

Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Utility

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What is stormwater?

Stormwater is exactly what it sounds like; it is the water that falls during a storm. In terms of pollution and management, stormwater is both the water that falls from the sky as well as the water that runs off any hard surface, commonly called stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff picks up various chemicals and pollutants that can contaminate our local waterways, which are the source of our drinking water. These pollutants can include everything from grass clippings and pet waste to sediment, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, and toxic chemicals.

Uncontrolled stormwater can have detrimental effects on the environmental and financial health of a community. For one, stormwater pollution can make our local waters unsafe for fishing, swimming, and boating. Also, improperly managed stormwater can lead to the erosion of our riverbanks and flooding of our streets.

The federal Clean Water Act requires communities to manage stormwater. This act ensures that residents can be confident their local communities are working diligently to protect the waters in their area.

What is a Stormwater Utility?

The Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Utility (ACCSWU) will be just like the other utilities that serve the community, in that users will pay a fee for services rendered. The implementation of a user-fee for stormwater related services ensures customers pay their fair share, and no one subsidizes non-ratepayers. This method also presents our community with an alternative to an across the board tax hike, which would exempt some of the largest service users in the community. The purpose of the stormwater utility fee will be to raise the revenues needed to fund the stormwater management program.

How is the fee structured?

It is proposed that the stormwater utility fee be charged based on three components - a base fee and a subsequent stormwater quantity fee and stormwater quality fee.

- 📍 The base fee covers costs of managing the program as well as the minimum cost to repair and maintain the stormwater system.
- 📍 The stormwater quantity charge covers the cost of properly operating and maintaining the county-wide system of pipes, culverts, ditches, and ponds. These services are tied to the reduction of flooding throughout the county.
- 📍 The stormwater quality charge covers the program costs of cleaning stormwater infrastructure, detecting illegal discharges, and implementing local stormwater pollution prevention plans. These services are directly tied to protecting water quality.



How is the fee calculated?

Much like a kilowatt or a therm serves as the basis for other utilities, the Equivalent Runoff Unit, or ERU, is the base unit for a stormwater utility. An ERU is a measure of the amount of impervious surface on a property. Impervious surfaces, like a concrete parking area or a rooftop, do not allow stormwater to soak into the ground. Instead, this water runs off of the surface and must be managed by the stormwater system.

A single ERU represents 2,628 square feet of impervious surface. This amount is the average size of the impervious area found at a single family property here in Athens-Clarke. That base amount is then applied to larger properties across the county. For example, City Hall on College Avenue has over 14 times the amount of impervious surface as an average single family home and will be charged 14.6 ERUs. The impervious area on a parcel of land is measured using the County's 2003 aerial photography.

The quality portion of the fee takes into account the land use of the property in determining the stormwater utility fee. An Intensity of Development (ID) factor is assigned to several categories of land use.

- ◆ Low Density Development: 0.5
- ◆ Medium Density Development: 1.0
- ◆ Multi-family/Institutional Development: 1.3
- ◆ Commercial/Industrial Development: 1.9
- ◆ Undeveloped: 0.0

The amount of your stormwater utility fee is the sum of the ERU multiplied by the base rate, the ERU multiplied by the quantity rate, and the ERU multiplied by the ID factor and the quality rate.

$$\left(\text{ERU} \times \frac{\text{Base}}{\text{Rate}} \right) + \left(\text{ERU} \times \frac{\text{Quantity}}{\text{Rate}} \right) + \left(\text{ERU} \times \frac{\text{Quality}}{\text{Rate}} \times \text{ID Factor} \right) = \text{Stormwater Fee}$$

An average single family homeowner will be charged for one ERU. For properties charged one ERU, it is expected that the fee will be around \$3.50 per month.

How can I reduce my stormwater utility fee?

While property owners in Athens-Clarke County may not be able to “turn off the rain,” some may be able to take certain steps to lessen the amount of stormwater runoff that comes from their property. The less polluted runoff that a property generates, the less that property will be charged for stormwater management. A reduction in impervious surface on a property will reduce the number of ERU's that are charged and result in a reduced utility fee. Stormwater credits are also given to properties who install and maintain systems to meet the requirements of the stormwater management ordinance. Stormwater ponds, wetlands, infiltration trenches, and other management systems reduce the velocity or rate of the runoff or clean up the pollutants found in stormwater. When properly maintained and installed, these systems can qualify for a reduction in fee for the property that they serve.

How can I help?

Most stormwater pollution is preventable, which is why the ACCSWU will focus on public education. Currently, ACCSWU staff members are in the community speaking to various civic and educational groups concerning stormwater management. The ACCSWU web site features information on the utility, as well as tips on how to prevent stormwater pollution.

For more information, contact ACC stormwater at 706.613.3440 or visit www.accstormwater.com.

