

**CITY OF HOLLY SPRINGS
STORMWATER UTILITY
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

GENERAL

What is a Stormwater Utility and why is it needed in Holly Springs?

A Stormwater Utility is an entity responsible for the daily operations of the City's stormwater management program, including maintaining compliance with the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater permit and the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's Watershed Management Plan. The NPDES permit and the Metro District Watershed Plan constitute an unfunded mandate, requiring the City of Holly Springs to direct resources towards stormwater management activities such as inspection and maintenance of the storm sewer system, regulation of construction and development activities, pollution prevention, and public outreach and involvement.

In addition to regulatory requirements, Holly Springs is facing issues of aging infrastructure or inadequate drainage systems in many areas throughout the City. The adoption of the Stormwater Utility is a display of the City's commitment to improving its drainage infrastructure throughout the city in order to benefit all citizens as well as our natural resources.

It has always rained. Why do we have to pay a fee for stormwater management?

Like other government entities, the City of Holly Springs has traditionally managed stormwater by collecting it and moving it to our creeks and rivers as quickly as possible. But the City of Holly Springs is now facing unfunded federal and state mandates (the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System or NPDES Permitting Program) that require the City to manage stormwater in ways that will also protect all tributaries and improve water quality. Until now, stormwater management activities have primarily been paid for with general fund revenues, but this funding source is inadequate to pay for the stormwater management programs necessary to be in compliance with these mandates. Consequently, a stormwater utility fee was adopted in 2009 to provide an equitable and stable funding source for these new stormwater management activities.

Is Holly Springs the only City that has adopted a Stormwater Utility and enacted a user fee?

No. Many cities and counties in the metro Atlanta area and throughout the country are facing the same mandates to implement stormwater management programs. Many of these local governments have adopted stormwater utilities and user fees as a fair and equitable way to fund stormwater management activities. The nearby cities of Canton and Woodstock have stormwater utilities and charge a user fee.

I have asked the City to address drainage issues on or near my property for some time but nothing has been done. Will you fix the problem now?

Some drainage complaints that the City receives are for problems on private property that the City has no authority to address. The existence of a Stormwater Utility will not change that. There are, however, historical problems located on public property or, in certain cases, on private property

with public drainage easements that the City will be better positioned to address thanks to the Stormwater Utility.

FEE QUESTIONS

I don't have storm sewers serving my property. Why am I being charged this fee?

Every property contributes and places a demand on the stormwater system. Every property benefits from the City's stormwater management activities, whether or not there is a constructed storm sewer connected directly to the property. As an example, everyone relies on and benefits from the storm sewer system constructed to serve the road network that gets us to and from work. The City's stormwater management system consists of both natural and constructed features, many of which are not obvious. In addition to the traditional stormwater conveyance needs of individual property owners, the City of Holly Springs is now required, under the stormwater mandate, to manage the entire stormwater management system, which includes providing water quality and channel protection, system mapping, inspections, maintenance and repair of ponds and conveyances, water sampling and testing, watershed planning and other programs for the benefit of the entire community.

How was my fee calculated?

The amount of impervious surface (hard surfaces like roads, buildings, driveways and parking lots), and land use type are the factors taken into consideration to determine an equitable fee. As we build more impervious surfaces, the amount of stormwater that runs off the land without soaking into the ground increases. As the amount of impervious area in our community increases, our surface waters become more polluted, aquatic habitats deteriorate, and flooding risks increase. The amount of impervious area on a parcel can be measured on aerial photographs or calculated by a licensed professional from site and general development plans. The fee is determined as follows:

Single-Family Residential Fee

All single-family residential homes, duplexes, and townhomes within the city limits of Holly Springs are charged a flat fee of \$4.00 per month. This is due to the fact that the impact on our watersheds and waterways is relatively similar for all residential properties. Statistical sampling and analysis conducted in 2009 determined that the average amount of impervious surface on a residential lot in the City is 2,700 square feet. This number is known as the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU), which is the basis for the stormwater service fee on all properties in the City. Single-family residential, duplex, and townhome properties all have an ERU of 1.0 and the billing rate is \$4.00 per ERU per month.

Non-Residential Fee

The stormwater service fee for non-residential properties is based on the amount of impervious surface located on each property. The amount of impervious area for each non-residential parcel in the City was calculated using aerial photography and GIS data. For each parcel, the total impervious area (sq. ft.) is divided by 2,700 to determine the number of ERUs for that particular parcel. For example, if a commercial property has 10,000 square feet of impervious area the formula for calculating the monthly bill would be $10,000/2,700 = 3.7$ ERUs & $3.7 \times \$4.00/\text{ERU} = \14.80 per month. Therefore a non-residential property with 10,000 square feet of impervious surface would pay a stormwater service fee of \$14.80 per month.

What will I get for my money?

