



## City of McMinnville, Tennessee

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### City of McMinnville

#### Stormwater Utility

#### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. What is stormwater runoff?**

A. Stormwater runoff is the water that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rainstorms. Stormwater runoff is also the rain that flows off grass surfaces and wooded areas that are not absorbed into the soil. The runoff that is not absorbed into the ground pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins and storm sewers. It does not receive any treatment before entering the streams and lakes.

**Q. What is stormwater pollution?**

A. Water from rain or melting snow either seeps into the ground or “runs off” to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes, and other water bodies. On its way, runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water. Examples of common pollutants include fertilizers, pesticides, pet wastes, sediments, oils, salts, trace metals, grass clippings, leaves and litter. Stormwater polluted runoff can be generated anywhere people use or alter the land, such as farms, yards, roofs, driveways, construction sites, and roadways.

**Q. Why is stormwater runoff a problem?**

A. As precipitation falls on undeveloped areas, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into streams, rivers or other water bodies. However, development resulting in rooftops and paved areas prevent water from being absorbed and create a faster rate of runoff. This development often causes localized flooding or water quality issues.

**Q. Why do we need to manage our stormwater runoff?**

A. Stormwater runoff needs to be managed just like any other natural resource. First, it is needed to minimize damage that may occur when stormwater runoff exceeds the capacity of the pipes and open channels used to carry stormwater to our rivers and streams. Second, it is also needed to maintain the quality of our natural watercourses as drinking water supplies and for recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, etc.

**Q. What is the city currently doing about these problems?**

A. Historically, the city has performed maintenance of the stormwater collection system, which includes cleaning, repair and replacement of the City's stormwater infrastructure. When funding was available in the past, the city implemented a small number of flooding and drainage improvement projects. Also, the Federal Government has mandated that all cities the size of McMinnville implement a series of programs and services to improve water quality. These mandates include programs to regulate development, inform/educate the public, and the identification of potential pollution sources throughout the city.

**Q. Who owns the stormwater system?**

A. Individual property owners. Currently, in most cases, the owner of record is the party responsible for accepting, to maintain, to add and to discharge stormwater flows. These systems routinely cross City maintained property that is generally located within public street rights-of-way.

**Q. What is the City's responsibility for stormwater?**

A. The City is responsible for managing all aspects of stormwater within its jurisdiction. The city operates and maintains drainage facilities that are located within the **public right-of-way** or **public easements**. The city is also responsible for the water quality of natural streams within its jurisdiction as designated by both the State and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The City **does not** maintain facilities that are located on private property or that fall under the jurisdiction of other local governments.

**Q. How does the city currently pay for its stormwater services?**

A. Stormwater services are primarily funded from revenue derived from property taxes collected by the City, which are held in the City's General Fund. As such, stormwater must compete for these funds with other City services such as parks, roads, fire, police, etc. Most stormwater-related work is performed by the Public Works Department.

Although the city has done a good job managing the existing program on a limited budget, the backlog of stormwater projects to address significant flooding issues in the City has grown and the new, federally mandated water quality programs that must be implemented have strained existing resources. Due to the high demand on the General Fund over the past several years, the

City is not currently able to set aside enough funds to adequately address all the City's stormwater needs.

**Q. Why has the City of McMinnville chosen to implement a separate fee for stormwater management?**

A. By establishing a dedicated funding source through stormwater fees, the City can ensure that the revenue required to manage and maintain this important system is available. A stormwater utility program will enable the city to take a more proactive approach to stormwater management. The city will be able to provide an increased level of system maintenance and repair that is necessary to support the aging infrastructure in McMinnville. In addition, the utility fees will enable the city to construct necessary capital improvement projects to reduce the risk to public health and safety from flooding. Finally, the fees will support the development of a comprehensive stormwater management plan.

**Q. Is the stormwater utility fee legal?**

A. Stormwater utility fees are legal. Stormwater fees are necessary to maintain the public stormwater system and represent an equitable way for the community to share the cost of a public service. Stormwater utility fees are becoming more and more common throughout the country and are legislated by Congress, mandated by the EPA, authorized by TCA 68-221-1112 and enforced by the EPA and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) Division of Water Pollution Control (WPC) through the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

**Q. What is the basis for the fee that is charged?**

A. The stormwater utility fee is based on the square footage of impervious surface area on your lot. Most utilities across the country have found this to be the most equitable way to charge and collect revenues for this program. A stormwater utility fee is like a water or sewer fee. In essence, customers pay a fee related to the amount of runoff generated from their site, which is directly related to the amount of impervious surface on the site.

