



DeKalb County

WATER RATE

TOWN HALL MEETING

February 3 – Dunwoody City Hall | February 4 – Ried H. Cofer Library | February 5 - Porter Sanford III Performing Arts

Community Questions & Answers



Question #1

On my property I have a storm drain that runs the full length of my backyard. That storm drain is in the county's easement. The water drains through a wear in the corner of my property from the storm drain and the ditch on the side of my property period there is erosion significant. I contacted roads and drainage, and someone came out. I was told I would have to pay for the rock and the labor to fix the erosion. The stone falling away from the wear needs repair. Why do I have to pay for the repair of erosion? The county should repair their easement also the sewer manhole has not been uncovered when the cult SAC was repaved.

The County will need to conduct research on the easement ownership of the stormwater assets located on your property. If the easement is determined to be publicly owned, Roads and Drainage will perform assessment to determine the cause of the issue and subsequent remediation activities. If the easement is determined to be privately owned, the property owner will be responsible for repairs. The County has a Citizen Drainage Program where a property owner may request drainage pipes and/or rock to be provided by the County. More information can be found at <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/roads-drainage/stormwater-drainage>.

A call can be made to Department of Watershed Management at 770.270.6243 to make a notification with the address if a manhole that has been paved over.

Question #2

Is a more complete list of loans and grants applied for sharing the amount and status of each application that residents can access?

How can residents keep up to date with the repair projects money being spent on the consent decree? DWM currently has two loans with U.S. EPA through their Water Infrastructure Finance & Innovation Act (WIFIA) program totaling \$549M as well as two loans through Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) State Revolving Fund (SRF) for a total of \$75M. Additionally, another loan through GEFA has recently been approved for \$16M. The County has applied for millions of dollars in grants through the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) funding and DeKalb's Congressional Offices. The County plans to apply for additional low interest loans through these programs in the following years as well as for grants as they come available. Additionally, please see the information at <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/watershed-management/2024-capital-improvement-program-cip>.

Question #3

What is the expectation for repairing the 14 off the cab sites in the consent decree now that the judge has denied de cabs extension? How will the county pay the \$80 million penalty and have enough left for repairs without overburdening residents?

The County successfully completed repairs on 176 Priority Fix List (PFL) sites ahead of schedule, addressing 71% of the 103 original PFL sites and 75% of the 134 additional PFL sites identified under the 2021 Modified Consent Decree. The repairs to PFL sites alone have resulted in the removal of an estimated 3.2 million gallons of sewer spill, overflow of building backup volume annually. The County remains in discussions with the federal and state environmental agencies regarding the status of the Modified Consent Decree and progress being made to complete the 14 Priority Fix List sites. An extension has not been denied, nor has any penalty been levied.

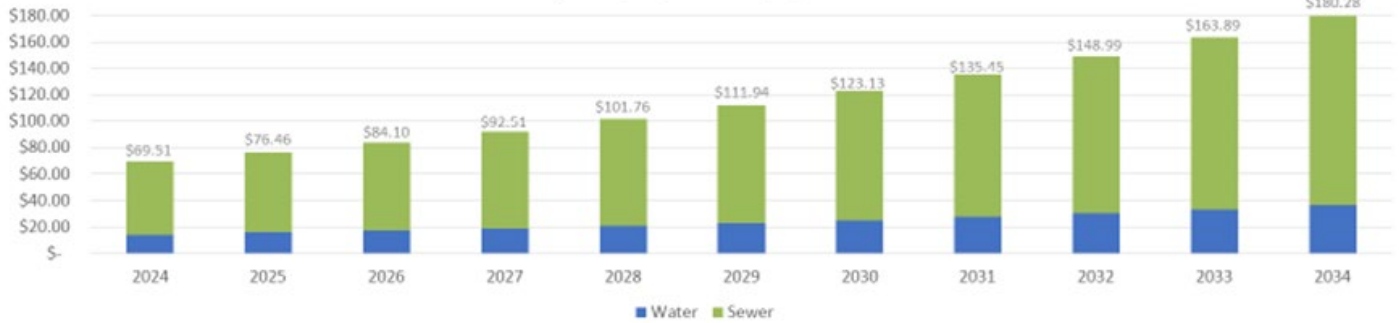
AVERAGE BILL AMOUNT 10% Annual Rate Revenue Increases

DeKalb County

Notes:

- Average monthly bill cost
- ¾" meter represents a typical residential customer
- Average residential usage is 4,000 gallons per month
- Bills shown are calculated monthly
- Customers can reduce usage to lower their bills
- Bill increase from current (2024) to 2034 is \$110.77 per month

Monthly Bill @ ¾" Meter; 4,000 Gallons



January X, 2025

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Question #7

How do the cab rates compare to other counties Gwinnett Fulton Cobb today? How will the rates compare to other counties after this 10 by 10 increase?

