



City of Suffolk

Department of Public Works

Storm Water Utility Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Storm Water Utility?

A Storm Water Utility is responsible for funding the operation, management, construction and maintenance of Storm water facilities. This utility generates its revenue through user fees. The Storm water fee is a service fee and not a tax. The fees are used to maintain and upgrade drainage facilities within the City as well as funding state and federal mandates regarding storm water facility reviews, inspections, and the erosion and sediment control program that relates to new construction.

What is Storm water runoff?

Storm water runoff results from rainfall. Typically, the more rainfall we get the less likely that the rainwater will be absorbed into the soils resulting in more storm water reaching our storm drains, ditches, streams, lakes and reservoirs.

Where are storm drains?

For the most part, storm drains are located within the limits of the streets. Water typically flows across the land onto the road and gutters and into storm water inlets that are connected to the storm water drainage pipes. In the more rural areas, storm water is conveyed along roadside ditches.

Does this storm water get treated at the wastewater plant?

No, storm water collected in the drainage system drains into our ditches and streams which discharge into lakes, rivers, or the Great Dismal Swamp.

What kind of pollution is in the rainfall runoff?

The pollution depends on what the rainfall runoff is running off from. Nearly all runoff contains silt and soil as a result of erosion. Runoff from agricultural lands and our lawns often contain fertilizer and herbicides. Runoff from streets and highways may contain oil and grease plus heavy metals such as lead from gasoline exhaust emissions, selenium from tires, phosphorous and several others from a variety of sources.

Is trash and debris floating in the water considered pollution?

Yes, the floating debris in the water is pollution and often termed floatables. Floatables are one of the simplest pollution to control – stop litter!

What about Bacteria?

Another pollutant which gets into the storm water is bacteria. Bacteria originates from illicit sanitary sewer connections or overflows, pet and wild animal waste, and birds. The City has a program to eliminate illicit sanitary sewer connections and overflows. Picking up pet waste and properly disposing of it also eliminates bacteria.

What is the current program the City participates in?

The City currently has a program to reduce erosion from new construction that follows State mandated guidelines; this program includes plan review services and inspection services. The City provides street sweeping in some areas of the city. The City of Suffolk is working with Hampton Roads Planning District Commission to get the public more involved by using public education.

Is the City's current program adequate?

No, the new federal regulations require more involvement. The State has recently changed the erosion regulations. The City of Suffolk is growing and more land is being developed. In addition, the past amount of money has not been able to keep up with the drainage and flooding problems.

How does the City plan to acquire the necessary funds to meet the new regulations and provide a higher level of service for its citizens?

The City has established a storm water utility fee similar to most other cities in the Hampton Roads area. The advantage of the source of funding is that it can only be used for storm water and related projects and that everyone pay an equitable amount.

Why is the Storm Water Fee necessary?

The Storm Water Fee is a result of the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972 and amendments thereafter. The regulations require cities to make improvements to reduce the amount of pollution from storm water runoff. These improvements include public education as well as removing pollution at the source. There are no federal or state dollars provided to implement water quality measures so the Storm Water Fee has been adopted. The fee also provides dedicated revenue for constructing more facilities to decrease drainage problems and flooding as well as providing maintenance of those already constructed.

How was the Storm Water Fee determined?

The revenues required were calculated to provide money to develop and implement a program based upon providing a level of service determined necessary to meet the regulations and the needs of our Citizens. The fee is based on a charge per residential home to create those revenues. Each residential home will be charged the same amount, called an Equivalent Residential Unit. Commercial businesses will be charged a multiple of the Equivalent Residential Unit.

What is the Storm Water Fee used for?

It may be used to fund many programs related to water quality including environmental education, street sweeping, capital improvements to the system, drainage maintenance, administration, review of permits, inspection, and monitoring activities. It may also be used for correcting storm water drainage problems, ditch and stream cleaning to provide more capacity for water to run off and to maintain certain retention basins or other best management practices.

What is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU)?

The ERU is a unit of measure to compare runoff generated by different size properties and varying amounts of impervious areas. ERUs are computed by randomly selecting several hundred single family homes and measuring the impervious area and then taking the average. ***In Suffolk, one ERU is equal to 3,200 square feet (a weighted average for both single-family and multi-family properties). A commercial property equal to 10 ERUs would pay 10 times the ERU charge.***

What is impervious area?

Impervious areas are any surface areas on developed property that rainfall will not be absorbed into the ground. These areas include, but are not limited to the roofs of houses and other buildings, patios, driveways, parking areas and walkways.

How will the Storm Water Fee be collected and what will it cost?

The fee will be collected via your real estate property tax bill due in June and December of each year. The fee will be charged to the owner of the property. ***The fee has been set at \$5.24 per ERU per month.***

Do I have to pay the Storm Water Fee on a vacant lot?

No, you do not have to pay the storm water fee until the parcel of land is developed.

Will agricultural land be charged the storm water fee?

No, agricultural lands will not be charged under the storm water fee. If there is a house or business on part of the land, that would be charged accordingly.

Do State and Federal developed properties pay the charge?

Yes, state and federal developed properties pay the storm water charge. They are exempt from the storm water fee if they have a separate storm water permit, and they discharge directly to a body of water that Suffolk has no maintenance obligation over.

What length of roadways does Suffolk currently maintain?

Approximately 631 miles of roadway, of which roughly 300 miles are curb and gutter within Suffolk. The City assumed responsibility for these roads in July, 2006.

What categories may be included in the Storm water Program?

The Storm water Program may include Preventive and General Maintenance Repair of the Storm water Facilities including certain storm water ponds in residential neighborhoods, Street Sweeping, GIS Updating and Maintenance, Plan Review & Approval Process, Infrastructure Site Inspection, and Capital Improvement Projects.

Has the Public been involved in the Program?

Yes. Since the beginning, a Citizens Advisory Committee of several Citizens as well City staff, has worked to establish policy and procedures. Prior to City Council taking action, there were Public Information meetings and a Public Hearing. In addition, there will be a Public Information program to provide more about the program's implementation.