**Q. What is the impervious surface area?**

A. Impervious surface area is any surface that does not readily absorb water and impedes the natural infiltration of water into the soil. In terms of the ordinance, it means the number of square feet of horizontal surface covered by buildings, and other impervious surfaces. Common examples include roofs, driveways, parking areas, sidewalks, patios, decks, tennis courts, concrete or asphalt streets, crushed stone and compacted gravel surfaces.

**Q. Why do I have to pay a stormwater fee?**

A. The City is responsible for providing and maintaining infrastructure for drainage and flood control as well as compliance with new Federal and State regulations on water quality. This

includes installation and maintenance of storm drains, inlets, and ditches as well as ensuring State programs such as erosion and sediment control are provided on construction sites. These services are provided to protect personal and public property as well as provide for a healthy environment. Funding is not provided by the Federal or State governments for these services.

**Q. If I live on top of a hill and I don't have drainage problems why would I have to pay stormwater management fees? Or I live on the edge of the city and water drains on my property away from streets and public drainage structure, or live at the bottom of a hill and not the cause of increased flooding from uphill, why should I pay stormwater utility fees?**

**A.** Providing for and addressing stormwater is a public service provided by the City of McMinnville. All buildings contain impervious surfaces (surfaces which prevent water from being infiltrated into the ground). Impervious surfaces on your parcel inevitably place a demand on the stormwater system. Stormwater runoff generated by any property must be controlled and conveyed once it leaves the property so that it does not create problems for others. Both the quantity of stormwater and the quality of stormwater impacts the entire stormwater system for the City. All property owners receive indirect benefits from a properly maintained and operated stormwater management system for the entire City.

Stormwater management activities with broad benefits include keeping public streets drained and cleared, making necessary stormwater infrastructure upgrades, reducing erosion and other pollutants that enter streams and lakes, protecting and restoring streams and other aquatic habitat areas and collecting and conveying stormwater safely through all parts of town. A portion of the fees also provide for compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations for water quality improvements; administration of the City's stormwater management ordinance; public involvement and educational programs; responding to public health and safety issues that benefit all property owners.

**Q. Why is there a stormwater fee instead of a tax?**

**A.** A property's value does not affect runoff, so property taxes are not the most equitable way to pay for stormwater services. For example, a high-rise building and a shopping mall may have similar value and pay similar property taxes. However, the shopping mall produces more runoff because of the amount of parking and rooftops. The fee system ensures the shopping center pays a higher stormwater fee than the high rise.

**Q. Are tax-exempt properties also exempt from the stormwater fee?**

**A.** No, because it is a fee – not a tax. Taxes are based on the value of the property. The stormwater fee is assessed based on the amount of impervious surface on the property (i.e. hard surfaces such as roofs, driveways and parking lots), which is directly related to the amount of runoff the property produces. The runoff generated by these impervious surfaces contributes to pollution and flooding problems and, therefore, all property owners should pay their share of the costs.

**Q. What will the money collected by Stormwater Utility be used to pay for?**

**A.** The revenues generated by this fee will be used to fund all stormwater-related services, which include enforcement of the City's stormwater ordinances, planning for future impacts, stormwater infrastructure maintenance and repairs, construction of necessary capital improvement projects and associated property acquisitions. The fee will also pay for annual compliance requirements of the City's NPDES MS4 permit, which is a program mandated by the State and Federal government for all communities similar in size to McMinnville.

**Q. Do other cities have a stormwater fee?**

**A.** At least 25 cities/counties in Tennessee (and over 2,000 nationwide) currently have a stormwater fee. Many local governments in Tennessee, including Goodlettsville, White House, Portland, Springfield, Alcoa, Signal Mountain, Union City, Dyersburg, Greenbrier, Lakeland among others.

**Q. What are the goals of the City of McMinnville's stormwater program?**

**A.** The stormwater program focuses on reducing the potential for the loss of life or property due to flooding and improving and protecting the quality of our lakes, rivers and streams.

**Q. What are some examples of drainage problems?**

**A.** Drainage problems may include roadway or structural flooding, clogged or failing underground pipes and culverts, stream bank erosion and stormwater pollution affecting a stream.

