

Camilla Stormwater Utility

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

A. Stormwater Management Program and Stormwater Utility (SW Utility) Overview

Stormwater runoff drains off rooftops, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, roads, compacted soil, gravel, and other surfaces that prohibit the infiltration of rainfall into the ground. The stormwater runoff then flows into the City drainage system and, eventually, into our local streams, creeks, wetland areas, and ultimately to the Big Slough, or recharges the local groundwater table. Most developed properties in the City contribute stormwater runoff to the drainage system, or they rely on proper function of the City's street system and associated drainage network to access their property. Stormwater runoff contributes to flooding problems, and washes chemicals, debris, sediment, trash and other pollutants into the City drainage systems and our local surface water bodies.

Management of stormwater runoff has become an increasingly important responsibility for local governments like the City of Camilla. Existing stormwater regulations, combined with aging infrastructure and deferred capital improvement projects, have driven the City's need to develop and execute a more comprehensive SWMP to address drainage system maintenance issues and high priority capital improvement projects.

The City Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) is responsible for the management and regulation of stormwater and drainage issues within the City. The SWMP must undertake various activities including the cleaning of ditches and other stormwater conveyance systems; replacement of aging culverts and drainage structures; and construction of new culvert systems to increase or improve pipe system capacity. A SW Utility is being implemented by the City to more effectively manage the overall SWMP and to fund the program through a system of user fees that will be dedicated solely to addressing stormwater management and drainage issues. The SW Utility will provide services to residences, businesses, institutions and government facilities. Please review the following FAQs for more information.

B. General Stormwater Management Questions

What is Stormwater Runoff? Stormwater runoff is water that flows over yards, streets, buildings, parking lots, and other surfaces when it rains. Stormwater runoff flows into local streams, canals and wetland areas and eventually ends up in the Big Slough, or recharges the local groundwater table.

How does stormwater get into our streams? When it rains, stormwater runoff flows into street, curbs and gutters, drainage ditches, storm sewers, and other conveyance systems that discharge into our creeks, streams and canals. These natural drainage systems convey the stormwater runoff to larger bodies of water such as the Big Slough. Some of the stormwater runoff eventually infiltrates into the groundwater table.

What problems does stormwater cause? Excessive stormwater runoff causes flooding, drainage system malfunction, stream bank erosion, adverse impacts to wetland systems and water quality problems. Heavy rains flood streets, yards and in some cases structures which can result in significant damage to property. Stormwater runoff also picks up pollutants and debris from streets, parking lots, yards, gravel parking areas, and other surfaces and carries them into local waterways. The SW Utility will provide a fair, equitable, and stable source of funding for the City to utilize in addressing the numerous stormwater management issues.

C. SW Utility Questions

What is a SW Utility? A SW Utility is an organizational and financial entity whose purpose is to manage and fund a local government SWMP and to provide stormwater management services to customers. Each user of the system is charged a user fee and services are provided.

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. The user fee revenue collected can only be used for the provision of stormwater management services to customers within the City.

Who is required to pay a Stormwater User Fee? All developed/improved properties and utility customers within the City of Camilla are required to pay a SW Utility user fee.

Isn't this just another tax? No, the stormwater user fee charge is not a tax. Although the SW Utility fee is an additional cost to customers, it is not a tax because it bears little to no relation to the taxable value of a property. Customers will be charged a SW Utility fee if the property is developed, including "tax exempt" properties (i.e. churches, schools, local government facilities, etc.) all of which generate stormwater runoff from their impervious surfaces.

How are the SW Utility User Fee Charges Utilized by the City? Stormwater user fees collected under this program will supplement other funding sources and be utilized to provide for additional resources to address: (1) drainage system needs and issues in a more proactive manner; (2) achieve compliance with Federal, State and regional regulations; (3) maintain water quality standards in local waterways; and (4) fund drainage related construction projects.

How does the City plan to pay to fix flooding problems? The City proposes to address the recurring flooding problems identified in the City's SWMP through the SW Utility. The SW Utility charges a stormwater user fee to residents, property owners and businesses based on the contribution of stormwater runoff quantity and quality that they contribute to the drainage system. Establishment of the SW Utility and the stormwater user fee system will allow the City to collect funds for use to implement high priority SWMP projects. At this time, the City has identified over \$1 million of needed capital improvement projects within the City.

If the stormwater runs off my property directly into Mitchell County and does not enter into the City of Camilla public drainage system, do I have to pay a user fee charge? If the runoff from a developed property never enters the City's public drainage system at any point downstream then a customer may be eligible for a No Direct Discharge Credit of "up to 50%" off their monthly user fee charge amount. Implementation of the SWMP benefits all developed properties within the City to some degree and these benefits may be direct, indirect or immeasurable. It is not practical for a customer to receive a 100% credit off their user fee charge even if they do not contribute stormwater runoff to the City drainage system since all customers and parcels within the City benefit to some degree from the provision of citywide stormwater management related services.

How do you calculate a stormwater user fee charge for an individual property? The user fee charge is based on the amount of impervious surfaces on a developed 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 stormwater runoff quantity and quality discharged from that property. The basic theory is that larger parcels with greater amounts of impervious area will be charged a higher user fee based on the demand placed on the City's drainage system and the increased service level provided to that customer and the property.

Are gravel and compacted soil surfaces charged a stormwater user fee? Yes, gravel and compacted soil generate runoff so those surfaces are charged a user fee charge. However, these surfaces are charged at a reduced rate to account for the minor amount of infiltration that can occur. This reduction factor of 0.85 (or a 15% reduction on the impervious area amount) is based on the literature data and the hydrologic characteristics of these types of surface and near surface materials for the Mitchell County and City of Camilla geographical area.

