

Summary:

To control stormwater pollution and combined sewer overflow events, repair aging infrastructure, and meet federal and state clean water requirements, Capital Region Water has restructured rates to charge a stormwater fee on impervious surfaces within the City of Harrisburg.

Background:

City Beautiful H₂O is Capital Region Water's program to restore and beautify our neighborhoods through community greening. We will be investing millions of dollars to repair aging infrastructure, reduce combined sewer overflows, control backups onto streets and into basements to improve the quality of local waterways, and protect public health and safety. This investment will be approximately \$315 million over 20 years.

Capital Region Water explored various funding alternatives with the goal of creating an equitable approach that considers the financial capability of City residents. It was recommended that Capital Region Water restructure rates and adopt a stormwater fee, a dedicated funding source for the necessary improvements. The stormwater fee is based on the amount of stormwater each property generates. The amount of stormwater generated is determined by the area of impervious surfaces (e.g., asphalt, concrete, buildings) on each property. This means that a parking lot that is 80% impervious pays a larger fee, while a residential property that is 40% impervious pays a smaller fee. This model equitably distributes the cost of stormwater management so that the properties with the most impervious surfaces, which generate the most stormwater, pay the highest fees.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Questions about Stormwater

What is stormwater?

Stormwater is water from rain, snow, or ice melt that does not get absorbed into the ground. In a natural environment, most rain, snow, or ice melt falls on pervious surfaces like grass and filters into the ground, recharging ground water and keeping water tables consistent. When stormwater lands on an impervious surface it travels until it can find a surface that will absorb it. However, in built-up environments like cities pervious surfaces are often not plentiful enough to absorb much of the stormwater before it reaches a storm drain or collects in a depressed area. While it is traveling to the nearest storm drain or pervious surface, stormwater can pick up pollutants and even debris and trash.

What is stormwater pollution?

When stormwater runs off impervious surfaces it collects pollutants. This can be oil slicks from vehicles, chemicals from nearby buildings, improperly applied fertilizers and pesticides on landscaped areas, or any number of other pollutants. In a separate stormwater system, these pollutants and debris are then

transferred to waterways, jeopardizing the health of water used for drinking, recreation, and habitat in Harrisburg and downstream communities. Pollutants from runoff, including oil, pesticides, and bacteria, can contaminate drinking water, pose a danger to public health, and damage aquatic life. Stormwater combined with sewage only increases the amount of pollution and damage.

What is Impervious Area (IA)?

Impervious area is any area covered by a hard surface such as a structure or building, paving, asphalt, concrete, compacted gravel, or any other man-made feature that prevents or restricts the absorption of precipitation.

What is the problem with stormwater runoff?

About 60% of Harrisburg's sewer pipes are part of a combined sewer system, where polluted stormwater runoff and sewage are conveyed in the same pipe for treatment. In wet weather, stormwater flows exceed system capacity, discharging the mixture into Paxton Creek or the Susquehanna River. In addition to the combined system, Capital Region Water is also responsible for the portion of the stormwater-wastewater system that is separate. The entire system (combined or separate) requires stormwater management practices to comply with regulatory requirements.

Questions about the Stormwater Fee

What is a stormwater fee?

A stormwater fee is an assessment of the amount of stormwater runoff from an individual property. The fee is based on impervious surfaces (e.g., asphalt, concrete, buildings). It is the most equitable approach to address stormwater issues because it is connected directly to the cause of the runoff pollution.

Why do we need a stormwater fee in Harrisburg?

Over half of Harrisburg's sewer pipes are part of a combined sewer system, where polluted stormwater runoff and sewage are conveyed in the same pipe for treatment. In wet weather, stormwater flows exceed system capacity, discharging the mixture into Paxton Creek or the Susquehanna River. In addition to the combined system, Capital Region Water is also responsible for the stormwater-wastewater system that uses separate stormwater piping from those pipes that carry sanitary flow to the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Facility. The entire system (combined or separate) requires stormwater management practices to comply with regulatory requirements, including but not limited to pollutant reduction plans necessary to improve water quality in Paxton Creek, the Susquehanna River, and the Chesapeake Bay.

The Community Greening Plan (2017) asked the community how we should pay for the cost of stormwater management to help us meet state and federal clean water requirements. Most respondents (86%) preferred a fee based on the amount of stormwater generated, citing that this method more equitably distributes the cost of stormwater management so that the properties with the most impervious surfaces, as a measure of stormwater runoff, pay the highest fee.

Why can't existing infrastructure handle this problem?

Approximately 80% Harrisburg's collection system was installed before 1940, meaning most of the city's stormwater infrastructure is over 80 years old. The age of this infrastructure --- coupled with decades of deferred maintenance --- has resulted in a number of structural and operational deficiencies. Nearly 40% of Harrisburg's sewer and stormwater infrastructure now needs to be repaired or replaced.

How is the fee determined?

The stormwater fee is based on the amount of stormwater generated by measuring the amount of impervious area (IA) on a property. Impervious area is any surface that prevents or impedes the infiltration of rainwater into the ground. For purposes of the fee calculation, impervious areas include, but are not limited to: pavements, driveway areas, and roofs. Any surface designed to be compacted gravel or crushed stone shall be regarded as an impervious surface.

How much will the fee cost me each year?

The fee is \$6.15 per month for every 1,000 square feet of impervious area. Most residential customers will pay \$6.15 per month. Larger properties would pay about \$6.15 a month per 1,000 square feet of impervious areas that generate the majority of stormwater.

How is impervious area (IA) determined?

