



**apw** | STORMWATER AND FLOODPLAIN  
M A N A G E M E N T

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS STORMWATER UTILITY

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **What is Stormwater?**

Stormwater is rain or snowmelt that falls on streets, parking areas, rooftops, and other developed land and either flows directly into nearby streams or travels there through drainage systems, such as curbs and gutters, inlets, storm drains, detention ponds, and channels.

### **What is a stormwater utility?**

The City of Austell's Stormwater Utility is a public utility organized as a separate enterprise in the same fashion as the City of Austell's water fund. Assets managed by the Stormwater Utility include storm drains, culverts, catch basins, and equipment used for managing the storm drainage system. The Stormwater Utility is given the responsibility of providing for the public needs in the area of stormwater management and compliance with federal and state laws. The Stormwater Utility charges fees for operation and maintenance of facilities and for capital improvements. The Stormwater Utility works to solve current drainage problems, prevents future problems, as well as repair, maintain, and enhance those facilities already constructed. The Stormwater Utility also provides a funding mechanism for providing staff to manage the stormwater program.

### **What is an impervious surface?**

Impervious surfaces do not allow rain to infiltrate (soak in) at the same rate as natural surfaces, like grassed areas. Impervious surfaces include, but are not limited to, all areas covered by structures, roofs, patios, decks, porches, driveways, loading docks, parking lots, sidewalks, and compacted clay and gravel which are used as driveways or parking lots.

### **Why is my gravel driveway considered an impervious surface?**

Gravel and compacted clay driveways do not allow rain to soak into the ground at the same rate as in undeveloped areas. They also contribute to particulates in the runoff which can enter the City of Austell's storm drains.

### **Is the City of Austell charging us for rain?**

While the Stormwater Utility is in place to manage the pollution carried by stormwater runoff, the fee is in no way related to the amount of rain that falls. The fee is in place to fund the ongoing maintenance and capital improvements to the entire public storm drainage infrastructure, as well as other water quality improvements and flood hazard mitigation programs.

### **What is an ERU?**

One ERU (Equivalent Residential Unit) is equal to 3,100 square feet of impervious surfaces. This unit is used as the basis for determining stormwater service fees to single-family dwelling unit properties or classes of single-family dwelling unit properties and to other developed lands.

## **Where can I get more information?**

You can contact Austell Public Works at (770) 944-4325. Additional information can be found on our website at [www.austellga.gov](http://www.austellga.gov) or by e-mailing [publicworks@austellga.gov](mailto:publicworks@austellga.gov)

## **STORMWATER PROGRAM FUNDING SOLUTIONS**

### **How did the City of Austell decide to create a Stormwater Utility?**

The original Stormwater Utility was created in June 1998 and a \$1.00 charge was placed on each water customers' utility bill. Now in its twelfth year, federal and state regulations have become more stringent which mandates us to improve our stormwater program and increase our focus on pollutants that is carried away in stormwater runoff. The current \$1.00 fee can no longer support our program without the public's support.

### **Why is a Stormwater Utility the best solution?**

A Stormwater Utility is the most equitable method to generate the necessary revenue needed to operate and maintain the City of Austell's stormwater system, meeting the requirements of the federal water quality permit, and add capital improvements to mitigate existing flooding, erosion, and sedimentation problems. Stormwater Utility charges are based on the amount of impervious areas on a property which directly relates to the volume of excess runoff and the demand the property places on the stormwater conveyance system.

### **How is this fee different from a tax?**

This fee is a charge for the purpose of defraying the cost of a particular service, such as the management of stormwater runoff. Revenue from this fee can only be spent to provide that service. A tax is imposed on property, acts, events, or occurrences to provide revenue to pay any of the general expenses of government. Tax revenue can be used to pay for any number of government activities such as police, fire, streets, etc.

### **What are the main benefits of a fee versus a tax?**

There are three main benefits:

1. A fee provides a dedicated source of revenue that can only be used on stormwater management program.
2. Fees are charged based on impacts or costs of managing the stormwater system and water quality. Taxes are assessed based on property value which is not directly related to managing stormwater runoff.
3. Stormwater management projects do not have to compete for the limited dollars in the City of Austell's General Fund.

### **Who must pay or who is exempt?**

The fee must be paid by residential, commercial, industrial, non-profit, and governmental agencies that own developed parcels. There are no exceptions for developed parcels. Undeveloped parcels with no impervious surface will not be charged.

