

**City of Zanesville**  
**Stormwater Utility Program**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**



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**Q. What is stormwater?**

A. Stormwater is rainwater that “runs off” from impervious surfaces (rooftops, parking lots, driveways, etc.) and lawns at a much faster rate than it would from woods or large grassy areas. This runoff flows quickly through storm drain pipes into the City’s streams. It can flood streets, erode stream banks, and topple trees. Runoff also picks up pollutants such as grit, oil and heavy metals from automobiles, pesticides and fertilizers from lawns, and sediment from unvegetated areas. Unlike sanitary sewers that outlet to a treatment plant, most stormwater is discharged directly to local water bodies. Increasing amounts of impervious surfaces in urban areas, such as roof tops, driveways, sidewalks, patios, parking lots, and streets, decrease the ability of the water to soak into the ground. An increased potential for flooding is a risk from greater volumes of runoff entering the City’s stormwater and drainage system at a faster rate.

**Q. Why does stormwater have to be managed?**

A. Stormwater is managed to protect homes, properties, the environment, streams, and rivers from damage due to flooding, pooling, erosion, and harmful pollutants. Stormwater runoff must be channeled through a system of pipes, culverts, ditches, swales, catch basins, and storm drains before being safely discharged into local streams and rivers. Even if your property has never flooded, the stormwater that flows off your property must be managed so that it does not contribute to flooding in areas downstream.

**Q. What is stormwater pollution?**

A. Water from rain or melting snow either seeps into the ground or “runs off” to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes, and other water bodies. On its way, runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water. Examples of common pollutants include fertilizers, and pesticides, pet wastes, sediments, oils, salts, trace metals, grass clippings, leaves and litter. Polluted stormwater runoff can be generated anywhere people use or alter the land, such as farms, yards, roofs, driveways, construction sites, and roadways.

**Q. Why is stormwater runoff a problem?**

A. As precipitation falls on agricultural and undeveloped areas, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into streams, rivers or other water bodies. However, development resulting in rooftops and paved areas prevents water from being absorbed and create a faster rate of runoff. This development often causes localized flooding or other water quantity or quality issues. In addition, stormwater can carry harmful pollutants, cause flooding, erode topsoil and stream banks and destroy habitats.

**Q. What is a Stormwater Utility?**

A. A Stormwater Utility is a financing mechanism that establishes a dedicated funding

source specifically to pay for stormwater management activities throughout the City. The Stormwater Utility accounts for its revenues and expenses separately in a self-supported "Enterprise Fund" that legally can only be spent on stormwater activities and not used for any other purpose. Businesses and residents within the City pay a stormwater fee based on the contribution to runoff that their property places on the stormwater management system. The revenue collected directly supports the NPDES water quality unfunded mandate regulations, maintenance of the existing storm drain systems, development of drainage plans, flood control measures and funds major capital projects.

**Q. Why is the Stormwater Utility fee needed?**

A. The City of Zanesville has implemented a stormwater fee rather than raise income taxes or cut services in order to address and enforce the unfunded mandate from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) referred to as the NPDES Phase II stormwater regulations, which are part of the Federal Clean Water Act passed by the US Congress in 1972. In addition, the funds will also be used to manage some stormwater flooding and drainage discharges and pay for associated stormwater infrastructure costs.

While none of us want to pay more fees, the City of Zanesville must show a good faith effort to comply with more of these unfunded government mandates or face fines of up to \$25,000 per day per violation. City officials who refuse to take action can also be prosecuted. The City of Zanesville has been obligated to meet the requirements since 2003, and began remediation using general fund money. The cost of the NPDES permit and the associated costs to comply continue to rise. Without an additional source of revenue, the City of Zanesville can no longer make the necessary improvements to reach compliance.

How to generate the revenue to enable the City of Zanesville to address these concerns has been carefully studied by City Council and Staff with the support of environmental, engineering and financial experts. After careful consideration it was determined that the most equitable method of generating revenue was a Stormwater Utility fee based on the impervious area of a property because a property's value does not affect runoff.