The stormwater fee is based on the amount of stormwater generated by the area of impervious surface (e.g., asphalt, concrete, buildings, crushed stone and gravel surfaces, etc.) on each property. Capital Region Water employed the most advanced, sophisticated technology to develop an interactive map that zeroes in on impervious surfaces subject to the assessment. View your property on the fee finder map: capitalregionwater.com/stormwater-fee/sw-fee-finder/.

How is the fee designed?

Residential Property Tiers. Single-family residential properties are grouped into four tiers, each defined by a range of measured IA. The Base Stormwater Units for Tier 1 (properties with an IA of 400 to 700 square feet) and Tier 2 (700 to 2,200 square feet) is the average IA of a representative sample of all properties within that tier. The Base Stormwater Units for Tier 3 (properties with an IA greater than 2,200 square feet) is an actual measurement of each Property's IA divided by 1,000. Tier 0 single-family residential properties are assigned a Base Stormwater Units of 0 and are not charged a Stormwater Fee. The following table summarizes the Single-Family Residential Tiers and their Base Stormwater Units:

Tier	Range of Measured Impervious Areas	Base Stormwater Units	Stormwater Fee per Month
Tier 0	Less than 400 square feet	0.0	\$0
Tier 1	400 to 700 square feet	0.5	\$3.08
Tier 2	701 to 2,200 square feet	1.0	\$6.15
Tier 3	Greater than 2,200 square feet	Measured IA/1000	\$6.15/1000 SF IA

Non-residential. For non-single-family residential properties, the Base Stormwater Units are calculated as the actual measurement of each Property's IA divided by 1,000. Property's with IA 400 to 700 square feet are calculated at 0.5 the Base Stormwater Unit.

When will the fee take effect?

The stormwater fee takes effect on July 1, 2020. Beginning with the bill issued in July 2020, the stormwater fee will be billed as a separate charge on your monthly water/sewer bill.

How much revenue will the stormwater fee generate?

The fee will raise more than \$5 million annually for stormwater operations and projects as part of the larger City Beautiful H₂O Program, which totals approximately \$315 million in investments over the next 20 years to improve our infrastructure.

Do tax exempt properties pay a stormwater fee?

Yes. This is a fee, not a property tax. The stormwater fee is a fee based on the stormwater a property generates. As a fee, users are also eligible to reduce their fee.

Are government-owned properties exempt?

Government owned properties are assessed the stormwater fee.

Is the stormwater fee deductible from my federal or state income tax?

No. The stormwater fee is not deductible from Federal or State income taxes.

I own land with no impervious surface. Do I have to pay a fee for that?

No, because there is no impervious area associated with your property.

Do I have to pay for any unoccupied properties that I own?

Yes, if the property contains impervious area because stormwater continues to be generated from this property a fee would apply.

Does the stormwater fee apply to sidewalks and roads?

Public sidewalks and roads are not subject to the stormwater fee.

What kind of projects will the stormwater revenue finance?

Work has already begun on numerous projects throughout the city to repair aging infrastructure. Capital Region Water also is transforming vacant lots into green spaces, installing raingardens in community parks, and building street-level planters that calm traffic while managing stormwater. Projects for 2020 include green stormwater infrastructure in the South Allison Hill and Camp Curtin neighborhoods of Harrisburg as well as city park improvements at Fourth and Dauphin streets. A portion of 2020 street sweeping costs will also be covered by stormwater fee revenues. To review a full list of Capital Region Water's Capital Improvement Projects, please visit capitalregionwater.com/capitalprojects/.

Questions about Stormwater Fee Adjustments and Credits

How do I appeal the fee or seek a discount?

Property owners who believe the fee was assessed incorrectly based on impervious surfaces may appeal. Capital Region Water is also introducing rate reduction incentives and credits for property owners who proactively manage or reduce stormwater on their property through best management practices.

Can my stormwater fee be lowered? What are the requirements for the fee credit?

Yes. Capital Region Water does have a stormwater credit program that allows property owners to reduce their fee up to 50%. A credit is offered to a property owner if they manage their stormwater runoff onsite through stormwater best management practices or stormwater BMPs such as installation of structural BMPs, disconnected downspouts, or additional credits. Interested property owners must submit a Stormwater Management Program Fee Credit request, provide associated documentation, and accommodate a site inspection.

Is my lawn/grass eligible for a stormwater credit?

While Capital Region Water recognizes that grass and bare ground may absorb some stormwater. Turf grass typically has weak, shallow roots that doesn't allow for stormwater to be absorbed into the ground. Grass and bare ground will discharge stormwater from the property during heavier precipitation events.

Can I request an adjustment to my stormwater fee?

Yes, property owners who believe that their Impervious Area (IA) calculation, ownership information, or property type is incorrect can submit a Stormwater Fee Adjustment Appeal between March 2, 2020 and June 2, 2020. Capital Region Water will apply approved adjustments to the first bill issued on July 25, 2020.

Questions about Learning More

Was the public involved in the decision-making process to introduce a stormwater fee?

The Stormwater Fee Proposal and Implementation Plan was unveiled in June 2019. Capital Region Water held three public hearings and participated in dozens of community meetings over the course of four months. Nearly 100 residents and businesses submitted comments. Capital Region Water responded to public comments and made changes to the program accordingly. One such example, was an increase in the stormwater credit Capital Region Water will grant to residential homeowners.

Where do I go to learn more about the stormwater fee?

Details about Capital Region Water's City Beautiful H₂O Program and related Stormwater Fee Proposal and Implementation Plan, including all supporting documents, presentations and reports, can be found at capitalregionwater.com/cbh2o/.

How do I contact Capital Region Water with other questions?

Please call 888-510-0606 or email stormwater@capitalregionwater.com.