

TEWKSBURY STORMWATER FINANCING

KEY TERMS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Department of Public Works is exploring the feasibility of implementing a Stormwater Enterprise Fund to be voted upon at Town meeting in the Fall of 2019. Below are some key terms and frequently asked questions to ensure our community is informed about stormwater financing in Tewksbury.

KEY TERMS

Impervious Surface: Materials or compact surfaces that do not allow stormwater to infiltrate or seep into the ground.

Stormwater: Runoff from precipitation or other sources that drains into the Town's drainage systems (such as catch basins, pipes, and culverts) and ultimately ends up in groundwater, ponds, streams and/or wetland resource areas. Areas with large amounts of impervious surface lead to greater amounts of stormwater runoff conveyed into the drainage system rather than seeping into the ground.

Stormwater Pollution: Pollutants (such as oils, fertilizer, sand, and trash) in stormwater runoff, which can contaminate drinking water supplies, fish and wildlife habitat.

Stormwater Flooding: Flooding of streets and sidewalks from overwhelmed stormwater drainage systems. Note, the total average annual precipitation has increased by approximately 10 percent in the last fifty years across the Northeast. In addition, greater amounts of total impervious surface across towns and cities have led to higher amounts of stormwater runoff. In areas where stormwater infrastructure has not been updated to accommodate greater runoff rates, minor but disruptive flooding events can occur more frequently.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How does Tewksbury manage stormwater?

The Town of Tewksbury's Department of Public Works manages the stormwater management program, which consists of public education, illicit discharge detection, system mapping, water quality testing, construction site runoff control, updating aging infrastructure, and installing new infrastructure.

How has Tewksbury funded its stormwater management program in the past?

The Town's existing stormwater program is currently funded through the General Fund, which is financed through property taxes. Certain stormwater system improvements have been financed through other external funding mechanisms (brownfield settlements and transportation funding from the State); however, none are specifically for stormwater management or guaranteed long-term funding sources. The stormwater program currently budgets for maintenance items such as street sweeping and catch basin cleaning, capital improvement projects, and MS4 permit compliance activities.

How is Tewksbury's stormwater regulated?

The Department of Public Works is continuously working to reduce stormwater pollution, improve surface water quality, and to fulfill the requirements of the EPA's NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit. In 2016, a new MS4 Permit was issued with more extensive requirements to foster improvement of surface water quality. **Complying with the new permit requirements will substantially increase the Town's stormwater costs going forward.**

How will Tewksbury fund compliance with the new requirements under the updated MS4 Permit?

The new MS4 permit will require additional funding for the expanded requirements, which would limit funding for other departments, like schools and transportation (streets and sidewalks). The Town has considered multiple options including higher property taxes, grant opportunities, or setting up a stormwater enterprise fund.

What is a stormwater fee and enterprise fund?

A stormwater fee is a payment for the stormwater management, operation, and maintenance (including regulatory compliance), which is provided by the town. A stormwater fees are collected from property owners based on a properties impact to the storm drain system in addition to assumed usage of roadways and sidewalks. Generally, the impact to the storm drain is assessed based upon a property's amount of impervious surface. An enterprise fund is an account with a specific purpose. A stormwater enterprise fund would receive all revenue from a stormwater fee and would only be used for the purposes of stormwater management.

How is the stormwater enterprise fund being assessed and developed for the Town of Tewksbury?

The Town of Tewksbury has researched other Massachusetts communities with stormwater enterprise funds for best practices. The steps of setting up a stormwater enterprise fund include:

1. Project future stormwater budget needs.
2. Assess impervious surface amounts by land use type.
3. Assess rate structures in relation to average impervious surfaces, land use types, and projected stormwater budget.
4. Meet with municipal departments, boards, commissions, and the general public to review findings, assess feasibility, and determine best way to move forward.
5. Pass enabling legislation at Town Meeting for the establishment of a stormwater enterprise fund.

The Department of Public Works has currently completed steps 1-3 and is meeting with municipal leaders and the public for input.

What are the benefits?

The benefits of adopting a stormwater enterprise fund cut across all municipal departments. By creating a stormwater enterprise and assigning user fees, additional funding will be made available for other priorities, such as roadway paving and reconstruction, sidewalks, and schools. The stormwater fee will also improve the public health and safety of our community by investing in aging infrastructure, addressing flooding concerns, and improving surface water quality.

What are the proposed stormwater fees and how will they be assessed?

The proposed stormwater fees were chosen from several options based on other Massachusetts communities, fairness, cost of implementation and ability to meet the Town's stormwater budgetary needs. The stormwater fee for small residential properties with three units or less will be a flat rate. For non-residential and larger residential properties, the stormwater fee will be based on impervious area, and the rate will be tied to the amount of impervious surface on the property. Many stormwater utilities create a custom unit, called an equivalent residential unit, to measure impervious surfaces across land use types. The stormwater fee is then based upon the ERU. The Equivalent Residential Unit in Tewksbury is 4,359 square feet, which is average amount of impervious area on a single-family residential property. The flat fee and fee per ERU would be \$30 to \$75 per year. For the average household, this equates to \$2.50 to \$6.25 per month. The total revenue coverage of the stormwater management budgetary needs would range from approximately a third to fully funded.

Who gets billed and when?

All developed properties will be billed. The stormwater fee will be included on the water/sewer bill, which is sent three times a year. Non-sewered accounts will be sent a separate stormwater bill.

What happens if a stormwater enterprise fund is not implemented?

The funds needed to comply with the MS4 Permit and meet necessary costs will be drawn from the General Tax Fund, taking away from other needs such as public safety and education. If the Town chooses not to act at all, the USEPA will impose fines.

What are other communities doing to fund and comply with the 2016 MS4 Permit?

There are 13 other communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who have implemented stormwater enterprise funds and many more have started the evaluation process. Communities who have implemented stormwater enterprise funds include Chicopee, Chelmsford, Fall River, Milton, Newton, Northampton, Reading, Shrewsbury and Westfield. Other communities are funding the MS4Permit requirements through the General Tax Fund, or through other revenue sources.