City of BURLINGTON
Office of Public Information

MEDIA RELEASE

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City of Burlington and Haw River Assembly partner to address concern about PFAS and 1,4 Dioxane in Municipal Wastewater Treatment Systems

On October 22, 2020, the City of Burlington and the Haw River Assembly entered into a Memorandum of Agreement formalizing Burlington's commitment to continue to test, analyze, and examine potential sources of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and 1,4-dioxane compounds discharged from the City's two Wastewater Treatment Plants. Across the nation, the conventional wastewater treatment processes and techniques typical for municipal wastewater treatment do not remove these emerging contaminants of concern. They pass through treatment plants and are discharged with treated effluent. The City's focused sampling and analysis of PFAS and 1,4 Dioxane in its wastewater treatment system has been underway since late 2019, but this date marks the start of the official partnership. The full Memorandum of Agreement can be found here. (to be hyperlinked when finalized)

The City of Burlington has also partnered with national Civil Engineering and Environmental Services firm Hazen & Sawyer to develop an enhanced and cutting-edge wastewater sampling program aimed at identifying potential sources of these contaminants. The sampling plan includes both targeted and non-targeted sampling of the Burlington Sewer System. Believing the program provides valuable guidance for other wastewater utilities across the nation, Hazen & Sawyer has submitted this proposal to the Water Environment Foundation, a global membership association of water quality professionals, to provide a standard for other utilities to identify potential PFAS sources in wastewater treatment systems.

The comprehensive analysis includes sampling the City's industrial wastewater users, the City's wastewater collection system, and its internal wastewater treatment plant processes. The goal is to identify potential sources of PFAS, 1,4-dioxane, and precursor compounds that may combine in a chemical reaction to form PFAS compounds**.** In the spirit of full transparency and cooperation, the agreement provides for every sample taken to be 'split' with the Haw River Assembly for independent testing by their consultants.

PFAS is a family of man-made chemicals that have been used for decades in products as diverse as cosmetics, pizza boxes, microwave popcorn bags, non-stick coatings, and waterproofing and

stain resistant cloth. Neither the EPA nor the NCDEQ has issued standards for PFAS in drinking water, but in May 2016 the EPA issued a healthy advisory level for two particular chemicals from the thousands of PFAS chemicals of total of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) of 70 parts per trillion in drinking water – roughly the equivalent of one grain of sand in an Olympic-sized swimming pool. View the EPA's Drinking Water Advisories for PFOS and PFOA here.

This sampling program focuses on treated wastewater, not on City of Burlington drinking water. The City's drinking water consistently tests well below current EPA health advisory levels for PFOA/PFOS.

In November 2019, Haw River Assembly sent a letter to the City of Burlington notifying of its intent to sue under the Clean Water Act to address their concerns with levels of PFAS and 1,4-dioxane discharges measured in the Haw River that they attribute to the City's wastewater treatment plants.

The City of Burlington is in full compliance with its discharge permits issued by NCDEQ under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The City has contacted NCDEQ to identify if any of their testing or evaluations raise concerns with PFAS levels in City of Burlington Wastewater. Though none have been raised by the NCDEQ to date, the City of Burlington is committed to full transparency and values cooperation with Haw River Assembly and all of its community partners. Open to addressing these concerns, the City met with the Haw River Assembly, beginning the conversations and negotiations that led to this Memorandum of Agreement.

"The City remains in full compliance with the rules and permit requirements for our wastewater discharge as set by North Carolina and Federal regulatory agencies. There are many unknowns about the environmental and health effects of thousands of chemicals used in our daily lives that are subsequently found in the wastewater stream." said City of Burlington Director of Water Resources, Robert C. Patterson. "However, we recognize that new research can reveal previously unknown concerns. When the Haw River Assembly came to us with their concerns, we immediately initiated accelerated, voluntary sampling at our wastewater treatment plants, from our relatively few significant industrial users, and from the landfill leachate brought to one plant for treatment. This agreement formalizes nearly a year of working with the Haw River Assembly to develop a cutting edge PFAS sampling plan and source tracking initiative that can serve as a national model for utilities around the country."

The Haw River Assembly's mission to promote the health of the Haw River and its tributaries is important to the City of Burlington. The City's door is always be open to our resident stakeholders. We believe that this good-faith, cooperative effort with the Assembly to identify potential sources of PFAS and 1,4-dioxane in wastewater can serve as a model for environmental partnership in North Carolina.

As North Carolina continues to rapidly develop and grow, increased measures may be required in every community to maintain and plan for strong water systems through monitoring protocols, treatment processes, and intake practices. The City of Burlington has gone above and beyond the sampling and monitoring mandated by the NCDEQ**.** As an environmentally-

conscious community, we are proud to partner with Haw River Assembly to ensure the best outcomes for our residents and our neighbors.

All sampling results will be published at BurlingtonNC.gov/Water.