



## frequently asked QUESTIONS

### **1. What is impervious area?**

Impervious area (or impervious surface) is any surface which inhibits infiltration of rainfall into the soil. This includes pavement (asphalt, concrete, etc.), rooftops, patios, sidewalks, and compacted graveled surfaces such as parking areas and driveways.

### **2. How are impervious surfaces determined?**

Impervious surfaces are measured from aerial photographs that have been processed to produce scaled images from which accurate measurements can be made. In certain cases, field measurements or data supplied on site plans may be utilized to augment information available on aerial photography.

### **3. There are no storm sewers on or near my property. Why should I pay a charge?**

All properties produce stormwater runoff that must be managed. Even if your property has never flooded and there are no nearby storm sewers, the stormwater that flows off of your property must be managed so that it does not contribute to pollution and flooding downstream. This also applies to cases in which the majority of stormwater is managed onsite; property owners should contribute for services provided that are beyond their property lines, such as permit compliance, municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) maintenance, and stormwater infrastructure improvements throughout the City. Stormwater management is a community-wide service and the costs should be funded by all residents in a fair and equitable manner.

### **4. Why not just include the stormwater program costs in our property taxes?**

Although property taxes are an effective way to generate revenues, creating a dedicated funding mechanism is often the best way to guarantee those revenues are used for the tasks at hand. A dedicated stormwater charge has the advantage of assessing costs based on the amount of impervious surface on a given property, which is a more fair and equitable way of raising revenues to pay for stormwater management than a tax-based system. Under a stormwater program, all properties regardless of tax status will be charged based on the amount each property contributes to stormwater runoff.

The City of Williamsport is required to reduce the volume and improve the quality of stormwater that flows into local streams and eventually to the Chesapeake Bay. It will be difficult and expensive to accomplish this objective. An advantage of a rate-



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based system is that it can offer credits to the business community to reduce the amount of stormwater that leaves their property. The City will be credited with these reductions, assisting them in meeting the requirements imposed on the community by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). A credit to incentivize these “Best Management Practices” is not possible under a tax-based system.

### **5. There is no separate charge/dedicated fund for police, fire, roads, etc. Why do we need it for stormwater?**

Those services (police, fire, roads) are general services that the City provides. Stormwater is evolving to be a true utility, just like sewer, water and electricity, because of the regulatory requirements and the amount of infrastructure (pipes, channels, catch basins, etc.) that is required to be maintained for proper operation. These utilities have separate charges in order to link the charge to the services provided. For example, the more water you use, the higher your water bill is. The best way of estimating the stormwater charge is to use impervious area (rooftops, driveways, etc.), because runoff from each property depends mainly on the amount of impervious area.

### **6. How do I affect stormwater runoff?**

If you have a roof, driveway, parking lot, or other impervious surface on your property, you impact the amount and quality of stormwater that runs off the property. Household tasks such as car washing and the use of fertilizer can also impact stormwater quality. Everyone contributes in some way to the stormwater system, and everyone should play a role in supporting its maintenance and upkeep.

### **7. What is an ERU?**

An ERU (equivalent residential unit) is the amount of impervious surface (measured in square feet) on a typical, single family, residential property. In Williamsport that amount is approximately 2,711 square feet. The ERU was determined by performing detailed measurements of impervious surfaces contained on single family residential properties selected at representative locations across all areas of the City. The resulting data was analyzed, and the average impervious surface value was set as the ERU value.



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### 8. How much will I be billed for the stormwater charge?

Under the stormwater program developed by the Williamsport Sanitary Authority (WSA) and under consideration by the City, **Single-family residential (SFR) properties** will be billed one of three rates based on the size of the property in addition to a \$5 administrative fee per quarter as shown below:

Tier	Property Area (acres)	Stormwater Rate*	Administrative Charge	Total Quarterly Charge
1	<0.1	\$6 to \$9	\$5	\$11 to \$14
2	0.1-0.5	\$10 to \$15	\$5	\$15 to \$20
3	>0.5	\$20 to \$30	\$5	\$25 to \$35

\* - The currently estimated rate is shown as a range because budgeting activities are ongoing.