D. SW Utility Billing Procedures

How is the amount of impervious area calculated on all of the properties within the City? The impervious area of *non-single family residential* (NSFR) parcels was derived/calculated using aerial photography and/or field verification methods. Aerial photography was also used to establish that the average amount of impervious area of *residential* (SFR) parcels in the City. The average amount of impervious area or equivalent residential unit (ERU) for a residential property has been established to be 3,360 square feet.

What is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU)? An ERU is equal to the median (or the approximate average) amount of impervious area associated with a typical detached single-

family residential (SFR) property within the City of Camilla. It has been established that the median single-family property contains approximately 3,360 square feet of impervious area.

What are considered to be residential customers? In general, single-family residential (SFR) customers are a typical detached residential structure on a single lot. Please refer to the definitions section of the applicable City Ordinances for a more detailed definition.

What are considered to be non-residential customers? Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR) properties are all other customers that do not fit into the residential class of customers. Non-residential customers consist of two different types: (1) standalone NSFR customers where a single bill is generated for all impervious surface area on the property; and (2) apportioned NSFR customers where the impervious surface area is apportioned to each user on the property. Examples of apportioned NSFR customers can be found in the shopping centers where each business (tenant) is apportioned a part of the impervious surface area of the building and the parking lot.

How are multi-family developments billed? These customers are generally billed as NSFR customers. In most cases, the entire monthly user fee charge will be billed to the property owner/landlord. In some cases, the monthly user fee charge may be billed to the individual tenants by dividing up the total user fee charge among all the units. Please contact the City Finance Department for specific monthly billing details regarding these customer types.

Will duplexes (and similar type properties) be charged the same as typical SFR customers? No. Duplex type properties will be charged a flat rate of 0.5 ERU per month, which equates to \$2.00. One can conclude that since the prorated impervious area for a “duplex type property” is approximately 50% of a full ERU of 3,360 square feet.

What if my SFR property consists of only one small residential structure? If the SFR structure and associated impervious areas are between 500 square feet and 1,680 square feet then the customer may be eligible for a “Reduced SFR Footprint Credit” per the SW Utility Credit Manual. A customer that secures this credit will be billed similar to the duplex example discussed herein such that the customer account will be charged 0.5 ERU per month which is consistent with the 1,680 square foot (or less) impervious area footprint for the property. The minimum monthly user fee charge has been set at \$2.00.

Why are churches and other tax-exempt properties required to pay? All developed properties within the City limits that have impervious areas in excess of 500 square feet will be charged a stormwater user fee regardless of ownership or property tax status. All impervious surfaces (e.g. parking lots) contribute stormwater runoff, and therefore, all customers should share the implementation cost of the City’s SWMP.

How is the stormwater user fee charge calculated? The user fee is based on a billing unit or Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) of 3,360 square feet of impervious surface. The ERU of 3,360 square feet is the approximate median of impervious area on a typical single family parcel.

Most single family residential (SFR) properties will be charged 1.0 ERU per month, except as stipulated in applicable sections of the SW Utility Rate Ordinance. All non-single family residential (NSFR) properties will be charged a custom amount based on the total impervious area on the property.

How much will utility customers be charged per ERU? SW Utility customers will be charged \$4.00 per ERU per month in accordance with the SW Utility Rate Ordinance. For example, if a NSFR commercial site had 30,000 square feet of impervious surface, that customer would be charged 8.9 ERUs per month. The NSFR customer would be charged as follows: 8.9 ERUs x \$4/month/ERU = \$35.60/month. A typical SFR customer would be charged 1.0 ERU or \$4.00/month.

How many other communities have stormwater utilities in Georgia? As of December 2010, it was estimated that approximately 45 stormwater utilities currently exist within the State of Georgia and more than 600 currently exist across the country.

Why did the City decide to implement a stormwater user fee charge? In order to address the SWMP needs of the City, the City determined that additional resources were needed in the program. The City Council evaluated the feasibility of SW Utility user fee because the City believes that user fee approach is a more fair and equitable approach than taxation for SWMP services. The user fee is not based on the assessed “value” of a property, like a tax, rather it is based on each customer's demand on, or contribution of runoff to, the system and the services provided -- similar to water, sewer, sanitation, electrical, etc. An additional benefit of a SW Utility set up is that all stormwater user fee revenues must be spent on stormwater management and drainage related issues whereas tax revenues are not subject to such restrictions. Although the user fee is a new charge to residents and businesses for stormwater services, SWMP costs have always existed and were historically paid primarily from the City General Fund budget.

Is there any way to reduce the Stormwater User Fee Charge Bill amount? Both residential and non-residential customers may be able to apply for credits to reduce their stormwater user fee charge by following the procedures outlined in the City's SW Utility Credit Manual. The credits are based on specific structural and non-structural practices that reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on the City's drainage system and/or assist the City in meeting its regulatory compliance requirements.

What will be the billing frequency and the billing mechanism? The stormwater user fee charge will be billed on your existing City of Camilla monthly public utility bill.

What if I chose not to pay my monthly stormwater user fee charge amount? The City's ordinances authorize the City to take specific actions to enforce payment of utility services by customers that include utility cut off (i.e. water) as well as other methods allowed by state law.

What if I think that my user fee charge bill has been calculated incorrectly? The customer should contact the City Customer Service personnel and request a copy of the Stormwater User Fee Charge Inquiry/Review Fact Sheet and Application Form provided in this manual. These documents will provide the customer with the needed materials to request a formal user fee charge review.

How do I report a stormwater problem (drainage, flooding, pollution, etc.) or to ask questions about the SW Utility? Please call 229-336-2220 and provide your name, address, phone number and a brief description of the drainage problem so that the City can further investigate the problem, or state your question to the City staff.