



frequently
asked
QUESTIONS

1. There are no storm sewers on or near my property. Why should I pay a fee?

All properties produce stormwater runoff that must be managed by the Township. Even if your property has never flooded and there are no nearby storm sewers, the stormwater that flows off your property must be managed by the Township 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 to services provided by the Township that are beyond their property lines, such as permit compliance, storm sewer system maintenance, and stormwater improvements throughout the Township. Stormwater management is a community-wide service and the Program costs need to be distributed to all residents.

2. Why not just include the stormwater program costs in our property taxes?

The advantages of using taxes is that we can deduct them on our federal return if we itemize, even though the deduction will be small. A disadvantage is that there is no correlation between assessed values and the amount of impervious surface on a given property.

The Township is required to reduce the volume and improve quality of stormwater that flows into the streams and eventually to the Chesapeake Bay. It will be difficult and expensive for the Township to accomplish this objective. An advantage of a fee-based system is that we can offer credits to the business community to reduce the amount of stormwater that leave their sites. The Township will be credited with all such reductions assisting us in meeting the EPA/DEP requirements. We cannot give such a credit on a tax-based system.

Another disadvantage is that on a tax-based system, residences would be hit unfairly with a larger share of the costs of the budget. By requiring that the percentage of impervious surface be used as the basis rather than assessed value, the cost is shifted to the properties that create more stormwater runoff and have more ability to reduce it.

3. What is impervious area?

Impervious area 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.

4. There is no separate fee/dedicated fund for police, fire, roads, etc. Why do we need it for stormwater?

Those services (police, fire, roads) are general services that the Township 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 the Township needs to operate and maintain. These utilities have separate fees because they need to link the fee to the services provided. For example, the more water you use the higher your water bill. The best way of estimating the stream preservation fee is to use impervious area (rooftops, driveways, etc.) because runoff from each property depends mainly on the amount of impervious area.



5. Isn't this fee really just another tax?

Some properties are exempt from taxes, but all developed properties contribute stormwater runoff and should pay the stream preservation fee. Furthermore, the revenue can only be used for stormwater management and cannot be redirected for other uses.

6. My neighborhood has a stormwater pond and HOA fees to maintain it. Other residential neighborhoods do not have ponds. Can you provide a credit to my HOA to reduce our HOA fees?

Neighborhoods with existing stormwater retention or detention ponds still contribute runoff and pollution to the Township's overall stormwater/drainage system. Stormwater management is a community wide service and the Program costs need to be distributed to the Township residents. Moreover, all residents of the Township benefit from our stormwater/drainage infrastructure, public streets, and public streams and lakes. A decision was made not to charge HOAs for their common areas.

7. Why will the Township be charging me for rain?

Residents and businesses are not being charged for rain. The stream preservation fee 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, address localized flooding concerns, and comply with State and Federal mandates.

8. 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. Also, household tasks such as car washing and use of fertilizer can impact stormwater quality. Because everyone contributes in some way to the stormwater system, everyone should play a role in supporting its maintenance and upkeep.

9. Hasn't the Township 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 Township had had a stormwater system for a long time. However, new and forthcoming federal regulations require a comprehensive stormwater quality and management program. The stream preservation fee enables the Township to meet its responsibilities to manage the stormwater system more closely, identify and eliminate illegal discharges, provide public education, and other regulatory requirements. It will also allow for increased inspection and maintenance of aging infrastructure and the ability to rehabilitate/replace infrastructure that's reached the end of its useful life.

10. 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 of stormwater facilities is required whether it rains or not.



11. How much will I be billed for the stream preservation fee?

Single family residential (SFR) properties will pay a fee estimated to be \$60/year. While everyone with buildings, pavement and other impervious surfaces on their property will pay the fee, the amount will differ between residential and non-residential areas. SFR properties will pay a fee equal to one Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). All non-residential properties will pay a multiple of that ERU 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.

