



**NORTH CAROLINA
PUBLIC STAFF
UTILITIES COMMISSION**

July 31, 2020

Ms. Kimberley A. Campbell, Chief Clerk
North Carolina Utilities Commission
4325 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4300

Re: Docket No. W-1314, Sub 4
Application by Pluris Webb Creek, LLC, 5950 Berkshire Lane, Suite 800,
Dallas, Texas, 75225 for Authority to Adjust and Increase Rates for Sewer
Utility Service in All Service Areas in Onslow County, North Carolina

Dear Ms. Campbell:

On April 27, 2020, Pluris Webb Creek, LLC (Pluris) filed an application with the Commission seeking authority to increase its rates for providing sewer utility service in all of its service areas in Onslow County, North Carolina. Pluris serves approximately 1,354 residential flat-rate sewer customers and eight metered commercial sewer customers in Onslow County, North Carolina.

Pluris is proposing to increase the monthly flat rate for residential customers from \$37.69 to \$73.38 and to change the monthly base rate for commercial customers from \$28.34 for all meter sizes to a monthly base rate based on the size of the meter. In addition, Pluris is proposing to increase the commercial customers' commodity charge per 1,000 gallons from \$9.04 to \$16.50.

On May 26, 2020, the Commission issued an Order Establishing General Rate Case and Suspending Rates in this docket.

The Public Staff recommends that the matter should be scheduled for customer and evidentiary hearings, and customers notified.

Executive Director
(919) 733-2435

Communications
(919) 733-5610

Economic Research
(919) 733-2267

Legal
(919) 733-6110

Transportation
(919) 733-7766

Accounting
(919) 733-4279

Consumer Services
(919) 733-9277

Electric
(919) 733-2267

Natural Gas
(919) 733-4326

Water
(919) 733-5610

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The undersigned attorney has conferred with Pluris counsel, and Pluris has no objection to this filing.

Based upon the above-referenced application and Order, the Public Staff respectfully believes this matter does not require presentation at a Staff Conference, but instead may be decided by the Commission based upon this letter and the filings. A proposed order scheduling hearings and requiring customer notice is attached for Commission consideration, a copy of which has been provided to Commission staff.

Yours very truly,

Electronically submitted
/s/ William E. H. Creech
Staff Attorney
zeke.creech@psncuc.nc.gov

cc: Sam Watson
Heather Fennell
Freda Hilburn

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
UTILITIES COMMISSION
RALEIGH**

DOCKET NO. W-1314, SUB 4

BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of
 Application by Pluris Webb Creek, LLC, 5950)
 Berkshire Lane, Suite 800, Dallas, Texas, 75225) ORDER SCHEDULING
 for Authority to Adjust and Increase Rates for) HEARINGS AND REQUIRING
 Sewer Utility Service in All Service Areas in) CUSTOMER NOTICE
 Onslow County, North Carolina)

BY THE COMMISSION: On April 27, 2020, Pluris Webb Creek, LLC (Pluris or the Company) filed an application with the Commission seeking authority to increase its rates for providing sewer utility service in all of its service areas in Onslow County, North Carolina. Pluris serves approximately 1,354 residential flat rate sewer customers and eight metered commercial sewer customers in Onslow County, North Carolina.

On May 26, 2020, the Commission issued an Order Establishing General Rate Case and Suspending Rates.

Pluris is proposing to increase the monthly flat rate for residential customers from \$37.69 to \$73.38 and to change the monthly base rate for commercial customers from \$28.34 for all meter sizes to a monthly base rate based on the size of the meter.

In addition, Pluris is proposing to increase the commercial customers' commodity charge per 1,000 gallons from \$9.04 to \$16.50.

Pluris's present and proposed rates are as follows:

	<u>Present Rates</u>	<u>Proposed Rates</u>
<u>Monthly Residential Flat Rate:</u>	\$ 37.69	\$ 73.38 (1)

(1) All residential flat rate customers

Monthly Commercial Metered Rates:
 Base charge, zero usage (minimum charge)

Meter Size:	< 1"	\$ 28.34	\$ 10.00
	1"	\$ 28.34	\$ 25.00
	1.5"	\$ 28.34	\$ 50.00

2"	\$ 28.34	\$ 80.00
3"	\$ 28.34	\$ 250.00
Usage charge, per 1,000 gallons.	\$ 9.04	\$ 16.50
<u>Other Charges:</u>		
Return check fee	\$ 20.00	\$ 25.00
Connection Charges - per sewer tap	\$1,800.00	\$3,200.00

The Commission concludes that the matter should be scheduled for a customer hearing for the sole purpose of receiving testimony from customers; that the matter should also be scheduled for an evidentiary hearing for the sole purpose of receiving expert testimony from Pluris, the Public Staff – North Carolina Utilities Commission (Public Staff), and intervenors, if any; and that Pluris should be required to provide notice to its customers of the Application, including the applied rates and the scheduled hearings.

