

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is stormwater runoff?

A. Stormwater runoff is the water that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rain storms. Stormwater runoff is also the rain that flows off grass surfaces and wooded areas that is not absorbed into the soil. The runoff that is not absorbed into the ground pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins and storm sewers. It does not receive any treatment before entering the streams and lakes.

Q. What is stormwater pollution?

A. Water from rain or melting snow either seeps into the ground or “runs off” to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes, and other water bodies. On its way, runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water. Examples of common pollutants include fertilizers, pesticides, pet wastes, sediments, oils, salts, trace metals, grass clippings, leaves and litter. Stormwater can become polluted anywhere people use or alter the land such as farms, yards, roofs, driveways, construction sites, and roadways.

Q. Why is stormwater runoff a problem?

A. As precipitation falls on agricultural and undeveloped areas, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into streams, rivers or other water bodies. However, development resulting in rooftops and paved areas prevent water from being absorbed and create a faster rate of runoff. This development often causes localized flooding or other water quantity or quality issues. In addition, stormwater can carry harmful pollutants, cause flooding, erode topsoil and stream banks and destroy habitats.

Q. Why do we need to manage our stormwater runoff?

A. Stormwater runoff needs to be managed just as any other natural resource. First, it is needed to maintain the quality of our natural watercourses as drinking water supplies and for recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, water skiing, etc. Secondly, stormwater also needs to be managed to minimize damages that may occur when stormwater runoff exceeds the capacity of the pipes and open channels used to carry stormwater to our rivers and streams.

Q. Who owns the stormwater system?

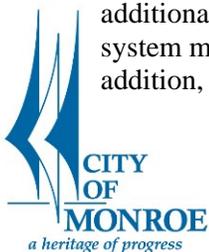
A. Individual property owners. Currently, in most cases, the owner of record is the responsible party to accept, to maintain, to add and to discharge stormwater flows. These systems routinely cross City-maintained property that is generally located within public street rights-of-way.

Q. What is the City’s responsibility for stormwater?

A. The City is responsible for managing all aspects of stormwater within its jurisdiction. The City operates and maintains drainage facilities that are located within the public right-of-way. The City does not maintain facilities that are located on private property or that fall under the jurisdiction of other governmental jurisdictions such as Union County.

Q. Why has City of Monroe chosen to implement a separate fee for stormwater management?

A. By establishing a dedicated funding source through stormwater fees, the City can ensure that the revenue required to manage and to maintain this important system is available. A stormwater utility program will enable the City to take a more aggressive approach to stormwater management. The additional funds raised through the stormwater fee will allow the City to provide an increased level of system maintenance and repair that is necessary to support the aging infrastructure in Monroe. In addition, the utility fees will enable the City to construct necessary capital improvement projects to



reduce the risk to public health and safety. Finally, the fees will support the development of a comprehensive stormwater management and water quality improvement plan, as mandated by the Federal and State governments.

Q. How did the City of Monroe develop its stormwater utility program?

A. A citizens Stormwater Management Advisory Committee (SMAC) was formed to evaluate the current stormwater program and determined that a higher level of service was needed. The SMAC reached consensus on the recommendation for implementing a stormwater utility fee and presented the recommendations to the City Council. The City Council authorized City staff to move ahead with the implementation the Stormwater Utility in June 2008.

Q. What is the basis for the fee that is to be charged?

A. The stormwater utility fee is based on the square footage of impervious surface area on your lot. The vast majority of utilities across the country have found this to be the most equitable way to charge and collect revenues for this program. A stormwater utility fee is similar to a water or sewer fee. In essence, customers pay a fee related to the amount of runoff generated from their site, which is directly related to the amount of impervious surface on the site.

Q. What is impervious surface area?

A. Impervious surface area is any surface that does not readily absorb water and impedes the natural infiltration of water into the soil. Common examples include roofs, driveways, parking areas, sidewalks, patios, decks, tennis courts, concrete or asphalt streets, crushed stone and gravel surfaces.

Q. Why do I have to pay a stormwater fee?

A. The City is responsible for compliance with new Federal and State regulations on water quality as well as providing stormwater management facilities and services. This includes installation and maintenance of storm drains, inlets, and ditches as well as public education. All of these services are done to protect personal and public property as well as provide for a healthy environment. Funding is not provided by Federal or State government for these services.

Q. When did the stormwater fee become effective?

A. A citizen Stormwater Management Advisory Committee's recommendations were formalized into an ordinance that was adopted in July 2008. The stormwater fees were added to the City of Monroe utility bill starting in January 2009.