**Other developed properties** will pay a multiple of the Base Unit charge for one ERU (currently estimated at \$10 to \$15 per quarter) based on the impervious surface area of their property, since runoff and pollution increases as the amount of impervious surface area on a property increases. For example, if a property has impervious area equal to 100 ERUs it will be billed a charge of 100 times the Base Unit charge. In addition, all non-residential properties will be charged the \$5 administrative fee each quarter to cover costs of the stormwater management program that are not related to stormwater flows.

### 9. My property has less than 2,711 SF of impervious surface (i.e. 1 ERU). Shouldn't I pay less than the Base Unit charge?

Very small properties (less than 0.1 acres) will pay only 60% of the Base Unit charge. Although there are variations in the amount of impervious surface between residential parcels and types of structures, the tiered flat rate per parcel has been selected for the following reasons:

- The tiered rate structure is easy to explain and administer, requiring minimal cost and effort to implement and oversee compared to other billing options. Time, effort, and revenues are best utilized in the operation and maintenance of the



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stormwater system, and keeping administrative efforts to a minimum is a great way to accomplish this.

- A significant investment in time and money would be necessary to collect the additional impervious data from the geographical information system (GIS) in order to bill each residential customer for its exact amount of impervious surface. The resulting changes would likely be so small that at this time it is not recommended to individually calculate the rates for residential parcels. A recent survey of stormwater utilities showed that only 6% of the utilities calculate the charges individually for residential areas.

### **10. Isn't this charge really just another tax?**

No. Some properties are exempt from taxes, but all developed properties contribute stormwater runoff and should pay the stormwater charge. Furthermore, the revenues received under this program can only be used for stormwater management and cannot be redirected for other uses.

### **11. It sounds like you want to charge me for rain...**

Residents and businesses are not being charged for rain. The stormwater management charge will fund a stormwater management program to help reduce the pollution associated with stormwater runoff from reaching our local waterways, maintain the current stormwater drainage system, and address localized flooding concerns. This issue is driven primarily by increases in impervious surfaces, creating additional run-off into aging infrastructure that was not designed for the increase in flows.

### **12. Hasn't the City always had a stormwater system? Nothing has changed on my property. Why will I be charged now when I haven't been in the past?**

Yes, the City has had a stormwater system for a long time. However, new and forthcoming federal regulations require a comprehensive stormwater quality and management program. The stormwater management charge provides the funding necessary to meet the responsibilities of managing the stormwater system more closely, identifying and eliminating illegal discharges, providing public education, and other regulatory requirements. It will also allow for inspection and maintenance of aging infrastructure and the ability to rehabilitate/replace infrastructure that's reached the end of its useful life.



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### **13. Will I still be charged even if it doesn't rain for a long time?**

Yes, the pollutant potential in stormwater runoff is actually much greater when it has not rained in a long time because pollutants can build up on all impervious surfaces. In any storm, the initial runoff, or first flush, is the most contaminated. In addition to costs incurred to reduce pollution, maintenance and improvement of stormwater facilities is an on-going task, whether it rains or not.

### **14. Will everyone in the City pay the charge, including non-profits?**

Yes, everyone who owns developed property in the City will pay the charge – homeowners, business owners, schools, churches. Tax-exempt properties are required to pay for other utility charges including electric, water and sewer, and the stormwater charge is no different. Runoff from impervious surfaces from all properties makes its way into the stormwater collection system and receiving streams which need to be managed and maintained. Public roads are not considered developed property for the purposes of the stormwater program.