The typical DeKalb residential customer uses 4,000 gallons of water (and sewer) each month and their water and sewer bill is \$69.51 per month. A residential customer in Gwinnett, Fulton, and Cobb Counties, at this same level of usage, have the following monthly bills:

Gwinnett County - \$76.51 per month

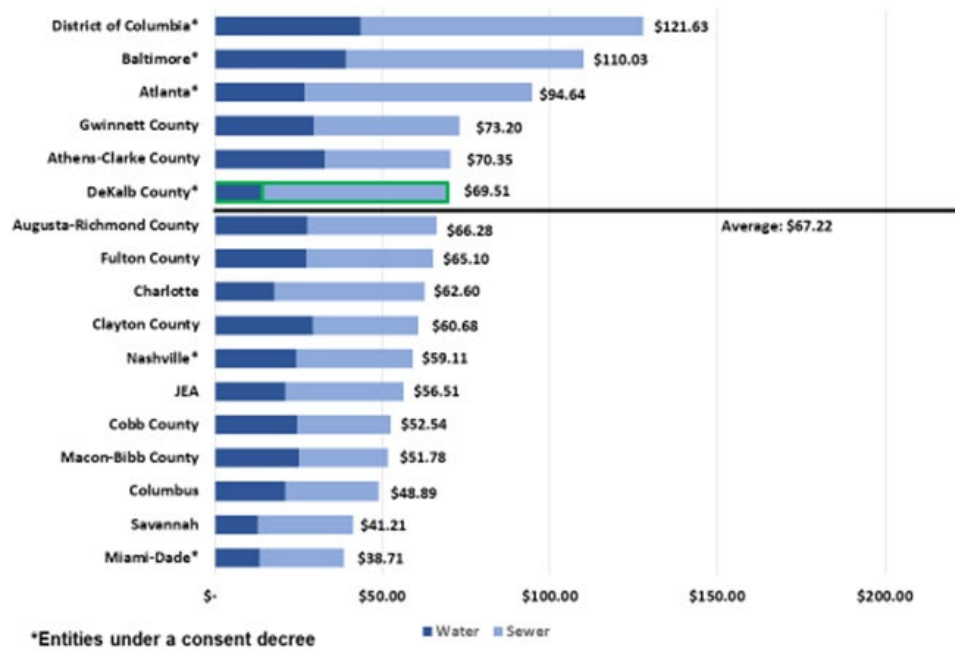
Fulton County - \$68.36 per month

Cobb County - \$54.90 per month

In addition, the City of Atlanta bill is \$94.64 per month (not including their 1% sales tax dedicated to water and sewer)

It is not possible to know how Gwinnett, Fulton, and Cobb County rates will change over the next 10-years. These Counties have not completed this evaluation, at least not made the information publicly available. Available information indicates Gwinnett County has adopted rate adjustments of 4.5% in each year 2025 and 2027; however, the County is also undertaking a rate study which will likely change these increases. Additionally, Fulton County adopted a 5% rate adjustment for 2025.

Residential Water & Sewer Bill - 4,000 gallons of Usage per Month – Current Rates



Question #8

Do home building businesses have any responsibility to the systems?

County ordinance Section 3 – Building Sewers and Connections, details the responsibility developers and any property owner have to the County’s water and wastewater system before and after they connect. This includes applying for the appropriate amount of wastewater flow contributions and receiving approval, ensuring that sanitary sewer connections are watertight, and conforming to County specifications. Please see <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/watershed-management/capacity-assurance-program> or more information.

Question #9

How can you ensure the planned developments will not get us into a similar situation in the future aging infrastructure?

Planned upgrades to the water and wastewater system take into account growth projections to ensure that planned future growth is taken into account. In addition, all developments are evaluated through the sewer capacity request process to determine if there is sufficient capacity within the wastewater system to approve connection or, if not, if sufficient rehabilitation has been performed to remove stormwater infiltration/inflow and allow capacity for the new development. For more information regarding the requirements for development, please visit <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/planning-and-sustainability/watershed-guides-checklists-and-calendars>.

