. Pluris is regulated by the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC). PSC's approved return on equity is 8.3%. The rate of return is noteworthy because when Pluris responds to customer complaints, any subsequent improvement results in a cost increase over and above to allow Pluris to keep its 8.3% rate of return. The unfortunate result is that prices continue to climb, and the Wedgefield constituents are stuck with paying excessive amounts for their water and wastewater services. The most recent price increase was June 9, 2023, two months after their recent lawsuit was settled.
  - Open Exhibit #1 to view price increase letter sent to Wedgefield residents.
- Issue #2: a direct connection to OCU infrastructure is not viable due to water quality concerns associated with long piping (approximately 6 miles of piping) and the resulting water age. Furthermore, in addition to costs for acquisition and upgrade of the Wedgefield water system, the approximate costs associated with piping extensions would be \$20,000,000 plus capital charges. Therefore, purchase and maintenance of the current system is the only viable economic option to relieve the Wedgefield constituents of the overburdened cost (which continues to rise) of their water utilities.
- Watch the following video presentation to gain a better understanding of the issues with Pluris utility services and OCU's objectives:
  - Youtube: <https://youtu.be/bWruVuXnZs>
- Two community meeting were held with the residents of Wedgefield to update the residents on the on the County's communications with Pluris and to discuss a proposed straw poll with the residents.
- Straw Poll Ballots were sent out on May 15, 2023.
  - Open Exhibit #2 to view ballot language.

- D5 Team created an infographic with information on this project and requested that residents return their ballots. Infographics were delivered door to door of Wedgefield residents.
  - Open Exhibit #3 to view infographic language.
- Straw Poll results: The table has the breakdown of all the ballots mailed and returned, including the “Yes” and “No” votes as well as the few ballots that were incomplete or returned as undeliverable mail. The percentage calculations for only the ballots returned are: Yes: 59.01% No: 40.99%

<b>Pluris-Wedgefield Straw Poll Results</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Mailed	1,768	344	1,424
Returned Completed	552	344	208
<i>Returned Incomplete</i>	7	0	7
<i>Returned Mail Undeliverable</i>	24	0	24
Total Returned	583	344	239
Unreturned	1,185	0	1,185
	<b>1,768</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>1,424</b>



June 9, 2023

## Important Notice to Pluris Wedgefield Customers

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Dear Valued Customer,

We understand that many of you would prefer that the County own and operate the Pluris utility that supplies water to your community, and we would consider a sale to the County.

As a courtesy we are providing you with this announcement that Pluris intends to seek a rate increase from the Florida Public Services Commission within the next 90 days. Accordingly, if you wish to express an opinion and support regarding a sale of the utility to the County, you may want to consider doing so soon.

If you wish to express your opinion about such a sale to Orange County Commissioners, their contact information is below.

Mayor Jerry L. Demings  
Telephone: (407) 836-7370  
Email: [mayor@ocfl.net](mailto:mayor@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Emily Bonilla (Wedgefield Commissioner)  
Telephone: (407) 836-7350  
Email: [District5@ocfl.net](mailto:District5@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Christine Moore  
Telephone: (407) 836-7350  
Email: [District2@ocfl.net](mailto:District2@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Mayra Uribe  
Telephone: (407) 836-5140  
Email: [District3@ocfl.net](mailto:District3@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Maribel Gomez Cordero  
Telephone: (407) 836-7350  
Email: [District4@ocfl.net](mailto:District4@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Michael Scott  
Telephone: (407) 836-5860  
Email: [District6@ocfl.net](mailto:District6@ocfl.net)

Commissioner Nicole H. Wilson  
Telephone: (407) 836-7312  
Email: [district1@ocfl.net](mailto:district1@ocfl.net)



CUSTOMER SERVICE DIVISION  
UTILITIES DEPARTMENT

9150 Curry Ford Road • Reply to: Post Office Box 312 • Orlando, FL 32802  
407-836-5515 • Fax: 407-254-9696  
E-mail: Utilities.Information@ocfl.net  
Website: www.ocfl.net/utilities/

May 15, 2023

«NAME1»  
«ADD1»  
«CITY», «STATE» «ZIP»-«ZIP4»

RE: Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater System – Property Owner Straw Poll Ballot

Dear Property Owner:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you and the nearly 1,800 other Wedgefield property owners with the opportunity to participate in a straw poll to determine your interest in purchasing the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater System (System). Property owners will be required to contribute 100% of the purchase of the System in the form of a fixed amount as outlined below.

