

Dormont Stormwater Fee Frequently Asked Questions

What is stormwater, and why is it a problem in Dormont?

Stormwater is runoff from rain or snow that falls and flows to Little Saw Mill Run or McNeilly Run through our stormwater drainage system. That drainage system is composed of curbs and gutters, inlets, catch basins and storm sewers. In Dormont, much of which was developed in the early 1900s, most properties and roads drain to the street, and stormwater is conveyed by way of curbs and gutters into a system of underground pipes many of which can no longer accommodate the volume of runoff. Flooding and pollution occur when the storm sewer system does not have the capacity to handle the flow. In addition, stormwater is loaded with pollutants and it is not treated. New Federal and state clean water regulations require Dormont and other SW PA communities to reduce pollutant input and improve water quality. In our case, this includes Saw Mill Run and the Ohio River.



What are impervious surfaces and how do they contribute to stormwater problems?

Impervious surfaces are hard surfaces that do not allow rain or snowmelt to infiltrate at the same rate as natural surfaces such as grass or dirt. They include rooftops, driveways, patios, parking lots, sidewalks and other man-made structures. Dormont is a built-out community. Sixty seven (67%) percent of Dormont's total area of a 0.76 square mile is covered by impervious surfaces.

What is a stormwater fee and how would it help Dormont?

A stormwater fee is established by a municipality to ensure that the stormwater infrastructure is well maintained and stormwater quantity and quality are adequately managed. The fee will fund operations and maintenance of the stormwater infrastructure, administration of Dormont's state and federally mandated Clean Water Act permit requirements, engineering and technical review staff, and the design and construction of capital improvements.

Why will Dormont property owners need to pay a stormwater fee?

Up until this year (2015), funds for repairing and maintaining the stormwater system came from the General Fund of the operating budget. That is no longer feasible because of:

- 1) the severity of the stormwater problems - steadily increasing flooding and water pollution; unfunded state and federal mandates to control these problems;
- 2) the need to meet mandates of the PaDEP and the USEPA;
- 3) an aging, deteriorating and undersized 12-mile storm sewer, and competition for dollars with other municipal needs.

Why is a stormwater fee preferable to a tax increase for funding improvements?

A stormwater fee is the fairest way to operate and maintain our stormwater system, meet federal water quality requirements and add capital improvements to mitigate flooding, sedimentation and water pollution. The stormwater fee, like other fees such as sanitary sewer fees, will be based on the amount of demand a user places upon the system. All property owners who generate stormwater runoff will pay an equitable share.

How is a fee different from a property tax?

A fee is a charge imposed on property owners that defrays the cost of a particular government service. Fees collected only can be spent in providing that service. Property tax revenue may be used for any and all general expenses of local government, such as police, fire, zoning, streets, etc. Property taxes do not apply to tax-exempt properties, who also are users of the stormwater system.

How will the revenue from the fee be administered?

In 2013, the State Legislature passed Act 68. Act 68 requires any borough to establish a stormwater authority if that borough determines that it needs to levy a stormwater fee. Following a public hearing, Dormont Borough Council passed an ordinance to establish the Dormont Stormwater Authority at its August, 2015 meeting.

Who will pay the stormwater fee?

Every property in Dormont with an impervious area of at least 200 square feet will be assessed a stormwater user fee. Homeowners, commercial property owners, nonprofit entities, tax-exempt properties and public facilities, including municipal government and the school district, will pay. Owners of single-family homes and small multifamily units will pay a flat fee of about \$9 per month (to be determined) based on the Equivalent Stormwater Unit (ESU), which is the median amount of impervious surface found for single-family residences in Dormont. Large properties (e.g., apartment buildings, non-profits) will pay a fee based on the actual amount of their impervious surfaces.



Why is impervious area being used to determine the fee? Why not just bill a flat fee?

The amount of stormwater runoff flowing from properties into our stormwater system and ultimately Saw Mill Run and the Ohio River depends on the amount of impervious surface and is the most equitable method of determining the fee.

How was the impervious area calculated?

The first step was to determine a standard Equivalent Stormwater Unit (ESU) for the Borough. An ESU is a standard unit of impervious measure that is uniquely developed for each community, and is used to develop system wide equivalency in billing. ESUs would be applied to every stormwater account as a standard billing unit. To develop ESUs, Geographical Information Software (GIS) mapping tools, aerial photography, and County parcel data were used to examine and analyze parcels and to determine imperviousness characteristics. Impervious area is the typical accepted measure of a parcel's stormwater impact.

For Residential Parcels, using the above data and tools, impervious areas were measured for a statistically relevant sample (not less than 10 percent) of each of the six residential categories (Single Family, Two-Family, Three-Family, Four-

Family, Row house, and Townhouse). Then, an average impervious area was calculated for each category and these values were compared. The most prevalent residential type is Single Family, of which there are 2,441 parcels out of 2,910 total residential parcels. Because Single Family residential type is the most prevalent parcel type in the Borough, this became the basis for the standard unit of measure for the Equivalent Stormwater Unit. The average impervious area of the Single Family category was determined to be 1,883 square feet. For the other residential categories, ESU factors were determined with ratios calculated using the average impervious area for each residential category, divided by 1,883 square feet, and then rounded to the nearest 0.25 to simplify billing.

Non-Residential Parcels are any type of parcel that is not one of the six residential types, and includes parcel types such as commercial, industrial, government, non-profit organizations, apartments, schools, and parks. There is a large degree of variability in non-residential parcels. Each of the 332 non-residential parcels was analyzed individually using GIS mapping tools, aerial photography, and County parcel data to determine each parcel's impervious area. Then, an ESU was calculated for each non-residential parcel, determined using the parcel's impervious area divided by 1,883 square feet.

Do properties that do not generate runoff have to pay the fee?

Even properties designed to infiltrate some runoff will have to pay. Infiltration systems usually cannot handle all runoff from a large storm event, so at some time every property will contribute to the system. Large storms cause the most damage and are the reason the stormwater system must be maintained and repaired on a continual basis. Maintenance of the stormwater system prevents damage to all properties. Additionally, even these properties contribute to the pollutant load that we are under state and Federal laws to mitigate.

Will there be a credit given to property owners who reduce their runoff?

Every municipality that has a stormwater fee and that we have looked at has a credit program of some sort. It is expected that Dormont's Stormwater Authority too would develop and adopt a stormwater fees credit program as part of its organization. To get some idea of what a credit program looks like, go to Mt. Lebanon's website, search on stormwater and you will find their stormwater credit guidance.

How and when will owners of single-family homes and small multifamily units be billed?

Assuming the Dormont Stormwater Authority is established, billing will begin following approval and organization of Stormwater Authority for all property owners likely late in 2015 or early in 2016.



How will billing be handled for business owners who lease space?

Because the stormwater fee is based on the amount of impervious surface of the property, the bill will go to the property owner. It will be up to the property owner to decide how or if the tenants should share in the payment.

How will Dormont spend the money generated?

The revenue provided by the stormwater fee will increase maintenance and repair of the system, fund drainage improvement projects (i.e., Athens Alley/Kelton Avenue, Latonia Avenue), sediment and pollutant collection equipment (e.g., street sweeper) and the development and implementation of state and Federally approved best management practices to improve water quality of Saw Mill Run and the Ohio River. The activities required to deal with our stormwater issues will be the final responsibility of the Stormwater Authority but will be subject to public review and comment.