Question #10

What is the plan for rate increases after 10 by 10?

The County has focused efforts on planning for the next 10 years, which is standard industry practice for water and sewer systems. The need for rate increases beyond 10 years has not been evaluated; however, it is likely some level of rate increase will be appropriate. From the Town Hall presentation, we see that part of the current problem is DeKalb County's lack of rate increases over the last 10-years (only one 6% increase compared to other communities who raised rates 50% cumulatively over this period). We do not want to make the same mistake again.

Question #11

You commented on residents not paying their bills what about the county erroneously charging residents for example sewer when not connected?

The County is committed to correcting and will correct any billing errors.

Question #12

Can we stop growth for six months to start the process?

In order to assure long-term economic viability for the County we would not want to impose a moratorium on development. We believe we can continue to grow in a measured, thoughtful way while we upgrade and enlarge our water and sewer system.

Question #13

Why doesn't the cab county bypass commercial property owner apartments etcetera who fail to pay their water bill and let the tenant pay directly to the county?

Unfortunately, we cannot bill tenants directly because apartments are constructed with large commercials meters so that the consumption of each apartment is unavailable for billing purposes.

Question #14

Will these repairs create jobs for DeKalb County residents?

It is estimated that the CIP 2025 – 2034 will create over 6,400 direct, indirect and induced jobs over the 10-year period.

Question #15

Do you know where the pipes are located by age of the pipe if so will you start with the oldest pipes first?

DeKalb knows the location of the pipes by age within the water and sewer system. For the water system, the pipe mains have been prioritized in terms of age, condition, number of breaks, pipe material, and risk of failure. Typically, the highest risk mains are replaced first.

Question #16

Have the pipes that were repaired within the last 10 years been logged in records so they are not duplicated?

Yes, the County maintains information on repairs and replacement within a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) program, Cityworks, that includes work orders containing information on assets that have been repaired, date of work, completed, etc. Cityworks is also connected to the County's GIS that has a database containing year of installation, pipe material, size, etc.

Question #17

This has been a long-time problem with so much of taxpayer dollars being wasted some by elected officials what assurances do we have that our money won't be wasted trust is still an issue? What accountability measures will be put in place considering DeKalb county's history of financial mismanagement faulty meters problematic watershed leadership etcetera?

Since taking office, CEO Cochran-Johnson has committed to addressing the funding gaps and accelerating infrastructure repairs with greater oversight and efficiency. To ensure accountability, she has taken the following steps:

- Appointing an external project management firm to oversee Consent Decree, CIP, and infrastructure work to ensure construction deadlines are met and resources are used effectively.
- Retaining a firm specializing in water, sewer, and infrastructure financing to oversee financial management, identify funding, and eliminate potential waste.
- Form Capital Improvement Plan Task Force to review and assess workflow and deliverables associated with capital improvements.
- Engaging directly with residents and stakeholders through the Water Rate Town Halls and strategic communications to ensure transparency and public awareness of the proposed rate adjustment and infrastructure needs and improvements.

Question #18

Our water sewer rates have increased over the last eight years 6% this is a major increase and understand the consent decree is mainly for the northern area of DeKalb but impacts us all can you explain?

Over the last 10-years DeKalb County has raised water and sewer rate only once, a 6% increase in 2022, compared to other communities who raised rates 50% cumulatively over the last 10-years. The Consent Decree is countywide. Priority has been placed on areas determined to be the most impacted under the Priority Areas Sewer Assessment and Rehabilitation Program (PASARP) as well as the Priority Fix List (PFL). The PASARP which includes large areas in South DeKalb upstream of the Snapfinger Advanced Water Treatment Facility (AWTF). Sites are added onto the PFL when a Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO) occurs within 500 ft of another SSO within 12 months, so these repeat spill sites are also countywide.

Question #19

Where are the new pipes coming from?

With the source of funding including federal dollars through the WIFIA and GEFA loans, requirements are in place for U.S. manufactured pipe to be used on projects with DeKalb County.

Question #20

What guarantee can DeKalb watershed management give residents that this increase is only for 10 years?

