

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Stormwater Rate Adjustments

March 30, 2017



The Fort Wayne Board of Stormwater Management and Fort Wayne City Council have approved an increase stormwater utility fees to address neighborhood and street flooding and other drainage issues across our city. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions about the increase:

**Q: What does the Fort Wayne stormwater utility do?**

**A:** The stormwater utility is instrumental in protecting public health and safety in the City of Fort Wayne, ensuring that public property is protected and providing infrastructure to manage rainwater runoff and melting snow. The utility operates and maintains existing public stormwater facilities, including above and below ground stormwater collection and conveyance systems (pipes, swales, roadside ditches, etc.). The utility responds to and investigates drainage complaints and works with neighborhoods on resolving chronic drainage issues. All drainage complaints are prioritized according to criteria including amount of property damage being caused, how public roads and traffic are affected, impact on the ability of police cars, fire trucks and ambulances to get where they need to go, 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 open drainageways. Stormwater utility staff members review all plans for new developments or redevelopment inside the City limits to ensure there is adequate drainage infrastructure to manage rainwater runoff after the development is built. Finally the utility works to minimize pollutants that stormwater carries into area streams, ponds and rivers to protect water quality and natural habitats.

**Q: How will the rate increase affect me?**

**A:** Since January 1, 2006 every residential property in Fort Wayne has been paying flat monthly stormwater utility fee of \$3.65. The monthly rate for residential properties will increase by 75-cents per month on July 1, 2017.

Non-residential properties pay a fee based on the amount of hard surface (also called impervious because it does not allow rain water to soak in) on the property. Impervious surface includes rooftop space, parking lots, driveways, sidewalks, paved storage areas – any surface that is not grass. City Utilities measures the amount of impervious surface and converts it into a number of equivalent residential units or ERUs by dividing the total by 2,500 square feet. One ERU is equal to 2,500 square feet of hard surface – that is the approximate amount of hard surface on the average residential property. Non-residential properties currently pay \$3.65 per ERU.

The rate increase approved by the City Council will increase the residential rate per ERU by 75-cents per month every year for three years. It would also set different rates for residential and non-residential properties.

**Residential stormwater fee per ERU per month**

<b>Rate per month</b>	<b>Effective Date</b>
\$ 4.40 per ERU	July 1, 2017
\$ 5.15 per ERU	July 1, 2018
\$ 5.90 per ERU	July 1, 2019

Residential properties in Fort Wayne will be billed \$3.65 per month in stormwater fees until July 1, 2017. From July 1, 2017 until July 1, 2018 they will be billed \$4.40 per month. Between July 1, 2018 and July 1, 2019 they

will be billed \$5.15 per month, and after July 1, 2019 the stormwater charge for a residential property will be \$5.90 per month.

**Non-residential stormwater fee per ERU per month**

<b>Rate per month</b>	<b>Effective Date</b>
\$ 3.85 per ERU	July 1, 2017
\$ 4.25 per ERU	July 1, 2018
\$ 4.75 per ERU	July 1, 2019

**Q: Why are there different rates for residential and non-residential properties?**

**A:** In preparing the stormwater utility rate adjustment, City Utilities worked with an outside financial professional to prepare a “cost of service study”. The study includes an analysis of what it costs for the stormwater utility to provide services to each type of customer – homes, businesses, industries, and so on – and where the utility invests most of the revenue it takes in. Based on the financial study, it was determined that the cost to provide services to larger non-residential stormwater customers is slightly less per unit of stormwater being released than it is to serve residential customers. Therefore the non-residential rate be slightly lower than the residential monthly stormwater fee.