The stormwater that leaves your property as runoff ultimately drains into a City maintained drainage facility. A fee is assessed because this runoff contributes to the need for operation and maintenance costs and capital improvements costs of the stormwater management system to prevent and correct stormwater runoff problems. Some of the services tied to the stormwater program include:

- ◆ the unfunded mandate from USEPA referred to as the NPDES Phase II stormwater quality regulations (MS4 Program);
- ◆ flooding and drainage maintenance projects;
- ◆ flooding and drainage capital improvement projects;
- ◆ storm drain cleaning and repair;
- ◆ street sweeping;
- ◆ GIS mapping;

- ◆ shoulder and ditch maintenance within the publicly owned right-of-way;
- ◆ public education and outreach;
- ◆ construction inspection;
- ◆ Project design and management;
- ◆ Inlet clearing (stormwater hotspots) after every rain event and as needed;
- ◆ Inlet repair/replacement;
- ◆ Inlet cleaning;
- ◆ Curb replacement and sealing;
- ◆ Roadside ditch repair;
- ◆ Bridge clearing;
- ◆ Repair and/or replace catch basins on an annual basis as needed.

**Q: Why does the City need money to fix the stormwater system?**

A: The City's water bodies, streams, watersheds, wetlands, floodplains, and riparian buffer areas collectively have significant value and influence on water supply, water quality, flood control, and wildlife/fisheries habitat. When properly protected and managed these interrelated systems can act to filter pollutants and control flood flows so as not to contribute or exacerbate downstream flooding conditions and protect wildlife habitat. City of Zanesville is located in the Muskingum watershed. The Licking and Muskingum rivers are the main watercourses that run through Zanesville and become the Muskingum river, and all municipal piped systems, natural ditches and surface and subsurface stormwater drains need to be managed for flooding and water quality activities.

Due to the increased growth and corresponding high demand on the City of Zanesville funds over the past several years, the City has not been able to set aside enough money to adequately address all of the City's stormwater needs. Although the city has done a good job managing the existing program on a very limited budget including the temporary stormwater elimination surcharge fee, the backlog of stormwater projects and ever increasing costs to comply with the federal water quality regulations has increased significantly over time.

**Q. How does City of Zanesville currently pay for stormwater activities?**

A. Stormwater services are currently funded from revenue derived from income taxes collected by the City general fund, revenue from the sanitary sewer fund and revenue from a temporary stormwater elimination surcharge fee that was approved by city council in 1987 that funds small capital projects in the areas of the city that require flood protection and water quality solutions. This fee will be rescinded and replaced with a new stormwater utility fee.

**Q. Why has the City of Zanesville chosen to implement a separate fee for stormwater management?**

A. By establishing a dedicated funding source through Stormwater Utility fees, the City of Zanesville can ensure that the revenue required to manage and to maintain this important system is available. A Stormwater Utility enables the City to take a more aggressive approach to stormwater management. The additional funds raised

through the stormwater fee allow the City to provide an increased level of stormwater system maintenance and repair that is necessary to support the aging infrastructure in the City of Zanesville. In addition, the Stormwater Utility fee enables the City of Zanesville to begin constructing the necessary capital improvement projects to reduce the risk to public health and safety. Finally, the fees will eventually support the development of a comprehensive stormwater master plan that will guide future management of stormwater within the City of Zanesville limits.

How to generate the revenue to enable the City to address these concerns has been carefully studied by City Council, City Staff, and reviewed and approved by the Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) comprised of key stakeholders that live and work in the City of Zanesville along with environmental, engineering and financial experts. After careful consideration it was determined that the most equitable method of generating revenue was a Stormwater Utility fee because a property's value does not affect runoff. For example, a high rise and a shopping mall may have a similar value and pay similar property taxes, but the mall produces more runoff because of the size of the parking areas and rooftops. By charging a rate that considers the amount of impervious area on the property that cannot absorb runoff, rather than an income tax, the formula insures that the mall pays a higher stormwater fee than the high-rise.

**Q: What is the basis for the Stormwater Utility fee?**

A: The Stormwater Utility fee is based on the square footage of impervious surface area on your property(ies). The vast majority of stormwater utility programs across the country have found this to be the most equitable and legally defensible way to charge and collect revenues for this program. In essence, customers pay a fee related to the amount of runoff generated from their site, which is directly related to the amount of impervious surface on the site. The Stormwater Utility fee is a "fee for service" similar to a water and/or sewer fee for service, not a tax.

**Q: What is impervious area?**

A: Impervious area is any hard-surface including gravel that does not allow stormwater to be absorbed into the ground. Impervious areas include rooftops, parking lots, driveways, sidewalks gravel surfaces, and many other hard areas.

**Q: Why is the amount of hard-surface area used to calculate the rates?**

A: Hard-surface areas are used because they prevent water from being absorbed into the ground. Hard surfaces create more runoff and increase the rate at which stormwater drains from an area.

