

STORMWATER PROGRAM FEE BEING DEVELOPED



fee
UPDATE

Billing is anticipated to begin in January or February 2022 and will be sent annually; however, you may elect to pay this bill quarterly using installment coupons.

Bethlehem Township established a steering committee to evaluate and consider how the municipality should pay for its stormwater management program costs, including necessary improvements created by unfunded mandates in addition to short- and long-term maintenance needs. Like other communities, Bethlehem Township manages stormwater through a series of pipes, inlets, and swales that convey water when it rains. In addition to the costs of maintaining infrastructure and continuing to address flooding concerns, Bethlehem Township is faced with requirements from the state and federal governments through the MS4 program. Bethlehem Township is providing information to the public in an effort to be transparent in the process and approach and to aid in public awareness and understanding of the issues. The steering committee has found that the costs of the stormwater program are most equitably met through a stormwater fee which is billed based on the amount of impervious area on each property. If stormwater program costs continued to be covered by property taxes, taxes would increase and residential property owners would pay substantially more than covering costs through a fee.

HOW DOES OUR STORMWATER SYSTEM WORK?

When it rains, much of the water does not soak into the ground. If it lands on a roof, driveway or other impervious surface, the water runs along the surface, across paved areas, along curbs and into ditches. Often it then runs into stormwater inlets which are covered with a grate. These inlets are connected by buried pipes.



95
MILES
OF PIPE

farther than the distance from Bethlehem Township to Philadelphia



4,500
INLETS

Stormwater runoff and associated flooding can cause public safety hazards, health risks, property damage, and environmental threats. Stormwater runoff also picks up dirt, trash, oil, grease, pesticides, fertilizers, pet waste, and other pollutants and carries them into our waterways. These pollutants coupled with stream bank erosion threaten stream health and water quality.

The State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires Bethlehem Township to manage its stormwater as part of a permit through its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) program. Bethlehem Township has various operational requirements as part of the MS4 program. The Municipality is also required to develop and implement a pollutant reduction plan, essentially a program of projects that will help to mitigate the impacts of stormwater.

If the municipality does not address stormwater concerns, including reducing pollutants, in the next five years, DEP and United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may impose fines. Bethlehem Township has to determine **how to fund the costs associated with this required program.**

DO WE HAVE PROBLEMS WITH OUR STORMWATER FACILITIES?

Unfortunately, yes, we do. There are stormwater needs throughout the municipality that will need to be addressed in coming years, regardless of the work required by the MS4 permit. **Various areas of the Township have flooding concerns such as Easton Avenue, Walnut Street and Ohio Street. Projects to address flooding concerns will require millions of dollars.** In addition, most of the pipe throughout the Township has reached the end of its useful life. **When pipes fail, the road above the pipe can experience degradation and sinkholes, leading to the need for more repairs.** Like a leaky roof, maintenance needs that are ignored cost more in the long term.

\$\$\$
\$30 - \$35
MILLION
NEEDED FOR FLOOD
MITIGATION PROJECTS &
POLLUTION REDUCTION
PROJECTS

HOW DO WE PAY TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THE STORMWATER FACILITIES?

Currently, Bethlehem Township property owners pay to maintain and improve the stormwater system through property taxes. The problem with using taxes is that a property's assessed value does not correlate to the amount of stormwater it sends into the system. In addition, tax-exempt properties, like churches and government buildings, benefit from the stormwater program but do not pay towards the stormwater program since they are exempt from taxes.

Bethlehem Township chose to develop aerial imagery of all properties in the municipality. From this information, the amount of impervious surface on each property is being measured. With the impervious area amounts, we can determine **how to distribute costs more equitably**.

Stormwater fees for average residential customers is planned as **\$8.60 PER MONTH**

Pennsylvania recently passed a law allowing Authorities to charge a stormwater fee. The municipality plans to use the impervious area data to determine what the fee should be for each property. In communities similar to Bethlehem Township that have recently enacted a fee, the average residential customer rates are typically \$5 to \$15 per month. Properties that are not subject to taxes will also be able to contribute financially to the community's stormwater needs based on the amount of impervious area on their property. Bethlehem Township has appointed a steering committee to explore the development of a utility to fund the stormwater program.

COULD WE JUST PAY FOR STORMWATER NEEDS FROM TAXES?

We could, but it isn't equitable. For example, **if stormwater needs are paid from taxes, residential properties pay more than they should** since they have a large share of the taxable assessed property values, but not as large a share in the total impervious area in Bethlehem Township. In addition, tax revenue may be spread across the municipal budget; however, fees collected through a utility will be used for that specific service. A fee presents a more equitable approach to paying for stormwater management costs.

Why paying from taxes is not equitable

If a tax is used to pay for stormwater costs, the single family homeowner on the left would have to pay for stormwater, but the tax-exempt post office on the right would not pay anything, even though the property generates significantly more runoff.



Single Family Residence



United States Postal Service¹

Property Taxes vs. Stormwater Fee

Paying from taxes is not equitable, because property value does not impact runoff. Tax exempt properties pay no taxes but make up a significant amount of the Impervious Area.

66% savings
Covering stormwater costs from a tax would cost the average residential property owner 66% more than from a stormwater fee



Unmanaged stormwater can lead to flooding, resulting in dangerous and impassable roadway conditions.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

Bethlehem Township presented information at public meetings on October 28. The presentation can be found on the Township's website.

Presentation Slides: <https://bethlehemtownship.org/forms/smp.pdf>

We'll also continue to share material on our website and on social media to keep our community informed.

https://bethlehemtownship.org/geninfo_stormwater.html

¹. United States Postal Service Photo by E Kalish, Jul. 2012.