**Q. Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?**

**A.** Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. When stormwater runs off your property, the City must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits may include providing safe passage on roadways during storms, protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property downstream from your runoff, complying with Federal and State mandates, educating our children about pollution, and improving water quality.

**Q. Why should I pay for rain falling on my property?**

**A.** Property and/or business owners are being charged a utility service fee for the cost and privilege of discharging stormwater into the public stormwater system which the city is obligated under law to maintain. With a stormwater rate, users are charged a fee for runoff discharged from their property to the city's stormwater management system not by the amount of rain falling onto your property. Property owners control the level of development on their properties, which directly impacts the runoff characteristics of the parcel.

**Q. What is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU)?**

A. An ERU is the average square footage of the impervious surface area (measured in square feet) for a single-family residential property determined pursuant to the City’s proposed ordinance. That amount is 2,058 square feet. The ERU was determined by performing detailed measurements of impervious surfaces contained on a representative sample of single-family residential properties across the City. The resulting data was analyzed and the median impervious surface value for the data set determined the ERU value.

**Q. How will single-family residential properties be billed?**

A. Most single-family homes will be charged a rate of \$3.00 (Base ERU) each month. However, for equity purposes, the McMinnville Board of Mayor and Alderman have approved a tiered rate system, whereby small homes will pay a slightly lower rate (\$1.50 each month) and very large homes will pay a higher rate (For every 2,058 square feet above 4,116 square feet, properties will pay 0.5 ERUs in addition to the base rate of 1.0 ERU). The City’s fee will appear on the McMinnville Utilities bill that you receive each month according to the table below.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Monthly Fee</b>
Rate – Single Family Residential Property	<b>Charge per Dwelling Unit</b>
<u>Tier (square feet of impervious area)</u>	
0 to 2,058	0.5 ERU (\$1.50)
2,059 to 4,116	1.0 ERU (\$3.00)
Every 2,058 above 4,116	+0.5 ERU (\$1.50 for every 2,058 sq ft)

Please note that the placement within the tier is NOT based on the square footage of your living space, but rather on the square footage of the impervious surface on your property (rooftop, driveway, patio, etc.).

**Q. How will non-single residential properties (such as duplexes, apartments, condos, etc.) be billed?**

A. If you are in a non-single-family property, the monthly fee will follow the table below. If you are the owner of a complex that receives the utility bill for multiple units, you will receive a charge for each dwelling unit in your complex. The City’s fee will appear on the McMinnville Utilities bill that you receive each month.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Monthly Fee</b>
Rate- Non-Single-Family Residential Property	<b>Charge per Dwelling Unit</b>
<u>Subcategory</u>	
Multi-Family (duplex, triplex, quadplex, apartments, etc.)	0.33 ERU (\$1.00)
Mobile Homes	0.50 ERU (\$1.50)
Town Homes & Condos	1 ERU (\$3.00)

**Q. I am renting an apartment or house. Do I have to pay this charge?**

**A.** Multi-tenant residential properties will be billed the minimum charge (0.33 ERU or \$1.00) if the apartment unit is individually metered. If the apartment complex is master metered, then the customer of record for the master meter will be billed a storm water user fee for the entire property.

Individuals or businesses which rent property will receive billing for the stormwater user fee if the water and/or sewer meter is in the renter’s name. Property owners are obligated to pay stormwater user fees. It will be up to the individual property owner and the renter to decide how to handle the assessed fee.

**Q. How are non-residential property fees determined and billed?**

**A.** All non-residential properties will be billed at a rate based on their measured impervious area. To determine the monthly fee, divide the total impervious area of your property by 2,058 square feet (or one Equivalent Residential Unit) to obtain the number of ERUs and multiply by the base single-family rate of \$3.00 per month per ERU. Impervious areas were determined by analyzing aerial photographs to identify the amount of impervious surface on each property. For most properties, the City’s fee will be billed on the McMinnville Utilities bill. However, in some circumstances, alternative billing methods may be used.

**Q. Is there anything I can do to reduce my fee?**

**A.** Yes, the city has developed a fee reduction/credit manual that provides opportunities for customers to reduce their monthly fee. Customers may apply for these credits, which are awarded to customers that install best management practices on site that reduce the runoff burden on the City’s stormwater system.

**\*Fee reduction/credit manual is in development\***