In March 2020, Governor Roy Cooper issued a progression of Executive Orders that declared a State of Emergency in North Carolina to coordinate response and protective actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). On May 5, 2020, Governor Cooper issued Executive Order No. 138 easing some restrictions on business operations and mass gatherings, but still limiting face-to-face meetings to no more than ten people and requiring social distancing between individuals of at least six feet.

Based on the current state of uncertainty regarding future requirements to assist in preventing the spread of COVID-19, the Commission will decide at a later date whether the evidentiary hearing will be held in person or remotely.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED as follows:

1. That a customer hearing for the sole purpose of receiving testimony from Pluris's service area customers is scheduled beginning at 7:00 p.m., on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. The customer hearing will be held remotely via WebEx;
2. That the Commission will issue an order setting forth the procedures for remote customer hearing;
3. That the evidentiary hearing for the sole purpose of receiving expert testimony from Pluris, the Public Staff, and intervenors, if any, is scheduled beginning at 2:00 p.m., on Monday, November 2, 2020, and continuing as necessary until conclusion. The hearing will be either held remotely via WebEx, or in Commission Hearing Room 2115, Dobbs Building, 430 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, North Carolina;

4. That the Commission will issue an order setting forth the procedures for a remote expert witness hearing or confirming that the expert witness hearing will be held in the Commission Hearing Room;

5. That Pluris's updates to its actual revenues, expenses, rate base, and cost of capital for the period ending July 31, 2020, shall be filed on or before Monday, August 24, 2020. This requirement shall not apply to events that are neither foreseeable nor within the Company's control. This requirement shall not prevent the Company from providing evidence showing changes in costs, including plant in service additions, pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 62-133(c);

6. That Pluris is required to file reports addressing all customer service and/or service quality complaints expressed at the customer hearing on or before Tuesday, September 29, 2020;

7. That on or before Tuesday, September 29, 2020, any persons having an interest in this matter may file petitions to intervene to this proceeding pursuant to Commission Rules R1-5, R1-7, and R1-19;

8. That the Public Staff and intervenors, if any, shall file their testimony on or before Tuesday, September 29, 2020;

9. That Pluris shall file its rebuttal testimony, if any, on or before Wednesday, October 14, 2020;

10. That Pluris shall consult with all other parties and file, no later than Tuesday, October 27, 2020, a list of witnesses to be called at the hearing, the order of witnesses, and the estimated time for cross-examination. If the parties cannot agree, the remaining parties shall, no later than Thursday, October 29, 2020, make a filing indicating their points of disagreement with the Company's filing;

11. That an officer or representative of Pluris is required to appear before the Commission at the time and place of the evidentiary hearing to testify concerning any of the information contained in the Application; and

12. That the Notice to Customers, attached hereto as Appendix A (Notice to Customers), shall be mailed with sufficient postage or hand delivered by Pluris to all customers affected by the proposed new rates; that the Notice to Customers shall be mailed or hand-delivered no later than 20 days after the date of this Order; and that Pluris shall submit to the Commission the attached Certificate of Service, properly signed and notarized, not later than 30 days after the date of this Order.

ISSUED BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION.

This the ____ day of August, 2020

NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

Kimberley A. Campbell, Chief Clerk

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
UTILITIES COMMISSION
RALEIGH**

NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

**DOCKET NO. W-1314, SUB 4
BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION**

Notice is hereby given that Pluris Webb Creek, LLC (Pluris or the Company), 5950 Berkshire Lane, Suite 800, Dallas, Texas, has filed an Application with the North Carolina Utilities Commission for authority to increase its rates for providing sewer utility service in all of its service areas in Onslow County, North Carolina.

Pluris is proposing to increase the monthly flat rate for residential customers from \$37.69 to \$73.38 and to change the monthly base rate for commercial customers from \$28.34 for all meter sizes to a monthly base rate based on the size of the meter.

In addition, Pluris is proposing to increase the commercial customers' commodity charge per 1,000 gallons from \$9.04 to \$16.50.

Pluris's present and proposed rates are as follows:

	<u>Present Rates</u>	<u>Proposed Rates</u>
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(1) All residential flat rate customers

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1.5"	\$ 28.34	\$ 50.00
2"	\$ 28.34	\$ 80.00
3"	\$ 28.34	\$ 250.00
Usage charge, per 1,000 gallons.	\$ 9.04	\$ 16.50

Other Charges:

Return check fee	\$ 20.00	\$ 25.00
Connection Charges - per sewer tap	\$1,800.00	\$3,200.00

The Commission may consider additional or alternative rate design proposals that were not included or proposed in the original Application and may order increases or decreases in the utility rate schedules, which differ from those proposed by Pluris. However, any rate structure considered will not generate more overall revenues than requested.

