

City of Normandy Park Stormwater Utility Frequently Asked Questions.



What is the City's responsibility for stormwater?

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 or public easements. The City does not generally own or maintain facilities that are located on private property or that fall under the jurisdiction of other governmental jurisdictions.

Some of the other important components of the City's stormwater program include:

- Improved stormwater quality through monitoring and reduction of illicit discharges and pollutants
- Public information and education concerning stormwater issues
- Increased maintenance/repair of the City's stormwater system
- Development of stormwater design standards and regulations
- Field inspection/enforcement of these standards
- Construction of long overdue stormwater projects

Why is stormwater such a problem?

Because of the unique topography, soil conditions and numerous drainage basins, Normandy Park residences enjoy beautiful natural settings, including views, habitat, parks and creeks. Unfortunately, the enjoyment of the natural setting frequently involves increased exposure to ground water issues, including poor drainage, springs, and erosion.

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.

How does the City currently pay for its stormwater services?

Prior to the creation of the Stormwater Utility, in 2004, money from the City's Street Fund was the primary source of funding for stormwater services. After a popular initiative passed to limit vehicle tab fees the City of Normandy Park was forced to pick up the additional financial burden through its General Fund, which is revenue derived from property taxes collected by the City. As such, stormwater system maintenance, repairs and improvements competed for funds with other City services such as parks, roads and police protection. These funds are not always available and a dedicated revenue stream was necessary. The high demand on the General Fund did not allow the City to set aside enough funds to adequately address all the City's stormwater needs. Unfortunately, the backlog of stormwater projects continues to grow significantly as the system ages and is tested by continuing development and weather patterns.

How does the Stormwater Utility work?

The Stormwater Utility is a unit within the City that provides stormwater management. Like water, wastewater, solid waste, recycling and electric utilities – the Stormwater Utility generates its revenue through user fees. These fees are a dedicated revenue stream, which is restricted for use only on stormwater system maintenance and operations of stormwater management devices, for stormwater systems planning and construction.

By establishing a stormwater utility, the City is able 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, as well as enable the City to construct additional capital improvement projects.

Why do we need to spend more for stormwater?

Historically, the allocation of funds has not been sufficient to address all of the City's stormwater service needs. The City has attempted to provide stormwater services on a limited budget for many years, but the condition of the system continues to deteriorate. Illicit additions to existing poorly constructed systems, poor construction practices, and a growing backlog of stormwater projects has grown and some maintenance activities have not been performed. Local, state and federal laws also require that municipalities address the environmental impacts of stormwater pollution, but do not provide the funds to do it. Consequently, the City must identify alternative means for raising revenue.

How will we be able to see where our money has been going, and what will the priorities be?

The money collected through the user fees goes towards better stormwater management, and you should gradually see results in terms of better flood management, stormwater maintenance and regulatory compliance. In the field, we will be keeping a photographic log of areas when work is done. We will also post signs, provide news releases and report on projects as they are completed using the City Web Site and *City Scene* newsletter.

Why not raise property taxes?

Property taxes are based only on the assessed market value of a property, without consideration of the contribution of stormwater runoff from the property. Charges derived from property value are therefore not fairly and equitably allocated to stormwater services. In addition, the City is limited to annual property tax increases of not more than 1%, which is approximately \$15,000.

What is a Stormwater Revenue Fund?

The Stormwater Revenue Fund is a separate fund responsible for providing service to Normandy Park's existing and expanding stormwater drainage system. This enterprise fund allows fees to be collected and used to address flooding problems as well as improve water quality by reducing stormwater pollution. Like Normandy Park, many cities throughout King County, Washington State and nationwide have established stormwater management utilities.

How is a stormwater user fee charged?

A stormwater user fee is charged based upon the contribution of stormwater runoff to the City's stormwater management system. This is a more fair and equitable approach than charges based on property value.

Why should I pay for rain falling on my property?

With a stormwater rate, users are charged a fee for runoff discharged from their property to the City's stormwater management system and the benefit they receive from the City's system, not by the amount of rain falling on their property. Property owners control the level of development on their properties, which directly impacts the runoff characteristics of the parcel.

Why should I have to pay? I live on a hill and have no drainage problem.

You may not have a problem, but the runoff generated from your property is contributing to problems downstream. The approach being taken through this program recognizes that everyone contributes to the problem (runoff and pollution) and everyone will share in the results (improved water quality, reduced flooding, unimpaired access to roads, etc.)

I have a septic tank. Why should I pay this fee?

The stormwater utility fee is used specifically to address citywide stormwater issues. A septic tank is used to treat wastewater at a specific location. This wastewater is water that comes out of individual households or businesses. Properties that use septic tanks are not charged for sanitary sewer service. It should be noted that properties that are connected to the sanitary sewer system do pay for the sanitary sewer service as well as the stormwater utility fee.