**Q: How was the impervious area for residential properties calculated?**

A: This formula is the standard used across the country to make the calculation and has been deemed legally defensible in courts across the country. To implement an appropriate Stormwater Utility rate structure, a statistical sample of one-family and two-family properties were measured for impervious area. The average impervious area for residential properties in the City was calculated to be 2,300 sq.ft. This is known as the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). Under this approach, all one-

family, two-family, agricultural and most condominium type properties will be charged one ERU per month. All other properties types will be charged based on their calculated number of ERUs. This is determined by dividing the total measured impervious area by the ERU value of 2,300 square feet. and rounding to a whole number. Currently, the estimated rate of charge per ERU per month is **\$X.XX**.

**Q: How was the impervious area for non-residential properties calculated?**

A: The impervious areas for all non-residential properties (all properties except single-family and duplexes, some condominium and agricultural properties) were measured using aerial photography through use of a computer mapping software program.

**Q: Will all properties have to pay?**

A: All developed properties that contain impervious area will be charged a stormwater fee. Undeveloped lots will be excluded since there is no impervious area on those properties.

**Q: Is there anything that non-residential property owners can do to reduce their bill?**

A: The City has developed a stormwater credit program for non-residential property owners that independently implement measures that decrease stormwater runoff or that have a positive effect on water quality. Please check the City of Zanesville website to download a copy of the credit application and appropriate documents to submit for a credit, or call the Department of Public Service, Engineering Division, City Engineer, Chip Saunders at 740.617.4910 for more details.

**Q: What if I don't agree with the City's calculation of the amount of hard-surface area I have on my property?**

A: You can contact the Department of Public Service, Engineering Division, City Engineer, Chip Saunders at 740.617.4910 and request that staff review the measurement for your property.

**Q. Why is there a stormwater fee instead of a tax?**

A. A property's value does not affect runoff, so property taxes are not the most equitable way to pay for stormwater services. For example, a high-rise building and a shopping mall may have similar value and pay similar property taxes. However, the shopping center produces more runoff due to the size of the parking areas and rooftops. The impervious area method ensures the shopping center pays a higher stormwater fee than would the high-rise building.

**Q: Will tax-exempt, non-profit organizations like schools, churches and hospitals be charged for stormwater?**

A: Yes. Much like these organizations now pay for water and sanitary sewer services, they will pay a user fee based on their contribution to the stormwater system.

**Q: Why can't we just use existing sanitary sewer rates to fund the stormwater costs?**

A: The money currently collected for sanitary sewer service is needed to provide

those services. The city continues to face costly sewer infrastructure improvements, including costly separation of combined sewers that is mandated by the EPA, which are paid for by sanitary sewer funds. The current charge is simply not adequate to meet the increased costs to meet water quality regulations and begin to address the continued increasing costs to address the flooding and draining problems throughout the city.

**Q. What will the money collected by the Stormwater Utility will be used to pay for?**

A. The revenues generated by this fee will be used to fund all stormwater related services, which include enforcement of the City's stormwater ordinances, planning for future impacts, stormwater infrastructure maintenance and repairs, alley repairs, and construction of necessary capital improvement projects and associated property acquisitions.

**Q. Do other communities in Ohio have a stormwater fee?**

A. Yes, approximately 100 communities in the State of Ohio have established a stormwater user fee and over 3,000 nationwide have a stormwater fee.

**Q. What is the Mission Statement of the City of Zanesville's stormwater program?**

A. To manage stormwater in Zanesville in an efficient, effective and financially responsible manner.

**Q. What are some examples of drainage problems that will be funded with the new fee?**

A. Drainage problems may include roadway or structural flooding, clogged or failing underground pipes and culverts, stream bank erosion and stormwater pollution affecting a stream. Following are some examples of projects the City of Zanesville plans to undertake in the next five years based on the Stormwater Business Plan based on the current financing assumptions:

1. Ditch projects;
2. Basin projects;
3. Alley improvement projects;
4. Stormwater Drainage Improvement Projects;
5. Culvert and Concrete projects;
6. Backflow prevention projects;
7. Stormwater infrastructure projects;
8. Combined Sewer Overflow projects;
9. Street Sweeping;
10. Hot spot maintenance projects;
11. Emergency flooding and drainage projects.

**Q. Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?**

A. Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Utility program. If stormwater runs off your property, the City must have a program and dedicated funding source to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits include complying

with the NPDES Phase II water quality permit and regulations (unfunded mandate), protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property downstream from your runoff, providing safe roadways, educating our children about pollution, and improving water quality.

