

## **Frequently Asked Questions About Fort Wayne's Stormwater Utility and Rates**

All properties within the City of Fort Wayne pay a monthly fee to the Stormwater Utility. Upon annexation, properties in the Aboite Township annexation area will also receive bills from City Utilities for stormwater services.

**Q: Why am I paying a stormwater fee to City Utilities?**

**A:** The stormwater fee paid by City Utilities' customers is used to support and maintain the hundreds of miles of storm sewers and other structures used to control stormwater runoff and prevent unnecessary flooding and erosion. The fee also ensures proper treatment of stormwater, thus improving overall water quality as required by federal environmental regulations that govern stormwater. One might not think of stormwater as "dirty," but the federal government is tightening its rules on how clean stormwater has to be in order for it to be discharged to a river or stream. In metropolitan areas, stormwater may contain oil, grease and other chemical contaminants. In Fort Wayne, the stormwater fee is the primary means of support for keeping the stormwater system up to date and working.

**Q: Who is required to pay?**

**A:** All properties within the Fort Wayne city limits that have impervious surface such as concrete, asphalt, stone, building rooftops, etc. are charged a stormwater fee. This includes residential properties and non-residential customers – for example, commercial, industrial and institutional properties, churches, schools, businesses and government buildings. Not-for-profit entities that own property in Fort Wayne receive a 25% discount on their stormwater fees. A determination of not-for-profit status is based on property records in the Allen County Auditor's Office.

The residential stormwater fee is \$3.65 per month per property effective January 1, 2006.

**Q: I live in the Wabash River watershed and I understand that most of the City is in the Great Lakes Watershed. Why should I pay a stormwater fee to the City if the stormwater from my property doesn't go into a "City river?"**

**A:** Regardless of where the water eventually "ends up", the City of Fort Wayne is still required to manage stormwater inside the City limits – from both a quantity and a quality perspective. The stormwater utility operates and maintains the drainage structures that drain public streets. The stormwater utility provides emergency response to drainage complaints and maintains hundreds of miles of storm sewers. The stormwater utility repairs broken or collapsed storm drainage lines – many in areas where the County also provides some maintenance services. The stormwater utility is required to monitor the storm drainage system in the whole City to keep illegal substances from being dumped and to clean up hazardous spills when they happen. The City is also required to provide programs to help educate the public about improving the quality of stormwater that goes into our lakes, rivers and streams – regardless of whether that water goes to the Great Lakes or the Gulf. Every property inside the City limits receives benefits from the Fort Wayne stormwater utility and pays for a portion of the costs.

**Q: I pay a drainage fee to Allen County. Do I have to pay the City fee, too?**

**A:** Residents who are currently paying ditch or other assessments to Allen County will continue to pay those assessments. The County Surveyor's Office is responsible for the maintenance of County-regulated drains even when they are inside the City limits. The

County assesses for a number of different maintenance and repair districts and those assessments are applied to many areas inside the City limits.

Because the Fort Wayne Stormwater Utility also provides maintenance and other stormwater management services, the City bills each property within the City limits a stormwater fee. The City does not receive any of the ditch assessment funds collected by the County, so the County assessments are not applied as an offset to the City stormwater fee.

**Q: Is there a way that I can reduce my City stormwater bill – particularly if I pay a drainage assessment to Allen County?**

**A:** If your property is immediately adjacent to a County-regulated legal drain, you may apply for a credit if the stormwater from your property goes into that drain. However, you must make an application for the credit and pay an application fee.

**Q: I understand that there is a program that my neighborhood or I can use to reduce the amount of the stormwater fee we pay to the City if we pay a County maintenance assessment. How do I apply for that credit?**

**A:** The City stormwater utility does offer a credit program that your neighborhood may be able to use to reduce your City stormwater fee. If your neighborhood is designated as a Maintenance and Repair District under the jurisdiction of the County Surveyor's Office, you may apply to have your Fort Wayne Stormwater Utility charge reduced to just 35% of the standard bill. However, your entire neighborhood will need to agree to apply for this credit. If the credit is granted you will not receive any storm sewer system maintenance or repair from City Utilities.

