

## Frequently Asked Questions about Stormwater User Fees

### **Q. What is the stormwater management program?**

A. We are all familiar with rain: water falling from clouds onto the surface of the earth. Although rain itself is easy to identify, what happens to rainwater after it reaches the ground surface is less obvious and dependent on the type of land cover where it rains. In urban areas like those found in Rocky Mount, stormwater runoff must be managed by the City to protect public and private property and as well as protect our streams and river from pollution that is created by our daily activities.

Both water *quality* and water *quantity* problems are created as land is developed. Even though the same amount of rain falls on a rural farm and an urban city, the city will have a much larger amount of stormwater runoff since it has more impervious surfaces like asphalt and concrete. Often the runoff is large enough to cause flooding and erosion problems due to the rapidly moving water.

In late 1999, due to expanding state and federal regulatory requirements, increasing development and an aging stormwater system in need of repair the City of Rocky Mount began to investigate possible options for funding stormwater needs. After study of the recommendations from the citizen based Stormwater Advisory Committee, the Rocky Mount City Council approved the implementation of a Stormwater Utility beginning July 1, 2003. The fees for the utility are based on impervious area such as buildings and parking lots and will pay for operation, maintenance and capital improvements for the City's stormwater system. Revenue collected from stormwater fees will be used only for stormwater management related activities.

### **Q. Why is the City doing this now?**

A. It's been 30 years since the Clean Water Act began the process of cleaning up the country's waters. On March 10, 2003, a new Federal mandate entitled the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System was enacted. This regulation adds new requirements for the control and management of stormwater quality and quantity on all municipalities over 10,000 in population.

The City of Rocky Mount is responsible for compliance with new Federal and State regulations on water quality as well as providing stormwater management facilities and services. This includes installation and maintenance of storm drains, inlets and ditches, as well as ensuring that state programs such as erosion and sediment control are provided on construction sites. All of these services are done to protect personal and public property as well as provide for a healthy environment. Neither the Federal nor state government provides funding for these mandated programs.

The largest source of stormwater pollution in Rocky Mount is runoff from developed property. Everyone, in one way or another, is likely to be part of the problem, but everyone can also be part of the solution. Stormwater pollution includes: bacteria and viruses, chemicals, pesticides, trash, sediments and motor vehicle fluids. Reducing stormwater pollution and protecting the quality of our surface waters it everybody's responsibility.

### **Q. Why do I have to pay a stormwater fee?**

A. Today, the City funds stormwater management through the General Fund, that is, by property taxes. With this funding the City maintains hundreds of miles of ditches and culverts, responds to flooding complaints, repairs and replaces the infrastructure, and inspects new construction for compliance with local stormwater regulations. Most people agree that residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional customers should pay for their fair share of water and sewer service based on their use of these systems. In comparison, the most equitable method to pay for stormwater service is to estimate a property's relative impact on the stormwater system. One of

the best indicators of this impact is the amount of impervious area on the property which indicates quantity and rate of the stormwater runoff generated by the property. Facing the same requirements, more than 300 other communities nationwide have developed stormwater utilities as an alternative funding mechanism for their stormwater management programs.

**Q. How will revenues be used?**

A. All revenues will be used to support the stormwater program, which includes compliance with the state Tar Pamico Nutrient Management regulations and the Federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) regulations for water quality. Program priorities include maintenance of the drainage system, such as pipes and ditches; protecting properties from flooding; protecting our streams and wetlands from erosion and pollution; and major capital investments for the drainage system.

**Q. Will revenues be spent throughout the City?**

A. Yes, the stormwater management program is Citywide and services will be provided throughout the City pursuant to service guidelines established when the funding level of the stormwater utility was established.

**Q. Why is the stormwater management program not funded by tax revenues?**

A. The stormwater management utility fee was selected as a more equitable way to distribute the program cost because:

- The fee is based on each property's actual demand for stormwater services as measured by how much impervious surface is on the property (that is, buildings, parking lots, garages and similar surfaces).
- All property, including government, schools and tax exempt properties, will share towards the overall cost of the stormwater management program.

**Q. My neighborhood has drainage problems. Who do I call to get some action on these problems?**

A. Service requests, reports of illegal dumping into the storm drainage system and other questions about Stormwater Utility Services may be directed to the **"Stormwater Hotline"** at **972-1500**. City staff will collect the necessary information and investigate the problem. If it is determined that the problem is within the City's area of responsibility, we will advise you of the action to be taken by the City. If it is determined that the problem is outside the City's area of responsibility, city staff may be able to provide advice on possible solutions or direct you to other available assistance.

**Q. How were the recommendations for the utility developed?**

A. The utility was developed with the assistance of a citizen based Stormwater Advisory Committee to address new water quality regulations, maintenance, and flooding issues. The committee's recommendations included the development of a stormwater user fee, where all developed properties in the City would pay to fund stormwater services. Once the committee developed recommendations, the City started advising homeowners and other property owners of the plans to create a utility, specifically to address stormwater issues, and of the need to charge a monthly fee for the improved services.

**Q. How is the rate established?**

A. The rate is set by City Council, based on a program of services developed in response to Federal and State water quality requirements as well as known stormwater quantity problems, such as maintenance and remedial repair needs. The Citizen Advisory Committee assisted in identifying priorities for the program of services.

**Q. When will the fee take effect?**

A. Stormwater fees will be added to the utility bill as a separate line item starting in July 2003.

**Q. Are tax-exempt properties also exempt from the stormwater fee?**

A. No, tax-exempt properties will also pay the fee. Taxes are based on the value of the property. The stormwater fee is assessed based on how much the property contributes to the amount of stormwater runoff. The amount of runoff from the property is determined by the amount of impervious surface on the property.

**Q. How are residential property fees determined?**

A. Each single-family residential dwelling unit is billed a flat fee, based on the measurement of the local average of the building footprint, garage, driveway and other features that interrupt the natural absorption of stormwater into the ground. The average impervious area for a single-family residence in Rocky Mount is 2,519 square feet. Impervious areas were determined by analyzing aerial photographs to identify the amount of impervious surfaces on each property. Multi-family dwellings and all non-residential properties will be billed at a rate that is based on their impervious area as well. For non-single family property, each 2,519 square feet of imperviousness found on the property is billed at a fee of \$3.25 a month.

**Q. How are non-residential or multi-family property fees determined?**

A. To determine the annual fee, divide the total impervious area by 2,519 square feet (or one Equivalent Rate Unit) to obtain the number of ERUs and multiply by the rate. The minimum utility fee for any developed property is never less than one ERU.

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

A. Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. If stormwater runs off your property, the City must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits may include complying with Federal and State mandates, 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. How can I help?**

A. The success of the program to address water quality by reducing pollution will greatly depend upon the involvement of citizens like you. The best way to make a difference is to become informed about the volunteer conservation and preservation programs in the area, and then to actively participate. The City will be providing more information on steps you can take in your business, home or school.

Protecting our storm water quality is everybody's responsibility. Water is a precious resource that we must protect. Spotting and reporting pollution, preventing pollution by recycling and properly disposing of household chemicals are simple things that everyone of all ages can do to protect our storm water and our community.