From the Town Hall presentation, we see that part of the current problem is DeKalb County’s lack of rate increases over the last 10-years (only one 6% increase compared to other communities who raised rates 50% cumulatively over this period). We do not want to make this same mistake again; some level of rate increase will likely be needed after 10 years. Future rate increases will be needed to fund the operating cost of the system, which increases each year, and the annual capital improvement needs so that the system can be properly maintained moving forward.

Question #21

Does the cab county have any customers like the one that owns Town Center in Cobb?

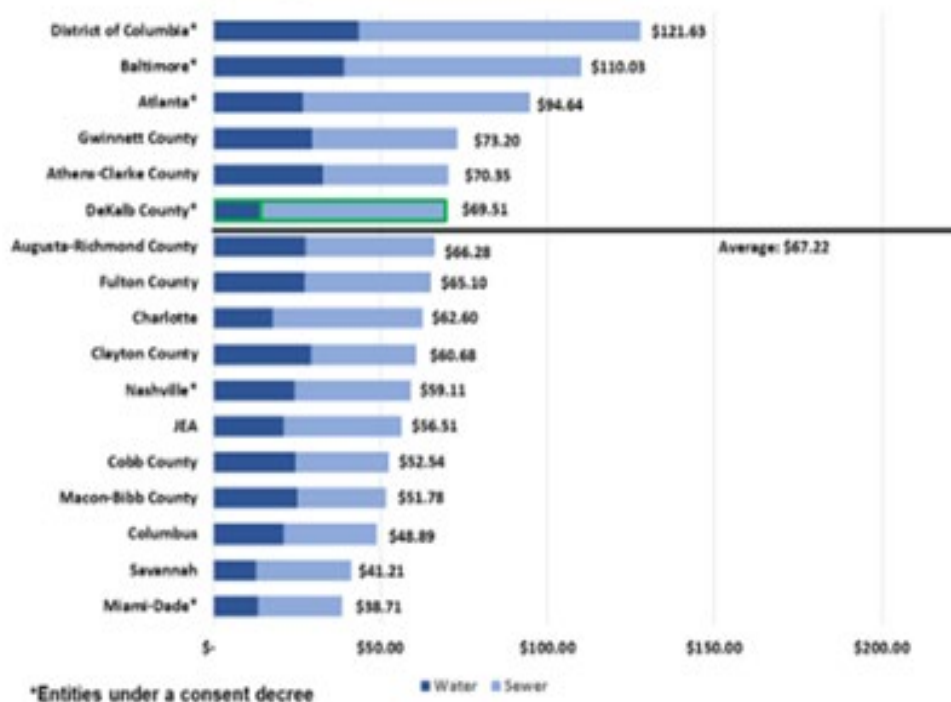
To our knowledge we do not have any similarly situated customers.

Question #22

Where does DeKalb County stand in Georgia for water rates?

The County has completed a comparison of DeKalb County rates to other communities including communities in Georgia and other systems from around the County. The typical DeKalb residential customer uses 4,000 gallons of water (and sewer) each month and their water and sewer bill is \$69.51 per month. The average residential monthly bill (using 4,000 gallons per month) for other communities in this survey is \$67.22 per month.

Residential Water & Sewer Bill - 4,000 gallons of Usage per Month – Current Rates

