



City of Cornelia

Stormwater Management Program & Stormwater User Fee

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Stormwater Runoff? Stormwater runoff is rainfall that drains off rooftops, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, roads, and other man-made surfaces that prohibit the infiltration of rainfall into the ground. The stormwater runoff then flows into the City's drainage system and into our local streams/creeks and eventually into the Chattahoochee River. All developed properties in the City contribute stormwater runoff to the drainage system and, in some cases, to recurring drainage problems. In addition to flooding problems, stormwater runoff washes chemicals, debris, trash and other pollutants into the drainage system and our local waterways.

What is the City of Cornelia's responsibility for managing the impacts of stormwater runoff? The City of Cornelia is responsible for the management and regulation of stormwater runoff and drainage issues within the City. The City must undertake various activities including the cleaning of ditches and pipe systems; replacement of aging culverts and drainage structures; and construction of new culvert systems to increase or improve conveyance capacity. The City has established that it needs to undertake the necessary actions to address drainage-related capital improvement projects (CIPs) that have been deferred for implementation due to insufficient funding. Limited resources are currently available to address high priority stormwater management program (SWMP) issues and to more effectively address drainage system operation and maintenance and CIP related needs.

What stormwater regulations must the City comply with? The City of Cornelia's current and future SWMP is subject to certain regulatory requirements overseen by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and other agencies. The City's existing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Wastewater Discharge Permit has specific provisions related to stormwater and watershed management that are conditional to the permit. These requirements, described in the Watershed Protection Plan, include implementation of specific compliance elements related to stormwater pollution prevention within the sanitary sewer service area.

How is the City of Cornelia proposing to address expanding SWMP needs? The City of Cornelia is currently considering a stormwater utility and user fee system that will be dedicated solely to addressing stormwater management and drainage issues. The stormwater user fee will provide the resources necessary for the City to deliver stormwater services to residents, businesses, institutional and government facilities.

What is a Stormwater User Fee? A stormwater user fee is a charge for stormwater management services provided by the City to all developed residential and non-residential properties in the City. It is

very similar to a water or wastewater fee, which are also charged to customers who received these services from the City. Under the plan proposed, the stormwater user fee revenue collected can only be utilized for the provision of stormwater management services and operation of the City's drainage system infrastructure.

How do you calculate a stormwater user fee charge for an individual property and utility customer account? The stormwater user fee charge is based on the amount of impervious surface on a parcel. Impervious surface means those areas which prevent or impede the natural infiltration of rainfall and stormwater runoff. Common impervious surfaces include, but are not limited to, rooftops, buildings or structures, sidewalks, walkways, patio areas, driveways, parking lots, storage areas, awnings and other fabric or plastic coverings, and other surfaces such as compacted soil and gravel. The square footage of impervious surface on a property has a direct correlation to the amount of stormwater runoff discharged from that property. Developed parcels with greater amounts of impervious area will place a larger impact on the City's drainage system and SWMP, receive more stormwater services (either directly or indirectly), and will therefore be charged a higher stormwater user fee.

Are gravel and compacted soil charged at the same rate as other types of impervious surfaces? No, gravel and compacted soil will be charged at a reduced rate of 85% to account for the minor amount of superficial infiltration that can occur. This reduction factor of 85% is based on the literature data related to the hydrologic characteristics of these types of materials as compared to undeveloped conditions.

How will my stormwater user fee be calculated? The stormwater user fee will be based on a billing unit or Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) that is approximately equal to the median (50th percentile) impervious surface area for single family residential homes in Cornelia, which is 3,300 square feet of impervious surface. Most single family residential (SFR) properties will be charged 1.0 ERU per month. All non-single family residential (NSFR) properties will be charged a custom user fee charge based on the total impervious area and land use on the property. For example, if a commercial site had 33,000 square feet of impervious surface, that customer will be charged 10 ERUs per month.

$$33,000 \text{ square feet of impervious surface} / 3,300 \text{ sq ft} = 10 \text{ ERUs (or billing units)}$$

How much will customers be charged per ERU? The stormwater user fee rate that is currently being considered for adoption by the City Council is \$4.50 per ERU per month.

Why did the City decide to implement a stormwater user fee charge? The City has evaluated its SWMP service delivery needs and concluded that additional resources are needed. The City has evaluated the feasibility of charging a stormwater user fee as opposed to increasing property tax millage, and has determined that the user fee approach is more fair and equitable to allocate costs as opposed to increasing ad-valorem taxes to fund SWMP services. The user fee is not based on the assessed "value" of a property like ad-valorem taxes, rather it is based on each customer's demand that they impose on the drainage system and the corresponding SWMP services provided. This user fee approach is very similar to water, sewer, gas and sanitation. An additional benefit of a stormwater

user fee is that all stormwater user fee revenues **must** be spent on stormwater management and drainage related issues whereas ad-valorem tax revenues are typically not subject to such restrictions.

Will there be any way to reduce my Stormwater User Fee? Yes, both residential and non-residential customers will potentially be eligible for credits to reduce their stormwater user fee charge by following the procedures outlined in the City's Stormwater User Fee Credit Manual. The credits will be based on specific activities that the customer undertakes to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on the City's drainage system and its SWMP.

What will be the billing frequency and the billing mechanism? The stormwater user fee charge will be billed on each customer's existing monthly utility bill, and billing is expected to begin in January 2017.

Who do I call if I have additional questions? Contact City of Cornelia at 706-778-8585 with any questions.