Source	Funding Estimate (in millions)	Percentage of Total	Funding Contribution per Owner
Property Owners	\$30	100%	\$27,000

Property owners also need to express their desire for Orange County to set up the owner purchase as a Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU). An MSBU designation would spread out the cost over a 20-year period. This fixed amount assessment would be included on the annual property tax bill for all 1,800 properties.

Your feedback is especially important as it will determine if this project advances. To do so, at least 67% of property owners are required to answer “in favor” of the purchase. Property owners who don’t complete and return the straw poll ballot in the allotted time frame will be counted as having answered “not in favor” of the purchase. Please limit ballot responses to one property owner per parcel to ensure we receive an accurate gauge of your collective interest in purchasing the System. The responses will be included in an update to the Orange County Board of County Commissioners sometime this summer.

Please complete the attached straw poll ballot and return it by mail using the prepaid postage envelope. **For your vote to be counted, it must be postmarked by June 17, 2023.** If you have any questions concerning the straw poll ballot, please feel free to contact our customer service line at 407-836-5515 or email Utilities.Information@ocfl.net.

Sincerely,

Orange County Utilities

Para más información, por favor llame al Departamento de Servicios Públicos del Condado de Orange y pida hablar con un representante en español. El número de teléfono es 407-836-5515.

**PROPERTY OWNER STRAW POLL BALLOT**

**Interest in purchasing the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System**

I am/we are the owners of the property included in the boundaries of the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System; parcel address of the property as follows:

«NAME1»  
WEDGEFIELD ADDRESS  
PARCEL ID: «PARCEL»

I am/we are aware of the proposed purchase of the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System. I am/we are a property owner within the boundary of said proposed project and I/we hereby cast my/our vote as follows:

**PLEASE MARK YOUR CHOICE WITH A CHECK**



**Please choose only one option. Sign your ballot.**

**OPTION 1:** I am **in favor** of purchasing the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System. Property owners would pay for the purchase of the system through a Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU). An MSBU designation provides property owners the opportunity to pay for their share of the cost of the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System over a 20-year period. A fixed amount assessment would be included on the annual property tax bill of all benefiting properties.

**OPTION 2:** I am **not in favor** of the purchase of the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System.

PRINT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

PRINT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Please note that only one property owner's signature per household is necessary. Please return this survey in the self-addressed return envelope provided. **It must be postmarked by June 17, 2023, to be counted in the tabulation of straw poll ballots.**

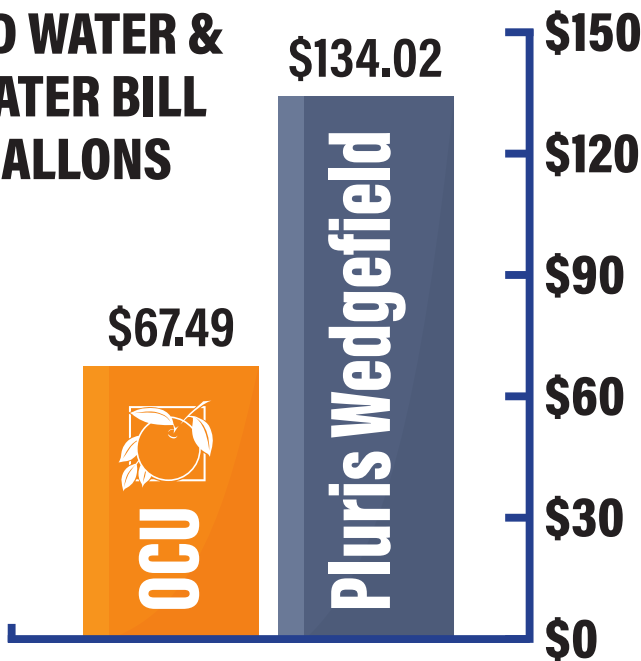
# RETURN YOUR STRAW POLL BALLOT!

Residents of Wedgefield have raised concerns regarding the utility services provided by Pluris Wedgefield, LLC. These concerns include the quality and appearance of the water, high rates, and poor customer service. Pluris was involved in a lawsuit regarding the quality of their water. As of April 2023, they have been ordered to pay \$3.3 million to settle the case. Currently, Pluris Wedgefield, LLC charges rates that are more than 98% higher than those of OCU, and Pluris recently announced their plans for a rate increase in the coming months. Presently, Pluris charges approximately \$134.02 per 5,000 gallons, while Orange County Utilities charges would be approximately \$67.49 for a combined water and wastewater bill of 5,000 gallons.



