

Stormwater Utilities At A Glance

What is stormwater? Stormwater, which is generated from rainfall and snow, is also referred to as runoff. In a natural environment, most stormwater is absorbed into the soil. In developed areas, stormwater that falls on hard, impervious surfaces such as driveways, roofs, and sidewalks cannot be absorbed and must be managed in other ways.

Why do we need to manage stormwater, and why is the situation getting worse? Due to pollution carried by stormwater, such as oils, fertilizers, and pesticides, nearly 90% of New Jersey's rivers, streams, and lakes do not meet water quality standards. Population growth and development have shrunk green space and increased hardened surfaces, exacerbating flooding and water quality problems. Based on meteorological data, the severity of storms has increased significantly in recent years and climate change is likely to worsen the problem in the future. These problems directly threaten public health and safety and often constrain local economic development.

How are towns currently paying for stormwater management? Local stormwater needs are typically funded through the property tax, the spending for which is spread across multiple agencies (e.g., public works, environment). Since local budgets are constrained, and budget growth is statutorily capped at 2%, stormwater needs are often crowded out by higher priorities (e.g., schools, police, fire).

What is a stormwater utility/stormwater fee program? Similar to a water or sewer utility, a stormwater utility assesses a user fee, which in this case is based on the extent of hard surfaces on a property. It is generally regarded as the most effective - and equitable - model to fund needed improvements to local stormwater infrastructure. Revenue is kept separate from general funds, so it cannot be raided for other needs.

Why should I consider it?

- **Dedicated** - The stormwater utility fee solely supports stormwater projects and best management practices.
- **Equitable** - While there is no relationship between the value of property and stormwater runoff, the latter determines the stormwater fee. With the exception of agriculture, which is exempt, all property owners pay the fee.
- **Fee Credits** - Property owners that reduce stormwater may install best practices to receive credits, which reduce their fee.
- **Local Spending Cap** - Spending from the stormwater fee revenue would be outside of the 2% cap on local budget growth.

What are my fees going to be? There is no "typical" stormwater utility fee. The size of the fee can be influenced by the amount of stormwater spending required (e.g., age of infrastructure), whether it covers only existing spending or a higher level of service, the presence of tax-exempt or commercial property, combined sewer regulations, and system maintenance needs (e.g., street sweeping).

What types of projects can be funded with a stormwater fee? Typical projects include street sweeping, catch basin and culvert cleaning, pipe reconstruction, flood control, combined sewer overflow improvements, green infrastructure that absorb rainwater (e.g., vegetated swales, pocket parks, bioretention basins), and community education.

How am I going to explain a stormwater utility to my constituency? A stormwater utility can help transform a community by addressing long-standing flooding and water pollution problems that threaten public safety and stifle growth. Many stormwater utility projects have additional benefits, including beautification, wildlife habitat, increased property values, economic revitalization, and job creation.

What are the key steps to determining if a stormwater utility is right for my locality? Public outreach and a feasibility study are key elements of any plan.



For more information, visit stormwaterutilities.njfuture.org.

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Green roof - roofing surfaces that are partly or completely covered with vegetation provide stormwater management by slowing down rainfall runoff and by allowing a portion of the precipitation to be returned to the atmosphere through evapotranspiration.



Constructed Wetland - a constructed wetland is an engineered wetland system that can be used to reduce peak flows and meet water quantity regulations.



Pervious pavement - allows stormwater to infiltrate into an underlying stone layer that stores it and allows it to seep slowly into the ground.



Bioswales - are landscaped, shallow depressions that capture, filter, and infiltrate stormwater runoff.



Street tree trench - A linear stormwater management feature, typically placed near sidewalks, that combines trees with an underground stormwater management system.



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