



## **Stormwater Authority of Chester Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **What is a Storm Water Authority?**

A storm water authority is similar to water, sewer and other authorities that you are familiar with. These authorities charge a fee for services provided. In this case, the service is the control of storm water runoff through outreach, education, construction, operation and maintenance of a storm water system. Municipal Stormwater Authorities in PA are governed by the Municipal Authorities Act, 53

### **Why do we need a Storm Water Authority?**

Funds for repairing and maintaining the storm water system typically came from the General Fund of the City's operating budget. That is no longer feasible because of the financial situation of the City and the severity of the storm water problems; steadily increasing flooding and water pollution; unfunded state and federal mandates to control these problems and meet standards; an aging, deteriorating and undersized conveyance system for storm water, and competition for dollars with other municipal needs.

### **What is the concern about storm water quality?**

A major storm water quality concern is "non-point source pollution". As the name implies, non-point source pollution comes from numerous locations and is carried through runoff. The types of pollutants include toxins, metals, oils, nutrients, and fecal coliform bacteria from septic systems, leaking sanitary sewers, and pets. These directly impact water quality and now represent a large percentage of the pollution picture. Street sweeping, flooding, trash and debris in waterways, pollution controls facilities, and increased cleaning of storm drains can control these pollutants.

### **How can you impose this fee without a vote?**

This is not a tax but a user fee. A public vote is not required to impose a user fee. The City has reviewed a number of options for funding storm water management. The City established the Stormwater Authority of Chester through the Municipal Authorities Act, 53 Pa 5603.

### **Who will pay the storm water fee?**

Every property will be assessed a storm water fee. Homeowners, commercial property owners, nonprofit entities, tax-exempt properties and public facilities, including municipal government and the school district, will pay. Residential units will pay a flat fee of about \$15.60 per month based on the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) of 1,139 square feet, which is median amount of impervious surface found on residences in the City of Chester. Large properties will pay a fee based on the actual amount of their impervious surfaces.

### **Do properties that do not generate runoff have to pay the fee?**

Even properties designed to infiltrate some runoff will have to pay. Infiltration systems usually cannot handle all runoff from a large storm event, so at some time every property will contribute to the system. Large storms cause the most damage and are the reason the storm water system must be maintained and repaired on a continual basis. And maintenance of the storm water system prevents damage to all properties.

**How is the impervious area calculated?**

The Authority used aerial photographs and parcel data to measure impervious surface. This calculation is accurate in almost all cases. In cases of error, the calculated amount will err on the side of the customer, likely underestimating the amount of impervious surface on their property

**What is the service charge based on?**

The service charge is an impervious area based rate structure that has assessed the amount of impervious area within a property for each parcel in the City of Chester. Impervious area is the best indicator of how much you use the storm water system. Residential homes provide the basis for the rate called an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). The average amount of impervious area for a Chester residence is 1,139 square feet, which forms the basis for our storm water utility rate structure as 1 ERU. Based on your property size a property owner will pay a monthly charge per ERU.

**How much is the Storm Water Utility charge?**

The rate has been set at \$15.60 per month for 1 ERU.

**What is an impervious surface?**

When property is improved through buildings, pavement, or trafficked gravel, water is prevented or retarded from getting into the soil. These areas are termed impervious surfaces because they restrict natural infiltration and increase runoff from the property.

**Why is a storm water fee preferable to a tax increase for funding improvements?**

A storm water fee is the fairest way to operate and maintain the municipality's storm water system, meet federal water quality requirements and add capital improvements to mitigate flooding, erosion and sedimentation. The storm water fee, like other fees such as sanitary sewer, will be based on the amount of demand a user places upon the system. All property owners who generate storm water runoff will pay an equitable share.

**Is this a one-time charge?**

NO. It is an ongoing fee for the development of new storm water operations, control facilities, their maintenance and water quality compliance.

**How is property measured?**

Impervious area on non-residential properties was measured from recent aerial photos with the actual measurement done via computer imaging. This produces a high degree of accuracy.

**Who has to pay?**

All property parcels within the City will pay the storm water service fee. That includes houses, schools, public facilities, churches and businesses. The only exceptions are public streets, which are designed to collect and carry storm water runoff.

**Why are Tax Exempt properties (such as churches and schools) being billed?**

The service charge, just like water and sewer fees, is based upon the cost of services provided. Because this is not a tax, it is collected from all customers who receive service. Tax exempt properties contribute a significant amount of runoff to the City because of their size and amount of hard surface. They will be treated like all other customers under the rate structure.

**Can I deduct the storm water fee on my taxes?**

For commercial property owners, the IRS, depending on your specific tax situation considers the charge a cost of doing business. Residential property owners will likely not be able to deduct the storm water fee on their taxes.

**How will I be billed?**

The storm water fee will appear on a monthly bill.

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**Where does the money go?**

Some of the other important components of this program include: a) increased maintenance of the City's storm water system, b) street sweeping, c) inspection and enforcement of storm water regulations and standards, d) public information and education, e) construction of long overdue capital storm water facilities.

**Is this money going to take care of the drainage problems created by new development?**

NO. Every developer is required to provide the drainage improvements necessary to handle the runoff generated by that development. Developers must also pay an impact fee or construct an equivalent portion of the storm drain system to relieve the impact of the new development on the overall system. All impervious area created by these new developments will be included within the storm water utility and will pay the service fee just as everyone else.

**How will billing be handled for business owners who lease space?**

The bill will go to the property owner. It will be up to the property owner to decide how or if the tenants should share in the payment.

**Will the fee change in the future?**

The current model does not include any increase in the proposed rates.



**The City required me to build all these extra parking spaces. Why should I have to pay a service charge for them now?**

Parking spaces are based on standard estimates of traffic and need, and are necessary requirements of doing business.

**My business is connected to the City's sanitary sewer. Why should I have to pay?**

Your property may be physically connected to the drainage system in the same manner as water or sewer but you are still provided service. How? The City's storm water program improves and maintains those upstream storm water facilities that protect your property. They establish design criteria, and regulate development that helps control off site storm water problems. This program is taking steps to reduce storm water pollutants that degrade our culinary water quality and the environment of the City.

**Has this program been used anywhere else?**

YES. There are many storm water utilities in large and small communities throughout the nation, with many more in the planning stages. Locally, Philadelphia, Wilmington, West Chester, and other PA cities like Lancaster, Mt Lebanon have implemented fees for storm water management.

**How can I be sure this fee won't pay for other City projects?**

Under law, storm water fees may not exceed the cost of providing storm water improvements and services. Your fees will go into an "enterprise" or special fund that will be used only for the storm water program. Professional auditors, to ensure compliance, will audit this fund annually.