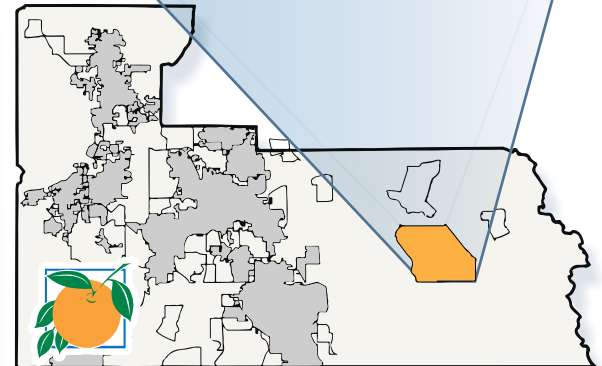
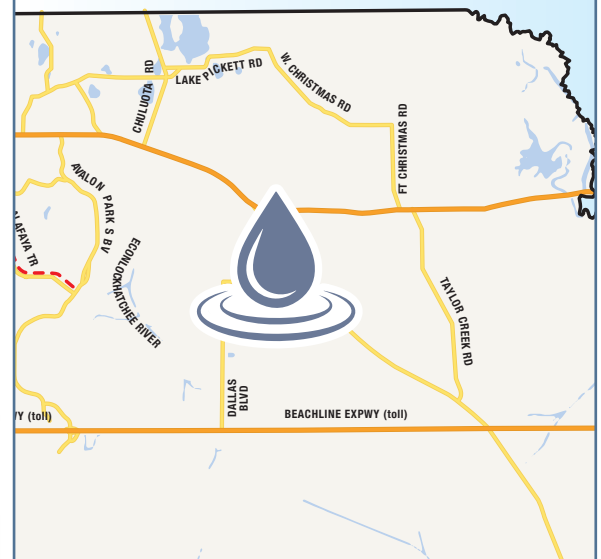
## COMBINED WATER & WASTEWATER BILL 5,000 GALLONS

AS OF  
5/2023



Should the residents continue their efforts to acquire Pluris Wedgefield, LLC, it would require the Board of County Commissioners' approval and a Municipal Service Benefit Unit (MSBU). An MSBU would spread out the cost of the purchase over 20 years. It is estimated that affected property owners would pay an additional \$112 a month in the property tax bill to cover the cost of the purchase. With OCU's monthly pricing of \$67.49 per 5,000 gallons and the \$112 assessment, it is estimated that property owners will pay \$179.49 a month for the acquisition and Orange County Utilities services.

## Pluris-Wedgefield Project



Orange County, Florida

# EXAMPLE

This straw poll ballot is designed to gauge residents' interest in purchasing Pluris Wedgefield, LLC.

**VOTE:**

**OPTION 1**

*I am in favor of purchasing the Pluris-Wedgefield Water & Wastewater Utility System*

**OPTION 2**

*I am not in favor of the purchase.*

Need more detailed information?



Scan the QR code to watch a presentation by Orange County Utilities.

# STEPS

1

## GET INFORMED.

Watch the video presentation or speak to a neighbor. Contact us if you have any questions?

2

## COMPLETE YOUR BALLOT!

Make an informed decision on whether you would like Orange County Utilities to be your local Wedgefield utility provider.

3

## USE THE PROVIDED PREPAID ENVELOPE TO RETURN YOUR BALLOT.

All ballots should be returned to Orange County Utilities, ATTN: Straw Poll Administrator, PO Box 312, Orlando, FL 32802.

All ballots should be returned to  
**Orange County Utilities**  
**ATTN: Straw Poll Administrator**  
**PO Box 312, Orlando, FL 32802**



**Remember to mail your ballot by June 17!**

**Your immediate participation in this Straw Poll is absolutely crucial to the decision-making process.**

Orange County is eagerly seeking your feedback and input, and your timely response is essential to help improve the plan. Don't wait any longer - voice your opinion and make a difference by returning your ballot right away!

**RETURN  
YOUR  
STRAW  
POLL  
BALLOT!**



**Commissioner  
Emily Bonilla**  
District 5

If you need assistance replacing a lost ballot or have additional questions, please contact Joe Stalcup at 407-254-9995 or email [Joseph.Stalcup@ocfl.net](mailto:Joseph.Stalcup@ocfl.net).