**Q: Will a fee be assessed against the street system?**

A: No, according to USEPA, the street and roadway system is part of the stormwater conveyance system along with storm drains and streams. Without the streets, the city's stormwater system would not function properly.

**Q: Isn't this just another tax?**

A: No, it is a user fee based on the amount of stormwater runoff a property contributes to the system via the amount of impervious area on the property.

**Q: I don't remember voting on this tax. How can the City do this without a vote?**

A: This is not a tax. This is a user fee just like your water and sewer user fee. Under state law, municipalities can set up a user fee for water, sanitary sewer and/or stormwater by a vote of City Council.

**Q: Is it legal for a community to establish a Stormwater Utility user fee?**

A: Yes, the State of Ohio law allows City Municipal government to establish stormwater program using councilmanic approved procedures to create such a program and fee legally.

**Q: How can we be sure that the money raised will be used for stormwater improvements and not diverted to other projects by the City?**

A: All of the funds raised by the stormwater utility fee will go into a stormwater "Enterprise Fund." Under state law, money in enterprise funds can only be used for its intended purposes. The City currently has separate enterprise funds for its water and sanitary sewer programs.

**Q: Won't this stormwater utility create a whole new government bureaucracy?**

A: No. the Stormwater Utility will be operated by the Public Works Director and only a small portion of the funds will be used for administration.

**Q: None of my stormwater goes into the storm drains. Why do I have to pay a Stormwater Utility Fee?**

A: Eventually all properties drain into the City of Zanesville's stormwater system and must be managed by the City, even if it is only the rainwater caught in your or your neighbor's backyard or ravine. Your property is also likely to generate runoff in a "severe" rain storm, even if the ground absorbs it during "normal" events. In any event, you always benefit from adequate, properly-functioning drainage and flood control systems which decrease the likelihood of flooding, erosion, and unlimited pollutants from surface and stormwater runoff. You also benefit from the regulation and monitoring of the properties above and around you. Finally, efforts to monitor and protect the river provide benefits to everyone.

**Q: I live on the edge of the City and water on my property drains away from streets and public drainage structures. Why do I have to pay this fee?**

A: All property owners receive benefits from a properly maintained and operated stormwater management system. Stormwater management activities with broad benefits include keeping the public streets drained and cleared so random flooding does not occur and travel is safe, making necessary stormwater infrastructure upgrades, reducing erosion and other pollutants that enter streams and rivers, and collecting and conveying stormwater safely through all parts of the City.

Also about half of the rate funds compliance with federal and state water quality regulations and improvements.

**Q: How will the storm water fee be billed?**

A: The new storm water charge is a fee for service not a tax. The fee will appear on the existing water, sanitary sewer and refuse utility bill as "storm water". The new fee will appear on the January 2019 utility bill.

**Q: How are properties with multiple renters handled?**

A: If you currently pay an existing water, sanitary sewer and refuse utility bill you be charged for the stormwater fee.

**Q: Why should I have to pay if I live on high ground?**

A: Every developed property in the City has stormwater runoff that contributes to existing water quantity and quality problems and contributes to the need to operate and maintain the storm drain system. Driveways, parking areas and rooftops in every part of the City contribute to the amount of water that must be managed. It is most equitable to have all developed properties pay a fee that is proportional to the amount of water that runs off the property.

**Q: We've had a drainage problem in front of my house/in my neighborhood for years and the city has never done anything about it. When are you going to fix it?**

A: The City has a backlog of drainage projects. You can contact the call the Department of Public Service, Engineering Division, City Engineer, Chip Saunders at (740) 617-4910 for more details to see if your issue is in the current business plan and approach or if it needs to be added to the list.

**Q: My area of the City is built out and has an adequate storm drain system?**

A: All developed properties in the city contribute stormwater to the system and should contribute to the cost of operating the system. A portion of the utility's revenues will be used to maintain and to make water quality improvements to the existing system, including the one in your neighborhood. As the facilities in your part of the city age, they require a higher level of maintenance and eventual replacement. There is also a need to begin water quality work and public education efforts that will help to

improve the quality of the water in your local streams, lakes and creeks. The remaining revenue will be used for capital improvement projects that will reduce flooding threats to life and property that currently exist. While the stormwater system in your area may be adequate to protect your neighborhood, the storm flows may contribute to problems downstream.