**Q: Why do I pay a stormwater utility fee to City Utilities?**

**A:** The stormwater fee paid by City Utilities’ customers is used to maintain almost 700 miles of storm sewers, nearly 100 miles of major ditches and more than 19,000 stormwater catch basins and inlets used to control stormwater runoff and prevent flooding and erosion. The fee also funds Fort Wayne’s compliance with federal and state stormwater quality regulations, thus improving water quality in area ponds, streams and rivers. One might not think of stormwater as “dirty,” but the federal government has rules on how clean stormwater must be in order for it to be released into a river or stream. In metropolitan areas, stormwater may contain oil, grease and other chemical contaminants from automobiles, lawns, etc. 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 the stormwater Utility fee?**

**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.

**Q: Why was a stormwater rate increase needed? What will it pay for?**

**A:** City Utilities last increased stormwater rates over a decade ago, in 2006. The money generated by that increase was used to fund investments in 30 areas around the City that had been plagued with chronic drainage problems. Those neighborhoods have since seen relief from their chronic drainage issues. But drainage issues and concerns continue in many other parts of our city. City Utilities has developed a list of the next 30 top priority neighborhood areas that are in need of investment. These areas have been ranked based on severity of the problems, number of times these neighborhoods have flooded / number of complaints received, the need and the potential for economic impact. The estimated cost to address all of these areas is \$40 million, so the rate increase is needed to pay for these essential projects. Projects have been identified in every area of the



City – in all quadrants and in all City Council Districts. All 30 are in neighborhoods.

**Q: How do I get my neighborhood on your list of areas that need drainage improvements?**

**A:** City Utilities identifies and prioritizes drainage improvement needs based, in part, on the number of concerns received from property owners and on the number of times and area experiences drainage or flooding issues. Therefore, it is important that you and your neighbors let us know every time you have a drainage or flooding problem. These issues should be reported by calling Fort Wayne’s Citizen Services Center at 311. Just dial 311 or (260) 427-8311. The 311 call center is open from 7:30 AM – 5:30 PM, Monday through Friday, except holidays. If the call center is closed, please call anyway and follow the prompts in the telephone system. You will be able to leave a message about your concern or you will be transferred to the appropriate department so that you may report the issue.

**Q: I have standing water in my back yard. Will the stormwater utility fix that?**

**A:** The purpose of the Fort Wayne stormwater utility is to protect public property such as road and streets and to provide a public drainage system to collect stormwater runoff from private properties. The stormwater utility does not take care of every drainage issue – many drainage issues that affect private property are the responsibility of the property owner to address. More information about what issues the stormwater utility is responsible for and which ones are the property owners’ responsibility may be found by going to the City Utilities website at [cityoffortwayne.org/utilities](http://cityoffortwayne.org/utilities) and clicking on Stormwater Utility.

**Q: Seems that my City Utilities bill is very high compared with other communities in the area.**

**A:** When comparing sewer and stormwater bills for typical customers in the 10-county northeast Indiana region, Fort Wayne’s bills are lower and cheaper than two-thirds of the other communities in the area. Of the 20 surrounding communities, Fort Wayne’s typical sewer and stormwater bill is lower than the bills for typical customers in 14 of the communities.

**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 hard surface area (such as rooftop, driveway and sidewalk) contributes to the stormwater runoff that Fort Wayne has to manage. These hard surfaces include things such as concrete, stone or asphalt, which are impervious – meaning they prevent rain 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 our 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. Along with seasonal temperature changes, poor drainage is one of the leading causes for deteriorating roads and streets. So it is a public benefit that the entire community must help pay for.

Also, the stormwater utility allocates funds each 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.

**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 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) 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 at the non-residential rate.

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

**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, treats inlets and areas of standing water to kill mosquitoes, 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

**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 stormwater 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 nearly 700 miles of storm sewers. The stormwater

utility repairs broken or collapsed storm drainage lines. 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 of Mexico. 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 fees 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 funds collected by the County, so the County assessments do not offset the City stormwater fee.

**Q: Is there a way that I can reduce my City stormwater utility bill?**

**A:** Fort Wayne’s stormwater utility offers a credit program for non-residential properties. Properties that discharge stormwater to certain water bodies or properties that go “above and beyond” in detaining their stormwater runoff may apply for credits to lower their stormwater bills. Customers may contact City Utilities’ Development Services Department at (260) 427-5064 to discuss how to qualify and apply for stormwater credits.