



## City of Watertown Storm Water Utility *Frequently Asked Questions*

### What is a Storm Water Utility?

A Storm Water Utility provides a separate source of funds that are used exclusively for storm water management.

### What's different about these funds as compared to the general tax fund?

These separate funds are dedicated to the planning, maintenance and construction of storm water facilities, such as detention ponds, storm sewer maintenance/construction/reconstruction and erosion control. All properties within the City, including nonprofit organizations such as schools, churches and hospitals, contribute to the fund based upon their impervious area.

### What is "impervious area"?

Impervious areas are those that do not absorb rainwater. Examples include the roof of a building, driveways, parking lots, paved playground areas, tennis courts or hard packed soil.



### Why should I be concerned about storm water runoff?

The most obvious effect of storm water runoff occurs during heavy rainstorms, when flooding and basement backups become a problem. However, the pollution to local rivers, streams and lakes can be significant from even small amounts of runoff. Storm water discharge from 1 square mile of road or parking lots can yield 20,000 gallons of residual oil per year.



### Isn't this just another tax - a "rain tax"?

No. Because Storm Water Utilities are generally funded by a user fee, all properties that contribute to runoff are charged based on their impervious area. Residential properties pay less in a Storm Water Utility than they would through the general tax roll. This is because the fees are not based on property valuation but contribution to the problem. A commercial property or large hospital has far more impervious area than a home, and is assessed accordingly.

### Can I deduct this fee from my taxes?

No. These fees are not tax deductible, like your property tax. However, most residential homeowners pay less with this system - even taking into account the loss of a deduction for income tax purposes.

### How will I pay this fee?

The user charge will be included in your regular monthly sewer/water bill.

### What if I own a vacant lot? Will I be required to pay the fee?

No. Vacant lots without impervious area will not pay a fee.



### How were fees determined?

By using aerial photography, impervious surfaces were digitally outlined to determine the amount of impervious area. An average was determined for single family and multi-family homes. Commercial, manufacturing and industrial properties will be charged based on the amount of impervious area compared to a single-family home.



### Why don't we just pay for this the way we always have - through the general fund?

Separating these funds provides a stable source of revenue, and assures that long-term planning that saves dollars can occur. Storm water planning that anticipates problems can help to eliminate catastrophic flooding. The property loss, economic damage, public health threat and threat to human safety that is caused by flooding is very real. Charges are more fair because they are based on runoff, not property value.

### Will the City have to hire more people to take care of the Storm Water Utility?

No. A Storm Water Utility does not add another layer of government. Because this fee will be added to your regular utility bill, there are no additional mailing costs. A small amount of money has been added for some minor administrative costs. The Street Department will continue to handle storm sewer cleaning and maintenance as usual. Large improvement projects will follow the same procedures as before.



## What objectives were identified by the Committee as important for the City of Watertown?

The proposed Utility and storm water management and user charges were recommended by a Committee with representatives from City government, businesses, non-profits and residents. The Committee identified the following four goals for storm water management and funding:

- **Generate adequate revenues for storm water management**
- **Allocate costs in a fair and equitable manner**
- **Improve accountability for storm water management funding**
- **Fund storm water management in a manner that is relatively easy to understand and administer**

The following chart shows the anticipated charges, and how they compare to the current method of funding through property taxes.

### Comparison of Proposed Annual User Charges vs. Property Taxes

	Parcel Size (acres)	Impervious Area (sf)	Equalized Value	Estimated Storm Water User Charge per Year	Property Taxes (for Storm Water)
Single-Family Residence	0.25	2,900	\$100,000	\$16	\$24
Typical Large Commercial	10.00	200,000	\$4,000,000	\$1,108	\$951
Typical Large Manufacturing	25.00	500,000	\$4,500,000	\$2,580	\$1,070
Typical Large Institutional	10.00	150,000		\$658	\$0

\*Example parcels for demonstration purposes. The actual user charges for non-residential parcels would depend on the actual amount of impervious area on each parcel.

More information, including the entire Storm Water Utility Feasibility Study, can be found on the City's website at: [www.ci.watertown.wi.us](http://www.ci.watertown.wi.us).