**Q: Is growth and new development the cause of these problems?**

A: New development approved and built in the City since 1990's has been required to meet strict regulations on the quality and quantity of stormwater runoff. New development is required to contain and treat their polluted stormwater runoff, but in older areas of the City, there is no easy or cost-effective way to clean the runoff prior to entering the streams and eventually the Muskingum river. Many of our current problems are caused by stormwater runoff from development occurring during and before the 1990's. Today's cost to remove, replace and upgrade old pipes and drainage systems exceeds the cost to build new systems.

**Q: How are you affected if you rent/lease your home/business rather than owning it?**

A: If you currently pay an existing water, sanitary sewer and refuse utility bill you be charged for the stormwater fee.

**Q: I live in an apartment. Will I have to pay?**

A: If you currently pay an existing water, sanitary sewer and refuse utility bill you be charged for the stormwater fee.

**Q: When will I know how much my bill will be?**

A: The City plans to send out letters to the top 100 stormwater users that will provide property specific billing information.

**Q: How soon can we expect to see results like reduced flooding?**

A: Faced with an aging stormwater system, the Stormwater Utility is clearly not a quick fix. It is however, a first step in solving a long-neglected problem. Residents will see improvements over time. However, City Council has developed a business plan and framework that outlines important improvement projects over the next five years. This plan is available on the City website and will continue to be updated with future planned improvements.

**Q: Was there any input from the public with this business plan?**

A: Yes. City Council created a Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) comprised of a cross section of key stakeholder citizenry that met 4 times to review and provide input on the business plan that was developed by City Council and staff and the consultants.

Changes were made to the Business Plan based on the review and input from the SWAC. The business plan and stormwater rates are based on SWAC review and input.

**Q: When will the stormwater fee take effect?**

A: The stormwater program ordinance is currently on a schedule to be approved by City Council after three readings during the fall of 2018. Stormwater fees will be appear on the utility bill beginning January 2019 and continue thereafter.

**Q:** When will rates go up?

A: The City Council has approved rates for the next five years including a \$X.XX per ERU per month rate for 2019 year 1 and a rate of \$X.XX per ERU per month in 2023 year 5 of the program. Rates will be reviewed again in 2023.

**Q: How much money does the City expect the Stormwater Utility to collect?**

A: The Stormwater Utility on average will generate approximately \$X,XXX,XXX per year based on the \$X.XX per ERU per month charge.

**Q: I am a resident. What is the billing information for me?**

A: Single-family residential, duplex, some condominium and agricultural properties were assigned 1 Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) and will be billed \$X.XX per month or \$XX.XX per year. If your residential property is situated on more than 1 parcel according to the City and Muskingum County Auditor Geographic Information System (GIS) computer records, your property will only be charged 1 ERU. Your residential property will not be charged for more than or less than 1 ERU.

Non-residential properties (all properties except single-family, duplex, some condominium and agricultural properties) were measured using aerial photography through use of a computer mapping software program to determine their impervious areas.

**Q: How much will business property owners pay? How was their rate determined?**

A: Non-residential property owners will pay based on the amount of hard-surface or impervious area on their properties. The impervious area for all non-residential properties located in the City was measured using aerial photography and a computer mapping software program.

The residential rate will be used in the calculation for non-residential properties. In the calculation, the flat residential rate equals one “equivalent residential unit” or ERU. One ERU = 2,300 sq. feet of hard-surface (impervious) area.

Example of the impervious area measurement for a residential parcel:



Non-residential property owners will be charged based on the number of ERUs of hard-surface on their property. For example, if a commercial property has ten times as much hard-surface area as the average residence (23,000 sq. feet or 10 ERUs) its stormwater charge would be ten times the residential rate per month. The rate per ERU that has been approved by City Council is: \$X.XX per ERU per month. This property will be charged \$X.XX x 10 (ERUs) = \$XX.XX per month or \$XXX.XX annually.

Example of the impervious area measurement for a non-residential parcel:



**Q: What can I do to estimate or measure the impervious area myself?**

A: Again, remember the residential properties are based on an average calculated amount of impervious area and all residential properties are assigned a flat rate. So, no calculation is required to determine your fee. The flat fee is \$X.XX per month or \$XX.XX per year.

The easiest and most cost-effective method to measure non-residential / business property would be to first determine the total square footage of your property using the property dimensions. Then, estimate the amount of impervious area on the property ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$  etc.). Multiply your estimate by the total square footage to arrive at an estimated measurement.

or

Calculate the footprint of your office building, your garage, and additional out buildings sheds etc., driveways and sidewalks in square feet and divide by 2,300. Multiply your estimate by \$X.XX per month or \$XX.XX per year.