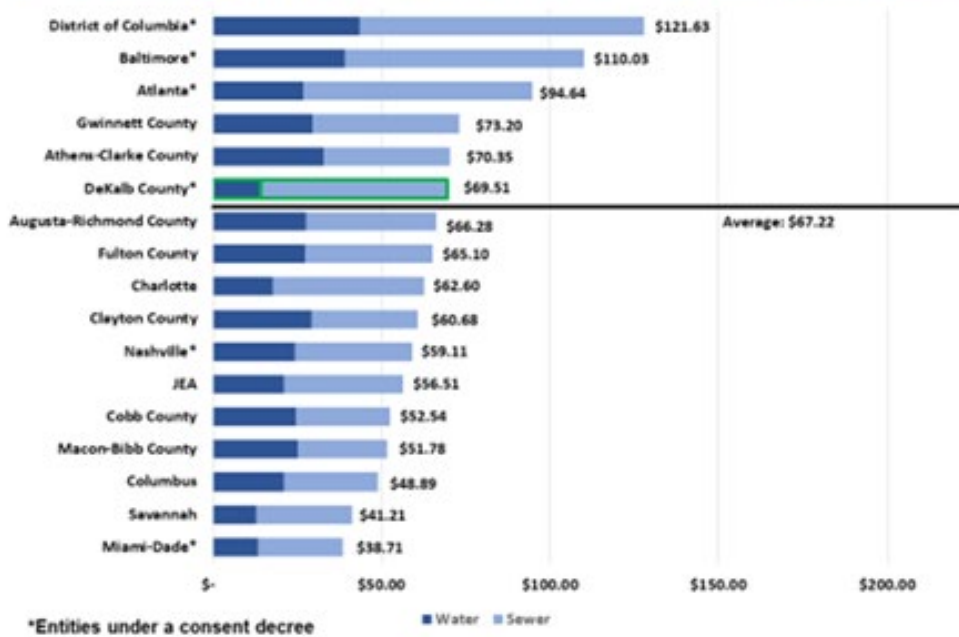


Question #23

Does Georgia have the second highest water rates in the nation?

There is no available comparison of water and sewer rates by State. However, the County has completed a comparison of DeKalb County rates to other communities including communities in Georgia and other systems from around the County. The typical DeKalb residential customer uses 4,000 gallons of water (and sewer) each month and their water and sewer bill is \$69.51 per month. The average residential monthly bill (using 4,000 gallons per month) for other communities is \$67.22 per month. From this study, it does not appear Georgia rates are the second highest in the County.

Residential Water & Sewer Bill - 4,000 gallons of Usage per Month – Current Rates



Question #24

How large is our county population compared to other counties? Why isn't it one of our priorities to add another water treatment plant?

DeKalb has 762,992 population as of the 2023 per U.S. Census estimate, making it the 4th most populous county in the state following Fulton, Gwinnet and Cobb Counties. New water treatment plants have very long planning horizons (20+years typically) and would likely cost in excess of \$1 Billion.

Question # 25

While we catch up on the infrastructure are we also slowing down approving new developments that increase the burden on the system?

New developments are being approved but only after ensuring they will not increase the burden on the system, all developments in DeKalb are evaluated through the sewer capacity request process to determine if there is sufficient capacity within the wastewater system to approve connection and, if not, sewer rehabilitation needs to be performed to remove stormwater infiltration/inflow and allow capacity for the new development. New

developments continue to bring jobs and resources to our communities that also provide an overall economic benefit to the County.

Question #26

What is being done to protect the creeks along which many sewer lines are run in DeKalb?

The County has a number of contracts that include scope to protect the creeks near sewer lines. The County has an ongoing Sanitary Sewer Creek Crossing Inspection contract dedicated to the inspection of all sanitary sewers that cross waterways to proactively identify defects or issues before they become sewer spills. The County also has a contract dedicated to the cleaning and removal of debris from large diameter sewer trunks that run along waterways.

Question #27

Who is providing accountability for this increase, so we don't face another situation of poor management and deferred maintenance?

CEO Cohran-Johnson has committed to hiring additional resources who will be solely responsible for overseeing all expenditures, contract awards and progress. Thus, ensuring that the funds raised are spent in the most efficient manner.

Question # 28

Do we have a choice about this or is it a done deal?

The Board of Commissioners serves as the legislative branch of the DeKalb County government. The seven board members will decide whether to proceed with a rate increase and at what level.

Question #29

What are the plans to build a second water source? Is a site picked?

Developing a second water source and water treatment plant has previously been evaluated during DWM's Master Planning efforts and most likely would be in the southeastern portion of the County. However, new water treatment plants have very long planning horizons (20+years typically) and would likely cost in excess of \$1 Billion.

Question # 30

Who will perform this work if it goes to a bid process how would that work? Is there federal money available?

The County has secured over \$600,000,000 in grants and State and Federal low interest loans. However, there are limits around Federal funding. For example, the Federal WIFIA program cannot fund more than 49% of a project (this is a limitation of the WIFIA program). The County must fund the remaining 51%. Additionally, only the grants provide permanent relief to rates. Loans must be repaid from rates over time. For additional information regarding the bid process please see the Appendix.

Question #31

Are folks who stopped paying because their meters and bills were messed up now paying their bills? The faulty meters have been completely replaced and customers who had faulty meter are subject to disconnection if they fail to pay their bill.

Yes, the County lifted its disconnection moratorium after the replacement of faulty meters. Everyone is expected to pay their bill or dispute their bill based on the customers' belief that this bill is inaccurate.

Question # 32

What other infrastructure areas has DeKalb been ignoring for decades, who was responsible for the lack of proactive thinking?

