

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT STORMWATER

Q: What is stormwater?

A: Stormwater refers to runoff from rain and snow melt. In natural settings, stormwater is able to slowly soak into the ground. This process relies on an abundance of pervious surfaces such as grassland, meadows, lawns, and other natural landscapes. In urbanized areas, such as cities and boroughs, these natural surfaces are often replaced with hard, or impervious surfaces, such as houses, streets, sidewalks, parking lots, patios and other structures. The result of this development is a reduced amount of natural area available to absorb stormwater. This means that a large amount of stormwater ends up flowing, at a faster pace, over the hard surfaces where it collects chemicals and debris along the way. When not controlled, stormwater will overwhelm streams and cause flooding, soil erosion and surface water pollution.

Q: Why is stormwater a problem in Ebensburg?

A: Most areas of Ebensburg lack any means at all of collecting stormwater. Very few residents have a stormwater catch basin within blocks of their home. Where stormwater mains do exist, they are very old, undersized and in poor condition. As a result, even during routine storms, it is not uncommon for stormwater to rushing over the tops of curbs flooding yards, basements, garages and intersections. The mains are so small and deteriorated that water actually shoots up out of the ground in several yards. In some problem areas, soil and debris washes into the streets and obstructs the few stormwater basins that we do have. And most importantly, we all have an obligation to protect our neighbors. Sending inordinate amounts of stormwater rushing downstream threatens our downstream neighbors.

Q: Why is a stormwater utility fee the best solution to fund stormwater drainage needs?

A: This is the most equitable solution. All contributors to stormwater runoff share the costs of the stormwater system, and in a proportional manner. In general, the more impervious area a property has, the more runoff flows from the property. This solution ensures that stormwater management receives adequate support, independent of the Borough's tax rate and general fund. Billing based on impervious surface is the widely accepted method in stormwater management programs across the country. To accomplish the same level of funding through real estate taxes would require an 8½ mill (60%) tax increase. Stormwater management is an expensive problem to address; too expensive to be supported only by tax dollars. Because it has relied solely on tax dollars, the available funding has been inadequate, unstable and unable to keep pace with the growing need for system management, maintenance and expansion.

Q: Who pays for stormwater management?

A: All owners of developed property will be charged a stormwater user fee based on their impact to the system, even those that are otherwise exempt from paying real property taxes (churches, schools, government properties, non-profit entities, etc.). Stormwater runoff does not discriminate. For example, the impact that stormwater runoff from a 10,000 square foot parking lot has on the stormwater system is the same whether it is owned by a business, a place of worship or a government agency.

Q: What properties are charged a fee?

A: Every developed property in Ebensburg Borough, except cemeteries of human remains, pays a stormwater user fee. Undeveloped properties with impervious area of less than 400 square feet are exempt.

Q: What does "impervious surface" mean?

A: A surface that prevents or retards the infiltration of water into the ground in a manner that such water entered the ground under natural conditions pre-existent to development. Impervious surface (or area) includes, but is not limited to: roofs, additional outdoor living spaces, patios, garages, storage sheds and similar structures, parking or driveway areas (including pavement, concrete, pavers, brick, compacted aggregate), and any private streets and sidewalks. Any travel areas proposed to initially be gravel or crushed stone shall be assumed to be impervious surfaces.

Q: Why not just a flat fee instead of incurring the administrative costs to determine everyone's impervious surface?

A: Billing based on the amount of impervious surface on a property is the most equitable method to determine the fee. Impervious surfaces decrease the amount of infiltration into the ground and increase the amount of runoff that will enter the Borough's stormwater system. Over the long term, the amount of impervious area on a property is directly related to the amount of stormwater that flows off the property and into the nearby streams and creeks.

Q: How is the fee billed to me?

A: The stormwater system is a utility, and appears as a separate line on your bi-monthly utility bill along with water and wastewater utilities.

Q: How much is the fee?

A: The fee is based on ERUs, or Equivalent Residential Unit. The ERU is the base unit for the stormwater fee, similar to the base unit for other utilities. One ERU is equivalent to 2,830 square feet of impervious area. This is the average amount of impervious surface found at the average single-family residence in Ebensburg Borough. The charge for one ERU, and the charge for every single-family property in Ebensburg Borough, is \$16 bi-monthly, or \$96 annually. For all other properties, the actual square feet of impervious surface is measured, and a factor is determined by dividing the actual square feet of impervious surface by 2,830. That factor x \$96 is the annualized fee for all other types of property, including commercial and tax-exempt.

NOTE: Prior to January 1, 2016 the fee assessed will be 50%, or \$8 bi-monthly.

Q: I think my bill may be calculated incorrectly. What should I do?

A: If a customer believes that the stormwater fee has been calculated incorrectly, the customer must file a written appeal with the Borough Manager within 30 days of the bill being mailed, stating the reasons for the challenge.

Q: Is there any recourse if AFTER the appeals process I still do not agree with the fee?

A: Yes. Customers who do not agree with the ruling of the Borough Manager may appeal to Borough Council in writing, and must do so within 10 days of receiving the Borough Manager's ruling.

Q: How did the Borough obtain information about my property in order for stormwater fees to be calculated?

A: The information was obtained from high-resolution aerial photography.

Q: How often is the information updated?

A: The information will be updated every few years as new aerial photography is acquired. However, as changes occur to the amount of impervious surface on given parcels (buildings added, surfaces paved, etc.) we can amend a customer's stormwater fee.

Q: Why do I pay a stormwater fee when I don't have stormwater drains on or near my property?

A: The water that leaves your property, either from irrigation or rainfall, ultimately drains into the Borough's stormwater system. You are assessed a fee because this runoff contributes to the need for maintenance. In addition, we all drive and walk through other areas of town in which an adequate community-wide stormwater system is necessary for everyone's health and safety.

Q: When are storm drains cleaned?

A: Storm drains are cleaned on an as needed basis. The Borough welcomes calls from the public notifying us of a problem storm drain, and encourages residents to help by keeping storm drains near their homes and businesses clear of debris.

Q: What is the stormwater fee used to pay for?

A: The use of the stormwater fees is limited to the stormwater system. That could include regulatory compliance such as water quality monitoring, floodplain management and meeting the requirements of the

stormwater permit; capital improvements including storm sewer installation and/or replacement, culvert upgrades, curbing, stream restoration and storm planning and engineering; operation, maintenance and administration of the stormwater system.

Q: Is there any way to earn credits in order to reduce the amount of the fee?

A: Yes. Click [here](#) to view a copy of the Borough's Stormwater Fee Credit Policy.

Q: Do tax-exempt properties have to pay?

A: Yes. Tax-exempt properties do pay because the stormwater utility is funded through fees and is not a property tax. Property taxes are based on the assessed value of the property. The stormwater utility fee is assessed based upon how much the property contributes to the problem of stormwater runoff.

Q: How is a stormwater fee different from a tax?

A: Taxes are collected from parcel owners, based on the assessed value of their property to cover the costs for a number of general government services. A fee is charged to support a specific service, such as electric, water or garbage collection. The cost of providing these services vary from property to property, and are in some fashion quantifiable. In some cases a meter is used to quantify the service. In the case of stormwater, it is measured by the amount of impervious area.

Q: Where can I find the Ebensburg Borough Stormwater Fee Ordinance?

A: Click [here](#)