**Q: What services does the Fort Wayne stormwater utility provide?**

**A:** Services from the City's Stormwater Utility include maintenance of existing public stormwater facilities, including above and below ground stormwater collection and conveyance systems (pipes, swales, roadside ditches, etc.) The City stormwater utility will respond to and investigate drainage complaints and will work with neighborhoods on resolving chronic drainage issues. All drainage complaints are prioritized according to the City's accepted criteria including amount of property damage, impact to transportation and safety delivery systems, cost benefit ratio and other factors.

The stormwater utility also designs and builds new storm water conveyance systems each year. Those could be pipes or ditches. Beginning in 2006, the stormwater utility will also be designing and building some flood control projects to protect neighborhoods from flooding along the St. Mary's River and Fairfield Ditch.

**Q: Why am I paying a stormwater fee to City Utilities when I have no storm sewers and water stands on my lawn, street, sidewalk, etc.?**

**A:** You don't have to have storm sewers in order to contribute to the stormwater Fort Wayne is required to manage. To some degree, every property with "impervious" surface area contributes to the stormwater runoff that Fort Wayne has to manage. An impervious surface is one, such as concrete, stone or asphalt, which prevents water from soaking into the ground. Even if water stands on your property for a while, it drains into Fort Wayne's stormwater system once it disappears. Water from your property may drain onto other nearby properties, then into storm sewers and ditches.

Fort Wayne's stormwater utility must maintain the storm sewers, inlets and other structures that drain public streets and roadways throughout the City. Good drainage is a matter of public safety and it is a vital part of street and road maintenance. So it is a public benefit that the entire community must help pay for.

Also, the stormwater utility allocates about \$1.3 million per year for capital improvement projects. Those might include building storm sewers where none currently exist or making improvements in neighborhoods where the storm sewers are not adequate. The City has investigated and prioritized more than 120 areas with chronic drainage issues and is working to do improvement projects in each of those areas. The total cost of those projects is estimated to be around \$37 million.

**Q: The drainage from my neighborhood goes into a pond. Why do I have to pay a stormwater bill to the City?**

**A:** In order for the water to drain off your property and get to the pond, it probably goes through street inlets and storm sewer pipes. Those inlets and pipes are maintained by the Fort Wayne stormwater utility. If the water drains out of the pond into a storm sewer or a ditch, those facilities are maintained by the Fort Wayne stormwater utility. The fee that you pay to the Stormwater Utility helps to fund the operation and maintenance of those structures. Also, the City of Fort Wayne must comply with federal regulations on stormwater quality. A portion of the fee that you pay every month goes to pay the cost of regulatory compliance.

**Q: How is the stormwater charge on my Utility bill calculated?**

**A:** Fort Wayne's stormwater utility charges properties based on the contribution that each property makes to the total amount of stormwater that the City must handle. The amount of hard – or impervious – surface on each property is used to approximate the amount of water that runs off each property. Based on a study of the hard surface on a sample of 600 residential properties, it was determined that the average residential lot has 2,500 square feet of hard surface. Each residential property within the City limits is charged for one equivalent residential unit (ERU) at a rate of \$3.65 per month for the stormwater utility.

Non-residential properties are charged based on the amount of hard or impervious surface on their property. For example, a business that has 25,000 square feet of rooftop, parking lot, sidewalks or other hard surface would pay for 10 ERUs. The stormwater bill for that business would be \$36.50 per month.

**Q: What does the City have to do to comply with the new federal program on stormwater quality?**

**A:** The pollutants in stormwater runoff can be a very serious environmental problem because they threaten the quality of our rivers, lakes and drinking water supplies. These pollutants can also threaten fish and other wildlife. Fort Wayne cleans drainage inlets, does street sweeping and provides recycling and leaf collecting to help keep litter and debris out of our streams. Contractors and developers will be required to comply with new requirements to reduce erosion and to keep dirt and sediments from running off construction sites. The City is also working on education programs to help people understand these threats and what they can do to improve stormwater. Some suggestions for citizens:

- Don't dump anything down a storm drain
- Use fertilizer and other lawn chemicals according to the manufacturer's directions. Avoid over-applying chemicals that can run-off the lawn when it rains.
- Pick up pet waste
- Don't litter