### **15. How did you come up with the cost of the stormwater management charge?**

A list of known problems, scheduled improvements, and projected projects to comply with future regulatory requirements were used as a basis for preparation of a forecast of stormwater program expenses. A 5-year budget projection, including administrative, operational, and maintenance costs was also developed to establish funding needs. Certain administrative and others costs are accounted for in a flat administrative charge that all property owners pay equally. The remaining stormwater system costs were divided by the number of ERUs to come up with the stormwater management charge for one ERU.

### **16. How will residential properties be billed?**

Should the City choose to adopt the stormwater program and task the WSA with its implementation, the Authority would strive to include stormwater charges as a separate line item on existing quarterly water and wastewater bills. Any properties in the City of Williamsport not currently on the Authorities' water or sanitary systems would be provided with a quarterly stormwater bill. There will be no pro-rating of charges for partial billing periods. For example, a charge billed in July will cover the entire 3rd quarter of the year, even if the property was vacated in August.



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### 17. How will non-residential properties be billed?

Each non-residential property has been measured to determine the amount of impervious area on the property. That impervious area will be converted to a quantity of ERUs based on one ERU per 2,711 square feet of impervious area, rounded to the nearest whole number. Each property will be billed the number of ERUs times the Base Unit charge, and each bill will include an administrative flat charge. The charge would appear on a quarterly bill from the Authority, and no property will be billed for less than one ERU.

### 18. Where does the money collected from the stormwater charge go?

All stormwater charges and interest generated by stormwater charges under this program will be accounted for separately, and will be used solely for the operation, maintenance, and management of the stormwater system. The charge will fund many initiatives required by the stormwater program, including:

- **Maintaining and Installing Stormwater Infrastructure** – Many miles of piping and other system components make up the storm drainage system that protects Williamsport from localized flooding and makes the roads drivable during storms. Improvements to better control localized flooding are needed in many areas of the City.
- **Education** – The best way to protect stormwater quality and stop pollution is to educate our citizens. We make changes in our behaviors when we learn about the negative consequences they create.
- **Protection of the Environment/Regulatory Compliance** – Development and other human interactions with the environment increase the amount of stormwater runoff which is contaminated and carries pollutants into our surface waters. State and federal regulations require these issues to be addressed, and efforts to reduce stormwater pollution, stop illegal dumping, clean up our watershed and restore local streams, benefit everyone.
- **Mapping the System** – In order to effectively maintain the storm drainage system, detailed mapping of all of Williamsport's outfalls, drains, ditches, pipes and other system components will need to be completed and maintained utilizing a Geographic Information System. Concurrent with this effort will be the continuous need to assess the stability/safety of the existing infrastructure and monitor for illicit discharges.



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### **19. How is unoccupied property treated?**

Vacant residential structures and empty commercial/industrial buildings are charged because they continue to generate runoff similar to that generated by occupied property.

### **20. How is undeveloped property treated?**

Undeveloped property is defined as real property that has not been altered by improvements such as buildings, parking lots, structures, or the addition of any other impervious areas. Undeveloped property will not be issued a stormwater charge.

### **21. How is billing for new properties initiated?**

Most of the time, properties undergoing initial development will begin paying the stormwater charge when a certificate of occupancy is issued. Under the proposed program, this would coincide with billing of sanitary sewer charges. New residential properties will be billed a flat rate based on parcel size. New non-residential properties will be charged based on the amount of impervious area reported as required on the site plan which must be reviewed and approved. If a certificate of occupancy is not issued within three years of the start of construction, billing of a stormwater management charge for the property will commence.

### **22. What happens when a residential property becomes vacant and other utility services are cut off?**

The stormwater charge applies whether the property is occupied or not. Why? Because stormwater runoff happens regardless of occupancy, and all flows must be managed. Fair and equitable treatment requires consistency in charges.

### **23. Does the stormwater charge help pay for the levee system that protects the City from river flooding?**

The ERU rate was developed as inclusive of levee operations and maintenance, but does not include the upcoming capital costs associated with recertification. Should the City decide to implement a stormwater program without levee operations and maintenance costs, the ERU rate would be adjusted appropriately.