For infrastructure projects being undertaken by DeKalb County please see SPLOST projects at <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/splost/splost>. Water and Sewer infrastructure projects can be viewed at <https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/watershed-management/capital-improvement-program-cip-projects>.

Appendix

Summary of Applicable Public Works Construction Law

- The terms of the Local Government Public Works Construction Laws (OCGA § 36-91-1, et seq.) apply to all public works construction projects let by any local government in Georgia
 - OCGA § 36-91-2(12) defines public works construction to mean “the building, altering, repairing, improving, or demolishing of any public structure or building or other public improvement of any kind to any public real property.”
 - Road Construction Contracts have additional considerations
 - Not Included: ❖ Routine operation, maintenance or repair of existing structures, buildings or property
 - ❖ Energy savings performance contracts or installations performed as part thereof as defined in OCGA § 50-37-1, et seq.
 - ❖ Work on certain roadways, as defined in OCGA §32-4-1, et seq.

- Public Works contracts have unique contracting and bidding requirements under O.C.G.A. § 36-91-1, et seq.
 - May allow for longer terms than that required by O.C.G.A. §36-60-13
 - Requires bid bond, performance bond and payment bond. *See O.C.G.A. §36-91-50, 36-91-70, and 36-91-70*
 - Retainage requirements under O.C.G.A. § 13-10-80 (for installation, improvement, maintenance or repair of water or sewer facilities) ❖ As of July 1, 2022, progress payments are to be made on a periodic basis and at least monthly, based on the value of work completed, and
 - ❖ Retainage will be held at a maximum of 5% of each progress payment. *See O.C.G.A. § 13-10-80(b)(2)(B)*

 - Retainage is released at substantial completion or any other standard of completion as indicated in contract document, subject to owner’s reasonable satisfaction of the work ❖ Retainage provisions different if using 36-60-15.1
 - Required 4 week minimum advertisement period. *See O.C.G.A. §36-91-20 (b)(2)-(3)*
 - Limitations on the issuance of addenda within 72 hours of the advertised bid opening. *See O.C.G.A. §36-91-20 (d)*
 - Mandatory prequalification of prospective bidders/offers allowed subject to listed limitations. *See O.C.G.A. §36-91-20 (f)*

- Contract Terms
 - O.C.G.A. § 36-60-13: Used for every multiyear lease, purchase, or lease-purchase contract of all kinds for the acquisition of goods, materials, real and personal property, services, and supplies ed for every multiyear lease, purchase, or lease-purchase contract of all kinds for the acquisition of goods, materials, real and personal property, services, and supplies
 - ❖ Enables county to enter into and terminate contracts if funding becomes unavailable.

Summary of Applicable Public Works Construction Law

- ❖ Absent this multi-year provision, no right by law to enter into these contracts or terminate for lack of funding
- ❖ Rationale: prevents current board from binding future board actions.

- O.C.G.A. § 36-60-15.1: Used for leases and contracts with private persons for operation and maintenance of waste-water treatment system, storm-water system, water system, sewer system, or combination of systems
 - ❖ Enables the County to enter into a contract for any period of time not to exceed 20 years to provide for the operation and maintenance of all or a portion of its waste-water treatment system, storm-water system, water system, or sewer system, or any combination of such systems, which leases and contracts may include provisions for the design, construction, repair, reconditioning, replacement, maintenance, and operation of the system, or any combination of such services and functions.

- Contract Modifications

- In the public works contracting context, change orders are allowed ONLY within the scope of the original project. *See OCGA §36-91-20(e)*

- The Public Works Construction Law is very specific on what is considered an emergency and what is consider a sole source.

- Sole Source

- ❖ The Public Works Construction Law defines sole source as “those procurements made pursuant to a written determination by the governing authority that there is only one source for the required supply, service or construction item.” *See OCGA § 36-91-2(17)*

- ❖ The standard requirements of the public works bidding do not apply to sole source public works construction projects.

- Emergency

- ❖ Emergency means “any situation resulting in imminent danger to the public health or safety or the loss of an essential government service.” *See OCGA § 36-91-2(7)*

- ❖ The standard requirements of the public works bidding do not apply to emergency public works construction projects.

- ❖ The nature of the emergency must be described in the minutes of the governing authority and the emergency contract must be ratified, as soon as practicable, on the minutes of the governing authority.