12. Does everyone in the township pay the fee, including non-profits?

Yes, everyone who owns developed property in the township will pay the fee – homeowners, business owners, schools, churches. Tax-exempt properties are required to pay for other utility charges including electric, water and sewer and the stream preservation fee 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 by the Township.

13. What is an ERU?

An ERU is the amount of impervious surface (measured in square feet) on a typical, SFR property. That amount in Swatara Township is approximately 2,607 square feet. The ERU was determined by performing detailed measurements of impervious surfaces contained on SFR properties selected at representative locations across all areas of the Township. The resulting data was analyzed along with records of impervious area for all buildings, and the average impervious surface value was set as the ERU value.

14. My property has less than 2,607 SF of impervious surface. Shouldn't I pay less?

Although there are variations in the amount of impervious surface between residential parcels and types of structures, a flat rate per dwelling unit is frequently used and has been selected for the following reasons:

- A flat rate structure is easy to explain and administer, requiring minimal cost and effort to implement and oversee compared to other billing options. The Township wants to use the funds in projects that will solve problems and the operation and maintenance of the stormwater system.
- The Township must invest a significant amount of money and time to collect additional impervious area for the existing geographical information system (GIS) in order to bill each residential customer for its amount of impervious surface. The resulting changes will be small so 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 fees individually for residential areas (67% have uniform flat rates and 28% have flat tiered rates).
- All property owners benefit from the community-wide stormwater management system that manages stormwater from roads and properties.



15. 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, the Township may also utilize field measurements or data supplied on site plans to augment information available on aerial photography.

16. How did you come up with the cost of the stream preservation fee?

A list of known problems, scheduled improvements, and projected projects to comply with future regulatory requirements was used as a basis for preparation of a forecast of stormwater program expenses. A 5-year budget projection, including administrative and operation & maintenance costs was also developed to establish funding needs. These overall stormwater system costs were divided by the number of ERUs to come up with the stream preservation fee.

17. How will residential properties be billed?

The Swatara Township Authority will be issuing the stormwater bills on behalf of the Township on an annual basis. Annual billing reduces the administrative costs of the stormwater program.

18. 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 2,607 square feet of impervious area, rounded to the nearest whole number. Each property will be billed the number of ERUs times the stream preservation fee rate (i.e. \$60/year). The fee will appear on an annual bill from the Authority and no property will be billed for less than one ERU. Properties with more than 10 ERUs may request to receive quarterly billing.

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. Will property taxes go down as a result of the Stream Preservation Fee?

The Township Board of Commissioners is responsible for setting and adjusting property taxes. No changes are anticipated as a result of the stream preservation fee. Revenue from the stream preservation fee will be used only for stormwater management within the Township.

21. 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 charged a stream preservation fee.



22. Where does the money collected from the stream preservation fee go?

All stream preservation fees and interest generated by stormwater charges will be accounted for separately from all other Township and Authority revenues and funds and will be used solely for the operation, maintenance, and management of the stormwater system. The fee will fund many initiatives required by the stormwater program, including:

- **Maintaining and Installing Stormwater Infrastructure** – More than 20 miles of piping and other system components make up the storm drainage system that protects Swatara Township from flooding and makes the roads drivable during storms. Improvements to better control flooding are needed in areas of the Township.
- **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. The Township is required by state and federal regulations to address these issues, and works to reduce stormwater pollution, stop illegal dumping, clean up our watershed and restore local streams.
- **Mapping the System** – In order to effectively maintain the storm drainage system, the Township continues to work regularly to map all of Swatara’s outfalls, drains, ditches, pipes and other system components while assessing the stability/safety of the existing infrastructure and monitoring for illicit discharges.

23. How is billing for new properties initiated?

Most of the time, properties undergoing initial development will begin paying the stream preservation fee when a certificate of occupancy is issued. This coincides with billing of other utility services. New residential properties will be billed a single ERU. 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 by the Township. If a certificate of occupancy is not issued within three years of the start of construction, billing of a stream preservation fee for the property will commence.

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

The stream preservation fee applies whether the property is occupied or not.