

Mt. Lebanon Storm Water Fee — Frequently Asked Questions

What is storm water, and why is it a problem in Mt. Lebanon?

Storm water is runoff from rain or snow that falls and either flows directly into nearby streams or travels there through drainage systems such as curbs and gutters, inlets, storm sewers, detention ponds and channels. The flows then are discharged untreated into open channels that lead to larger streams and rivers. In Mt. Lebanon, much of which was developed in the early 1900s, most properties and roads drain to the street, and storm water is conveyed by way of curbs and gutters into a system of underground pipes that 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.

What are impervious surfaces and how do they contribute to storm water 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, and other man-made structures. A built-out community such as Mt. Lebanon has many impervious surfaces; natural surfaces to absorb storm water are limited, so there is a possibility of flooding and related runoff problems.

What is a storm water fee? How would it help Mt. Lebanon?

A storm water fee is a separate entity and fund established by the municipality to ensure that the storm sewer infrastructure is well maintained and storm water is adequately managed. The fee would fund operations and maintenance of the storm water infrastructure, administration of Mt. Lebanon's federally mandated municipal permit requirements, engineering and technical review staff, and design and construction of capital improvements.

Why will Mt. Lebanon property owners need to pay a storm water fee?

Up until 2011, funds for repairing and maintaining the storm water system came from the General Fund of the operating budget. That is no longer feasible because of the severity of the storm water problems: steadily increasing flooding and water pollution; unfunded state and federal mandates to control these problems and meet standards; an aging, deteriorating, and undersized 75-mile conveyance system for storm water, and competition for dollars with other municipal needs.

Why is a storm water fee the preferred way to fund storm sewer system improvements? Why not a tax increase?

A storm water fee is the fairest way to operate and maintain the municipality's storm water system, meet federal water quality requirements and add capital improvements to mitigate flooding, erosion and sedimentation. The storm water fee, like other fees such as water and sanitary sewer, will be based on the amount of demand a user places upon the system. All property owners who generate storm water 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, many of which are heavy users of the storm water system and other public utilities.

Who will pay the storm water fee?

Every property in Mt. Lebanon with impervious area of at least 400 square feet, will be assessed a storm water 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 ____ based on the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU), which is the median amount of impervious surface found on single family residences in the Mt. Lebanon service area. Large properties 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 storm water runoff flowing from properties into streams, creeks, the municipal drainage system and ultimately into larger bodies of water depends on the amount of impervious area on the properties. Billing based on the amount of impervious surface is the most equitable method of determining the fee.

How is the impervious area calculated?

Mt. Lebanon used aerial photographs to measure impervious surface. This calculation is accurate in almost all cases. In cases of error, the calculated amount will err on the side of the customer, likely underestimating the amount of impervious surface on their property.

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 storm water system must be maintained and repaired on a continual basis. And maintenance of the storm water system prevents damage to all properties.

When will the first storm water user fee be billed? How will property owners receive it?

The storm water user fee will appear as a new line item on your monthly Pennsylvania American Water (PAW) beginning September 1 (assuming the proposed ordinance is enacted in August). If you do not currently receive a PAW bill, you may receive a bill with charges for storm water based on the impervious surface on your property

Will the fee change in the future?

The current five-year budget does not include any increase in the proposed rates. According to the proposed ordinance, the commission can adjust the rate in the future by revising the ordinance.

How will Mt. Lebanon spend the money generated by the fee? Is there a list of capital project priorities?

The revenue provided by the storm water fee will increase maintenance on the system, fund drainage improvement projects, enhance enforcement and compliance for new development and provide for drainage studies, public education and outreach. Mt. Lebanon has adopted a five-year budget for capital improvements to address flooding and the other major needs of the system. The capital projects are included in the five-year budget.

For further information, e-mail _____.