## **Is the Stormwater Utility really needed?**

The needs that the Stormwater Utility will address are very real. Property owners in the City of Austell will all benefit from this Stormwater Utility. First, there will be a better-maintained stormwater system. Also, because there will be more adequate funding, flood control projects can be completed. Further, the City of Austell will avoid fines that could be assessed by the Georgia Environmental Protection or the United States Environmental Protection Agency for not being in compliance with our stormwater permit requirements. The Stormwater Utility is needed to protect the health and safety of the public by preventing costly deterioration of our stormwater system.

## **RATES AND FEES**

### **How much will I have to pay?**

All single-family homes will pay the minimum charge of \$3.00 per month. Non single-family customers will receive a bill dependent upon the amount of impervious area on their property.

### **Will all properties have to pay?**

All developed parcels with an impervious area will be charged a stormwater fee. Undeveloped lots or properties with no impervious surfaces will not be charged a fee. Customers required to pay the fee include private property, residential, non-profit, commercial, industrial, and government property owners.

### **Who will pay the fees for public buildings?**

Properties including public buildings owned by the City of Austell, Cobb County, or the State of Georgia are required to pay the fees. These costs are incorporated into their operating expenses.

### **Why are non-profit organizations not exempt from the fee?**

All developed properties contribute to the problems and costs associated with stormwater management. The fee, based on the amount of impervious surface on a property, is the most equitable method of distributing the cost. Non-profits are not exempt from paying for other utility services such as water or electricity and in the same way will not be exempt from paying the stormwater utility fee.

### **Will a fee be assessed against the street and highway system?**

Although streets are impervious surfaces, the street and highway system is part of the stormwater conveyance system just like ditches, culverts, and storm drains. Without the roadways, the City of Austell's stormwater system could not function. No public streets or highways will be charged; however, private roads on private lands will be assessed the stormwater utility fee, because they contribute runoff to the stormwater conveyance system.

### **Why are private streets not exempt if public streets are?**

Only public streets are part of the City of Austell's stormwater conveyance system. Maintenance and stormwater costs for private streets are borne by the landowner.

### **How will you determine a pervious from an impervious area?**

Engineers for the City of Austell determine the impervious surfaces on a property from aerial photographs and field inspections. There may be instances where a pervious surface may look like an impervious surface in a photograph. In those instances, customers may contact Austell Public Works for a review and determination on the impervious area on their property. Customers will also be able to appeal the determination of the amount of impervious surface. For more information on determining an impervious area, see page 10.

### **Why do I have to pay if I live on high ground or in a dip?**

Every property in the City of Austell has stormwater runoff that contributes to existing water quality and quantity problems. Therefore, every property contributes to the need for proper runoff management and stormwater system maintenance. Driveways, parking areas, and rooftops on every property in the City of Austell contribute to the amount of stormwater that must be managed. It is the most equitable funding method to have all developed properties pay a fee that is proportional to the amount of stormwater that runs off each property.

### **Why do I have to pay if I do not contribute to stormwater runoff?**

If you own property that has been developed with impervious surfaces (for example rooftops, sidewalks, driveways, decks, etc.), you do contribute to stormwater runoff. These impervious areas do not allow rain to infiltrate as it would on a natural surface. It is important to note that the stormwater fee will pay for citywide improvements to the stormwater system and will also fund compliance with the federal and state permits and regulations. These improvements and permit programs support and apply to the City of Austell.

### **Why do I have to pay if my roof drains onto my grass?**

Even if all of the runoff from your property is directed to pervious surfaces (such as grass), it is highly unlikely that during a 100-year rain event, all of the runoff can be absorbed without discharging any to adjacent driveways, sidewalks, or streets. During a 100-year rain event, even the grassy areas will have runoff, so they would not be effective in absorbing runoff from impervious areas.

### **Will I pay more if it does not rain?**

No, but you will not pay more when it rains a lot either. Operations and maintenance activities will occur year round, not just when it is raining.

## **BILLING**

### **When will the City of Austell be billing customers?**

Customers will be billed annually and bills will go out November 1 of each year.

### **When will the bill be due?**

Bills are due in full by December 20 of each year.

**How will you bill multi-family units?**

The registered property owner will receive the bill. It is up to that owner to determine how, or if, he/she, will pass that cost along to the tenants of a multi-family property. If a Homeowners Association (HOA) owns any common area(s) within a residential neighborhood, the Homeowners Association will receive the bill.

**How will billing be handled for tenants that lease space?**

Bills will be sent to the property owner. It is up the property owner to determine how the cost will be distributed among the tenants.