How is the Stormwater Utility collected?

The utility fee is collected on behalf of the City of Normandy Park by King County and is included as a separate item on Property Tax and Drainage Billing Statements. As such, it is due semi-annually through the property tax bill.

How are differences between parcels determined?

By utilizing residential dwelling units as the basis for stormwater user fees, charges among parcel types can be compared to this Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU).

Who has to pay?

All developed property within the City of Normandy Park pays the Stormwater Utility Fee. This includes houses, schools, public facilities, churches and businesses. The only exceptions are streets within the City. These areas are excluded because they are designed to collect and carry stormwater runoff.

Why are churches and schools being billed?

The service charge, just like water and sewer fees, is based upon the cost of services provided. Because this is not a tax, it is collected from all customers who receive service. Churches and schools contribute a significant amount of runoff to the City

because of their size and amount of hard surface. They are treated like all other customers under the rate structure.

I have a retail store in a shopping center and currently receive a water bill. Why don't I receive a stormwater bill as well?

All impervious area within a multi-tenant facility such as a shopping center or apartment complex is consolidated into one bill. The bill is sent to the owner or person responsible for the improvements or management association.

What is an Equivalent Residential Unit? (ERU)

An ERU is determined by the amount of impervious area on the average single family home. The City Council policy is to use 3,100 sq. ft. as the basis for an Equivalent Residential Unit. All single family lots are treated as 1 ERU.

What is impervious area?

Impervious area includes pavement and building areas such as driveways, parking areas, rooftops, patios, garages and out-structures. The amount of impervious area on a property directly correlates to its contribution of runoff volume and pollutant loading to the City's stormwater management system.

Impervious surface means those disturbed or hard surfaced areas that either prevent or retard the natural entry of water into the soil. Rooftops, buildings, streets, parking lots, sidewalks, asphalt, concrete, other paving, driveways, gravel, patios, artificial turf and storage areas are all examples of impervious surfaces. These improvements effect natural infiltration, create more runoff, increase the rate of runoff and alter runoff patterns of stormwater that drains from an area.

How is impervious surface measured?

In order to determine how much impervious surface is on a piece of developed property, the City utilizes Geographical Information System (GIS) maps to determine the total square footage of the impervious surface on a parcel and the actual lot size. Because lot sizes and impervious surfaces vary from residential parcel to residential parcel, the Council decides to establish an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) of 3,100 sq. ft. as the base unit/residential unit. Every Normandy Park home or equivalent residential unit is equal to one ERU.

What is considered a residential unit?

A residential unit means a single unit that provides complete, independent living facilities for one or more persons including permanent provision for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation.

How are residential fees determined?

Residential property is charged a fee of \$10.00 per ERU. A single family home is charged one unit; a duplex is charged two units. Non-single family residential properties are billed \$10.00 for each unit.

Why should I pay if there is not a stormwater inlet in front of my property?

All properties generate stormwater runoff that must be conveyed, transported, stored, treated and discharged by the City. Even though the stormwater inlet, pipes and ponds may be remote from your property, your parcel still contributed runoff, which ultimately discharges to the City stormwater management system and facilities. In addition, all parcels receive the benefit of the City's stormwater system.

My property retains water, why should I pay?

All property receives some benefit from the City's stormwater management system and facilities. In some cases, a property benefits by having unimpaired access to streets, which we all use as a means of getting to and from our property. Other properties may benefit because the City's stormwater management system and facilities collect runoff from streets and other private properties, which would otherwise drain onto it causing flooding and/or property damage.

Why do we not charge properties upstream (that discharge to the City)?

Pursuant to state legislation, the City can only charge for services within its corporate boundary unless an Interlocal agreement has been adopted.

Are there any credits available to senior citizens or low-income residents?

Parcels owned by and serving as the personal residence of a person or persons determined by the county assessor as qualified for a low-income senior citizen property tax exemption authorized under RCW 84.36.381 may be exempt from all charges.

Why is this issue being addressed at this time?

In addition to meeting the City's current stormwater needs, Normandy Park's stormwater revenue will provide the City with a tool to comply with federal and state regulatory requirements.

My storm water rate is incorrect, how do I get it changed?

The City's goal is to make the process as fair and equitable as possible. We recognize that mistakes sometimes happen. If you feel your bill is incorrect, you can submit a completed adjustment request form, which will be reviewed by the City. If an error has occurred, reimbursement or credit will be provided for any overcharges your account has incurred.

Where can I go for more information?

If you would like additional information about the Stormwater Utility, please contact Cherie Gibson, Finance Director at 206-248-8251 or by email at cherieg@ci.normandy-park.wa.us. If you have specific concerns about stormwater issues, please contact Peter Landry at 206-248-8269 or by email at PeterL@ci.normandy-park.wa.us.