Q. Why is there a stormwater fee instead of a tax?

A. A property's value does not affect runoff, so property taxes are not the most equitable way to pay for stormwater services. For example, a high-rise building and a shopping mall may have similar value and pay similar property taxes. However, the shopping center produces more runoff because of the amount of parking and rooftops. The fee system ensures the shopping center pays a higher stormwater fee than the high rise.

Q. Are tax-exempt properties also exempt from the stormwater fee?

A. No, because it is a fee – not a tax. Taxes are based on the value of the property. The stormwater fee is assessed based on the amount of impervious surface on the property (i. e. hard surface such as roofs, driveways and parking lots), which is directly related to the amount of runoff the property produces. The runoff generated by these impervious surfaces contributes to pollution and flooding problems and, therefore, all property owners should pay their share of the costs.



Q. What is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU)?

A. An ERU is the amount of impervious surface (measured in square feet) on a typical, single family, residential (SFR) property in Monroe. That amount is 2,618 square feet. The ERU was determined by performing detailed measurements of impervious surfaces contained on a sample of single family residential (SFR) properties selected at random across all areas of the City. The resulting data was analyzed and the median impervious surface value for the data set determined the ERU value.

Q. How will residential properties be billed?

A. Most single-family homes will be charged a rate of \$4.00 each month. Since the Stormwater Advisory Committee had recommended a tiered rate system, very small homes and very large homes may pay slightly lower or higher rates respectively. The fee will appear on the City utility bill. All non-residential properties will be billed at a rate based on their impervious area as well.

Q. How are non-residential property fees determined?

A. To determine the monthly fee, divide the total impervious area by 2,618 square feet (or one Equivalent Residential Unit) to obtain the number of ERUs and multiply by the rate. The minimum Utility fee for any developed property is never less than one ERU. Impervious areas were determined by analyzing aerial photographs to identify the amount of impervious surfaces on each property.

Q. Is there anything I can do to reduce my fee?

A. Yes, the City has developed a fee credit/reduction manual that provide opportunities for non-residential customers to reduce their monthly fee. Credits/reductions will be awarded to customers that install best management practices on site that reduce the runoff burden to the City's stormwater system. More information is available in the City's Stormwater Utility Fee Credit Manual. To get a copy of the Stormwater Utility Fee Credit Manual, please call the Engineering Department at 704-282-4515.

Q. What will the money collected by the Stormwater Utility will be used to pay for?

A. The revenues generated by this fee will be used to fund all stormwater related services, which includes enforcement of the City's stormwater ordinances, planning for future impacts, stormwater infrastructure maintenance and repairs, and construction of necessary capital improvement projects. The fee will also pay for annual compliance requirements of City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (NPDES MS4) permit.

Q. Why do we need to spend more for stormwater?

A. Historically, the allocation of funds has not been sufficient to address all of the City's stormwater service needs. The City has provided stormwater services on a limited budget, which has resulted in a backlog of stormwater projects with certain maintenance activities performed on an infrequency basis. Local, state, and federal laws also require that municipalities address the environmental impacts of stormwater pollution, but do not provide funds to do it. Consequently, the City must investigate alternative means for raising revenue.

Q. Do other cities have a stormwater fee?

A. Approximately 50 cities in North Carolina (and nearly 1,500 nationwide) have a stormwater fee. In North Carolina, cities such as Charlotte, Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill, Pineville, Indian Trail, Stalling, Wilson, Greenville, High Point, Greensboro, Durham, Winston-Salem, Fayetteville, Asheville, Mount Holly, Concord, Gastonia, Raleigh and Wilmington use a stormwater utility fee.



Q. What are the goals of the City of Monroe's stormwater program?

A. The stormwater program focuses on reducing the potential for the loss of life or property due to flooding and improving and protecting the quality of our lakes, rivers and streams.

Q. What are some examples of drainage problems?

A. Drainage problems may include roadway or structural flooding, clogged or failing underground pipes and culverts, stream bank erosion and stormwater pollution affecting a stream.

Q. Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?

A. Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. If stormwater runs off your property, the City must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits may include complying with Federal and State mandates, protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property downstream from your runoff, providing safe roadways, educating our children about pollution, and improving water quality.

Q. I have a drainage problem on my property, who do I call to get help with this problem?

A. You can call the City of Monroe Engineering Department at 704-282-4515. If the problem is a City responsibility, we will investigate your concern and advise you of what action can be taken.

Q. Where can I get more information regarding the stormwater utilities?

A. More information is available by call the Engineering Department at 704-282-4515 or by visiting the City of Monroe's webpage at www.monroenc.org.