**Will Cobb County or State of Georgia properties in the City of Austell be assessed?**

The City of Austell will assess all parcels within the corporate limits of the City of Austell. This includes properties owned by the City of Austell, Cobb County, and the State of Georgia.

**Will religious entities or non-profits be assessed?**

Yes. The City of Austell will assess all parcels within the corporate limits of the City of Austell. This includes properties owned by religious facilities, service organizations, housing authorities, youth facilities, etc.

**What are the fees?**

\$60.00 annually at \$5.00 per month (per Equivalent Residential Unit) for the 2015 calendar year (for period beginning January 1, 2015 and ending December 31, 2015); and subsequent years, unless modified by the City.

However, the City Council has the authority to adjust the rate at any time by resolution. New requirements of the federal and state permits and/or federal and state regulations could also require a rate adjustment.

**What if I do not pay?**

For all balances in arrears after December 20 of each year, a late charge of five (5) percent of the unpaid balance of any stormwater utility service fee bill shall be charged when a bill becomes delinquent. Thereafter, an additional charge of one (1) percent based on the unpaid bill and any applicable delinquency charge shall be charged for each month the bill remains delinquent.

**CREDITS**

**Who is eligible for a credit?**

Only non-single family customers are eligible. Single-family customers are already paying the minimum charge.

**For non-single family customers, what credits are available?**

A Water Quality credit is available.

### **What is the Water Quality credit?**

The Water Quality credit is for treating and/or attenuating water before it enters the City of Austell's stormwater conveyance system using an approved structural best Management Practice in accordance with the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual.

### **What stormwater Best Management Practices qualify for the credit?**

Best Management Practices eligible for the credit include:

- Constructed Stormwater Wetlands
- Wet Detention Basins
- Dry Detention Basins
- In-Pipe or Underground Storage

### **How do I apply for a credit?**

To apply for a credit, applicants should contact Austell Public Works Stormwater Management at (770) 944-4325. Additionally, applicants can download the credit application instructions and credit application from [www.apwsm.org](http://www.apwsm.org).

## **STORMWATER PERMIT REGULATIONS**

### **Who issued the City of Austell's stormwater permit?**

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division issued the first stormwater permit to the City of Austell in June 1994. The permit was re-issued in June 1999, June 2004, and the most recent permit in June 2009.

### **What is required by the stormwater permit?**

The permit issued by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division required the City of Austell to develop a program for, but not limited to:

1. Program Amendments and Approval
2. Annual Reporting
3. Public Education and Outreach
4. Public Involvement and Participation
5. Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
6. Total Maximum Daily Load
7. Low Impact Development/Green Infrastructure
8. Construction Site Pollutant Control
9. Post Construction Stormwater management
10. Stormwater Quality Management
11. Stormwater System Inventory and Mapping
12. Outfall Screening

## **What is required for Public Education and Outreach?**

The City of Austell must implement a program to increase the awareness of stormwater pollution prevention impacts on waters of the State that encourages changes in public behavior. A few of these elements include:

- Promote detection and elimination of illicit discharges.
- Inform and educate the public about the proper management of materials that may cause stormwater pollution from sources including automobiles, pet waste, household hazardous waste, etc.
- Promote composting of leaves and grass clippings and proper use of fertilizers and pesticides.
- Promote the management of streambanks by riparian landowners.
- Promote infiltration of stormwater runoff from rooftop downspouts, driveways, and sidewalks.
- Inform and educate those responsible for the design, installation, and maintenance of construction site erosion control practices and stormwater facilities.
- Identify businesses and activities that may pose a stormwater contamination concern, and where appropriate, educate specific audiences on methods of stormwater pollution prevention.
- Promote environmentally sensitive land development designs by developers and designers.

## **What is required for Public Involvement and Education?**

The City of Austell must implement a program to notify the public of activities required by this permit and encourage input and participation from the public regarding these activities.

## **What is required for Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination?**

The City of Austell must develop, implement, and enforce a program to detect and remove illicit connections and discharges to the stormwater system. The program includes:

- An ordinance to prevent and eliminate illicit discharges and connections.
- Initial field screening at all major outfalls during dry weather periods.
- On-going dry weather field screening of suspect outfalls.
- Procedures to remove illicit discharges from our system as soon as possible.

## **What is an illicit discharge?**

Illicit discharges are illegal discharges into the stormwater conveyance system that are not composed entirely of stormwater. Illicit discharges often include car wash detergents, chemicals, fertilizers, sediment, nutrients, bacteria, and toxic pollutants.