Stormwater management systems protect the environment, people and property by ensuring the safety of our water bodies for generations to come. In the past, general fund revenues paid for limited stormwater management activities. Since inception of the NPDES permit in early 2003, the City has been obligated to provide their citizens, business owners and the development community with a wide range of stormwater management programs. These include:

- Inspection and engineering assessments of privately-owned stormwater management ponds and conveyances and storm sewers, culverts and ditches located inside of the street right-of-way
- The opportunity for property owners to apply for the City to maintain privately-owned stormwater management features that control or convey runoff originating from public property or right-of-way
- Enhanced development plan review and enforcement for grading, stormwater runoff, water quality and environmental protection
- Public education and outreach activities at schools, businesses and civic organizations
- Detailed stormwater infrastructure inventory and mapping updates
- Field monitoring, water quality sampling and enhanced code enforcement—illicit discharge detection, citations and abatement
- Planning and design of regional facilities designed for flood control and water quality improvement
- Construction site inspection of stormwater facilities before acceptance into the County's inventory

In addition, developers of new commercial, industrial, institutional and residential property will continue to add to the City's stormwater management system either by building on-site stormwater management ponds and conveyances that serve their new developments and/or by funding the construction of regional stormwater management facilities.

The NPDES regulations require that these same activities be continued and intensified, plus work is conducted in these new areas:

- Targeted public education and participation
- Construction of regional water quality and quantity control structures
- Computer aided storm sewer system mapping
- Routine pond and outfall inspections and maintenance
- Detection and elimination of illegal discharges to the storm sewer system
- Development and enforcement of erosion control and illicit discharge ordinances
- Pollution prevention activities
- Verification of response to citizen inquiries, violations reports, and complaints
- Enhanced record-keeping and report preparation
- Watershed based stormwater management planning

Can the Utility Fee be used to fund other programs, like the Police Department?

No. The Stormwater Utility provides dedicated funding only for stormwater management program activities specified by the Stormwater Utility Ordinance. The City of Holly Springs Finance Department will track the amount of money generated through the Utility and account for how the money is spent.

Are any properties exempt from paying the fee?

a) Yes. Undeveloped properties will not pay a fee since they have no impervious surfaces.

b) Parcels with impervious area from the public transportation network (roads, sidewalks, etc.) are not charged a fee. The stormwater management costs associated with impacts from public transportation networks are apportioned to all customers as part of the Stormwater Utility Fee due to the universal benefit that customers derive from them. In addition, public transportation networks are directly responsible for stormwater management of their rights-of-way and assume the costs associated with those responsibilities.

We are a property tax-exempt institution. Are we required to pay a Stormwater Utility Fee?

Yes. Every developed property in the City of Holly Springs contributes and places a demand on the stormwater system and receives the benefit and use of the stormwater management system, regardless of tax status. Therefore, all owners of developed property will pay their fair share to support it. Tax-exempt entities will need to pay for stormwater management, just like they pay for drinking water, wastewater, and electrical utility services.

I'm thinking about buying a property and want to know what the annual Fee will be. How can I find that out?

You can contact the City Stormwater Department at (770)345-5533 or contact the City via the Holly Springs website at www.hollyspringsga.us.

Will the revenue go into the City's general fund?

No. Revenues will go into a separate fund that may only be used for stormwater services.

I wasn't aware that the City was considering this fee. Can you tell me how it was enacted?

The decision to establish a Stormwater Utility and to adopt a user fee was not made lightly. The City has been facing regulatory pressures to improve its stormwater management program for several years, yet limited funding sources have restricted the City's ability to deliver an adequate level of service for many stormwater management activities. Beginning in 2008, city staff began conducting an assessment of the needs that the stormwater program would face during the next several years and researching funding options available to meet those needs. The needs and funding options were discussed with the City Council during several meetings in the Spring of 2009 and the general consensus was that the creation of a stormwater utility and the adoption of a user fee was the most fair and equitable way to provide a stable funding source for the City's stormwater management program. On July 20, 2009 the City Council

voted to establish a Stormwater Utility responsible for implementing the stormwater management program. After the framework for the Stormwater Utility was adopted, city staff conducted statistical sampling and analysis of impervious surfaces within the City using aerial photography and geographic information systems (GIS) data. The analysis determined that the average amount of impervious surface on single-family residential lots in Holly Springs was 2,700 square feet. This number was established as the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) and is the basis for each property's stormwater charge.

BILLING QUESTIONS

How and when will I be billed?

The stormwater service fee will be included on the city tax bill and mailed out each December. Though a separate fee, it can be paid together with your tax bill.

I own several properties. Can my bills be combined into one?

No. For record keeping and database purposes, customers will be receive separate bills for each property that they own.

I am retired and leave Holly Springs for extended periods so I disconnect my utilities. Will I still have to pay the stormwater fee?

Yes. Unoccupied parcels will still be billed. The availability of the stormwater management system cannot be discontinued based on occupancy.

I rent an apartment or a house. Will I get a bill for the Stormwater Service Fee?

No. Only property owners will receive bills. Property owners may choose to pass the fee onto renters in the form of higher payments, but the obligation for payment rests with the property owner.

As a landlord, my contract with my renters specifies that they pay utilities. Can you send the bill to them?

No. You may pass this expense on to your renters via a rent increase, but the ultimate responsibility to make payment remains with the property owner.

Why is the City using the tax bill collection method to collect the stormwater service fee?

Compared to stand-alone monthly billing and its associated mailing and postage costs, "piggy-backing" the stormwater service fee on the existing annual property tax bill saves everyone money by significantly reducing the administrative costs of the program.