

City of South Milwaukee

Stormwater Utility

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is stormwater management?

Stormwater includes all the surface flow, or runoff, from property that occurs from rain or snow melt events. This runoff flows over land or streets to a municipal collection system consisting of pipes, ditches, culverts, swales, and detention facilities, until the runoff reaches Oak Creek or Lake Michigan. Stormwater management is effectively managing the amount (quantity) and cleanliness (quality) of stormwater runoff within the city. The city performs a wide variety of services to carry out this responsibility, as follows:

Maintenance

- Cleaning, repairing, and replacing storm sewer manholes, inlets, and pipes;
- Constructing new storm sewer projects;
- Mowing ditches
- Cleaning brush or debris from Oak Creek and other drainage ways where allowed.

Water Quality Practices

- Sweeping streets
- Leaf Collection
- Inspecting and enforcing construction site erosion control standards
- Monitoring the maintenance of detention basins

Planning and Engineering

- Engineering studies to determine the size and type of structures that must be used to improve drainage system and reduce risk of flooding.
- Reviewing and approving land development stormwater management practices.
- Water quality studies to determine the areas where pollution reduction practices must be utilized along with other state requirements, to meet WDNR permit goals.

2. Why have a stormwater utility?

A stormwater utility is a fair and equitable way to pay for stormwater costs, since all property owners pay their fair share of stormwater management costs, similar to a water or electric utility. Stormwater costs were previously paid for through the property tax roll. A stormwater utility charges the customer for the stormwater management services based on the runoff generated from their property. With a stormwater utility, the cost of stormwater management is shifted to the properties that drive the service costs, such as commercial, industrial, and other properties with large impervious surfaces. All properties within the utility jurisdiction, including government, schools, and churches, pay a stormwater fee also (these lands do not pay property taxes).

3. When was the stormwater utility created?

The utility was created by ordinance on October 16, 2007, with initial fee on 2007 tax bills.

4. Why not leave the stormwater management costs as part of the General Tax Fund?

Under the city's stormwater permit issued by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the city has been required to undertake or improve a number of stormwater related activities which has increased costs. To meet permit requirements, the city must also continue activities such as street sweeping and leaf collection. The City will also use these funds to construct or update facilities to

reduce the risk of flooding. Based on state imposed levy limits, the city needed to create the utility to help fund these costs, or reduce other city services, funded by property taxes.

5. Who has approval authority for the stormwater utility budget?

The Common Council will serve as the stormwater utility board. All policy and budget decisions must be reviewed and approved by the elected officials of the Common Council.

6. How do you determine how much I am charged for stormwater?

Stormwater fees are based on the amount of impervious surface each property has. Impervious surfaces include roofs, private sidewalks, private streets, driveways, patios, and parking lots. The impervious area of each property was measured from an aerial photo and using site plans. The greater the impervious area of a property, the greater the amount of stormwater runoff.

An ERU, or equivalent runoff unit, is the unit of measurement. An ERU is defined as the average impervious area of a single family home. The average impervious area of a single-family home in South Milwaukee was calculated to be 2,964 square feet. Thus, for the city's stormwater utility rate structure, one ERU = 2,964 square feet. The initial charge per ERU is \$3.00 per month, or \$36.00 annually.

7. Can I reduce the amount of my fee by controlling the runoff from my property?

Single family homes and duplexes cannot reduce the fee, since there are benefits to all property owners, such as street sweeping, leaf collection, and general system maintenance. A system of credits was established when the stormwater utility was created to reduce the fee in certain circumstances, such as properties with detention basins. To be eligible for a credit, a property must meet the criteria set in the South Milwaukee Credit Manual.

8. My property never floods. Will I still have to pay a stormwater fee?

All developed property in South Milwaukee will pay a stormwater utility fee regardless if a drainage concern exists on that specific piece of property or not. Even if your property has never flooded, the stormwater that flows off of your property must be managed so that it does not contribute to flooding in areas downstream.

9. Do other cities have stormwater user-fees?

As of 2007, more than 40 utilities have been established in Wisconsin communities to fund their stormwater management programs. User-fees for stormwater services range from \$18.00 to over \$100.00 annually for the base ERU charge.

10. How much will an average single family homeowner have to pay for a stormwater fee?

Under the current ordinance and resolution, an average single family homeowner will pay \$36 per year for the first two years for the stormwater utility fee. The third year the rate (2009 tax bill) will increase to \$48 per year and shall remain in effect unless changed by Resolution of the City of South Milwaukee Common Council.

11. Who can I contact for additional information?

Contact City Engineer, Kyle Vandercar for more information. He can be reached at 768-8068, or by e-mail: Vandercar@ci.south-milwaukee.wi.us