## What are the effects of these pollutants on our environment?

<b>Sediment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sediment is often viewed as the largest pollutant load associated with stormwater runoff in an urban setting. The loads have been shown to be exceptionally high in the case of construction activity.</li> <li>• Sediment is associated with numerous impacts in surface waters including increased turbidity, effects on aquatic habitat, and reduction in capacity of impoundments.</li> <li>• Other pollutants often attach to, and are carried by, sediment particles.</li> </ul>
<b>Nutrients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nutrients of concern in stormwater runoff are phosphorus and nitrogen.</li> <li>• In surface waters, these nutrient loads can lead to heavy algae growth and low oxygen levels.</li> <li>• Nutrients enter into the urban system in a variety of ways, including landscaping practices, leaks from sanitary sewers and septic systems, and animal wastes.</li> </ul>
<b>Bacteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High bacteria levels may be found in stormwater runoff as a result of leaking sanitary sewer systems, garbage, animal waste, etc.</li> <li>• The impacts of bacteria on surface waters may affect recreations uses and aquatic life and can also pose health risks.</li> </ul>
<b>Toxic Pollutants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many toxic substances are associated with urban stormwater including metals, pesticides, and herbicides.</li> <li>• Toxic compounds may affect biological systems and accumulate in bottom sediments of surface waters.</li> </ul>

## How can you help?

- Never dump anything down a storm drain.
- Dispose of yard and pet waste properly.
- Avoid excess use of lawn fertilizers.
- Wash your car on your lawn or at a car wash facility.
- Make sure sanitary, laundry, carwash, and industrial waste do not drain to the storm drain.
- Beware of storm drains that have a measurable flow during dry conditions, and report flows that have a noticeable odor, discoloration, or oil sheen.

### **What is required for Construction Site Pollutant (Erosion) Control?**

The City of Austell must develop, implement, and enforce a program to reduce the discharge of sediment and construction materials from construction sites. The program must:

- Have an ordinance or other regulatory mechanism requiring the implementation of proper erosion and sediment controls, and controls for other wastes, on applicable construction sites.
- Have procedures for site plan review of construction plans.
- Have procedures for site inspection and enforcement of control measures and to ensure compliance.
- Establish procedures for the receipt and consideration of information submitted by the public.

### **What is required for Post-Construction Stormwater Management?**

The City of Austell must develop, implement, and enforce a program to reduce pollutants in post-construction runoff to the stormwater system from new development and re-development projects that result in the land disturbance of greater than or equal to one acre. We must:

- Have an ordinance or other regulatory mechanism requiring the implementation of post-construction runoff controls to the extent allowable under State of Georgia law.
- Develop and implement strategies which include a combination of structural and/or non-structural Best Management Practices.

### **What is required for Pollution Prevention?**

The City of Austell must develop and implement a pollution prevention program that establishes measurable goals for pollution prevention. The program will include:

- Routine inspections and maintenance of municipally owned or operated structural stormwater management facilities to maintain their pollutant removal operating efficiency.
- Routine street sweeping and cleaning of catch basins; proper disposal of such wastes.
- Limit the amount of road salt or other deicers than necessary to maintain public safety.
- Proper management of leaves and grass clippings, which may include on-site beneficial reuse as opposed to collection.
- Stormwater pollution prevention planning for the City's municipal maintenance yard, storage areas, and other sources of stormwater pollution from municipal facilities.
- Education of appropriate municipal and other personnel involved in implementing the Pollution Prevention program.
- Measures to reduce municipal sources of stormwater contamination within source water protection areas.

## What is required for Stormwater Quality Management?

The City of Austell must develop and implement a municipal stormwater management program. The program will include:

- Evaluation of all municipally owned or operated structural control facilities to determine the feasibility of retrofitting to increase Total Suspended Solids removal from stormwater runoff.

## How is an impervious surface calculated?

An aerial photograph was taken in 2009. The parcel information is laid on top of the aerial photograph; the yellow lines represent parcel boundaries. The City of Austell's engineers select the section of the map they need to work on and expand it.



City engineers zoom in on the area so they will be working on the parcel close enough to identify the impervious surface.

Because the aerial photograph is taken at an angle at this location, they must be careful to digitize the actual footprint of where the building is and not the top of the roof or any shadows from the building.

The digitized area is seen outside of the red border. Once the shapes are drawn in for the impervious area, a computer model calculates the total area of the impervious area. This is then converted into the number of Equivalent Residential Units you will see on your bill.