EFFECT OF RATES:

The present sewer rates have been in effect since August 8, 2016. In Commission Order dated March 26, 2019, in Docket Nos. W-864, Sub 11, W-864, Sub 14, and W-1314, Sub 1, the Commission approved, for Pluris (as franchise owner) the continuation of the provisional interim rates previously approved by Order dated August 8, 2016, in Docket No. W-864, Sub 11, for Pluris when it was the Commission-appointed emergency operator.

The proposed rates would increase the average residential monthly bill for sewer services by 95% from \$37.69 to \$73.38. Depending on meter size and based on the usage amounts provided in the application, the average monthly bill for commercial metered sewer services would increase as follows:

Meter Size	Average Monthly Usage (Gallons)	Present Average Monthly Cost	Proposed Average Monthly Cost	Percent Increase
<1"	9,504	\$114.29	\$166.88	46%
1"	8,238	\$102.81	\$160.93	57%
1.5"	38,642	\$377.76	\$687.59	82%
2"	3,533	\$ 60.28	\$138.29	129%
3"	22,746	\$233.96	\$625.31	167%

PROCEDURE FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS:

The Commission has scheduled the following hearings on the Application:

Customer Hearing at 7:00 p.m., on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. The customer hearing will be held remotely via WebEx. The Commission will issue an order setting forth the procedure for a remote hearing.

Evidentiary Hearing beginning at 2:00 p.m., on Monday, November 2, 2020, and continuing as necessary until conclusion. The hearing will be either held remotely via WebEx, or in Commission Hearing Room 2115, Dobbs Building, 430 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, North Carolina. The Commission will issue an order setting forth the procedure for remote hearing or confirming that the hearing will be held in the Commission Hearing Room.

The hearing scheduled for Wednesday, September 23, 2020, shall be for the sole purpose of receiving the testimony of public witnesses. The hearing scheduled for Monday, November 2, 2020, shall be for the sole purpose of receiving expert witness testimony from Pluris, the Public Staff – North Carolina Utilities Commission (Public Staff), and any other parties of record.

The Public Staff is authorized by statute to represent consumers in proceedings before the Commission. Written statements to the Public Staff should include the customer's name, subdivision, contact information, and any information that the writer wishes to be considered by the Public Staff in its investigation of the matter; and these statements should be addressed to Ms. Dianna Downey, Chief Counsel, Public Staff-North Carolina Utilities Commission, 4326 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4300. Written statements can also be faxed to 919-715-6704 or e-mailed to mike.franklin@psncuc.nc.gov.

Persons desiring to present testimony concerning their opinions on this Application, or on any service problems they may be experiencing, may appear via WebEx at the September 23, 2020 remote public hearing and give such testimony.

Written statements are not evidenced unless those persons submitting the statements appear at the public hearing and testify concerning the information contained in their written statements.

North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC) hearings are subject to change because of COVID-19. Any changes to scheduled hearings will be posted on the NCUC website (<https://www.ncuc.net/>).

The Attorney General is also authorized by statute to represent consumers in proceedings before the Commission. Statements to the Attorney General should be addressed to The Honorable Josh Stein, Attorney General, 9001 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-9001.

Persons desiring to intervene in the matter as formal parties of record should file a motion under North Carolina Utilities Commission Rules R1-5, R1-7, and R1-19 no later than September 29, 2020. Any such motion should be filed with the Chief Clerk of the North Carolina Utilities Commission, 4325 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4300. Information regarding this proceeding can also be accessed from the Commission's website at www.ncuc.net under Docket Number "W-1314, Sub 4".

This the ___ day of August, 2020.

NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION

Kimberley A. Campbell, Chief Clerk

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, _____, mailed with sufficient postage or hand delivered to all affected customers the attached Notice to Customers issued by the North Carolina Utilities Commission in Docket No. W-1314, Sub 4, and the Notice was mailed or hand delivered by the date specified in the Order.

This the ____ day of _____, 2020.

By: _____
Signature

Name of Utility Company

The above-named Applicant, _____, personally appeared before me this day and, being first duly sworn, says that the required Notice to Customers was mailed or hand delivered to all affected customers, as required by the Commission Order dated _____ in Docket No. W-1314, Sub 4.

Witness my hand and notarial seal, this the ____ day of _____, 2020.

Notary Public

Printed or Typed Name

(SEAL) My Commission Expires: _____
Date