



## STORMWATER UTILITY

### *Why is there a new charge on your bill?*

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#### **What Is a Stormwater Utility?**

Bellingham is facing new federal requirements to reduce the amount of polluted stormwater runoff it discharges to waterways. This has required the Town to increase its investment in the stormwater infrastructure management without any funding by the federal government.

The Town recently adopted a new Stormwater Utility Fee to fund the costs associated with stormwater infrastructure management. The fee is based on the amount of hardened or impervious surface—such as parking lots, driveways and buildings—that cause stormwater runoff on each parcel. Like water and sewer fees, a stormwater utility fees proportionately allocates costs based on the amount of use, in this case, the amount of stormwater impervious surface.



#### **What was the process for Stormwater Utility Adoption?**

There was a series of steps to create the utility for the ordinance to be approved:

1. The Selectboard placed an article on the November 13, 2019 Town Meeting Warrant to establish a Stormwater Management Enterprise Fund. The Finance Committee held the public hearing and recommended the article. The Town meeting voted 116 for and 23 against approving the Stormwater Enterprise Fund.
2. The Selectboard discussed and approved an initial Stormwater fee schedule at their meeting on June 8, 2020.
3. The Stormwater utility budget was approved at the June 22, 2020 Town Meeting.
4. The Selectboard held a public hearing on August 24, 2020 and acceptance of the Stormwater Utility Fee Regulations and revised Stormwater Fee Schedule.

#### **What is Stormwater Runoff?**

Developed areas in Bellingham include many parking lots, buildings, roadways and other hardened “impervious surfaces.” When it rains, water runs off impervious surfaces and picks up pet waste, oil, sand, fertilizers, and other pollutants. It then flows into gutters and storm drains, which discharge it directly into the nearest waterway.

Stormwater runoff is the single largest source of pollution for Bellingham’s waterways (brooks,

rivers, streams, ponds and lakes). Substandard stormwater infrastructure is the foremost cause of flooding. Everyone who owns or uses any impervious surfaces contributes to stormwater runoff.

**What is Stormwater Infrastructure?**

Bellingham’s stormwater infrastructure collects runoff from all over town through a network of 2,550 catch basins, more than 63 miles of pipe, 70 detention and water quality basins, and 290 outfalls. Most of the drainage system discharges directly into local waterways with no treatment. Many waterways themselves are a critical part of Bellingham’s stormwater system.

The Town must actively maintain its stormwater system through tasks such as: street sweeping, catch basin cleaning, inspection and repair of pipes, manholes, inlets, stormwater basins, and outfalls, along with building new structures to treat runoff from existing impervious surfaces where minimal or no water quality basins currently exist.

**Why a new fee instead of property taxes?**

In Bellingham, 64% of property tax revenue comes from residential properties, but these properties account for only 46% of the Town’s impervious cover. The fee schedule places 42% of the burden on residential properties.

**Bellingham’s Current Stormwater Budget**

Most of Bellingham’s stormwater activities are carried out by the Department of Public Works (DPW) which estimates the initial cost (FY2021) to be \$1,000,000 annually.

**What Properties Are Affected by This Fee?**

The fee will be charged to all developed parcel owners in the Town of Bellingham. This includes residential and commercial properties as well as nonprofit and tax exempt properties.

**How is the Fee Schedule Determined?**

The Stormwater Fee is calculated by first establishing a base unit called an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). This was determined by calculating the average impervious area of all single-family residential parcels. The average ERU in Bellingham is 3,025 square feet. The next step is to determine the total number of ERU’s for all developed properties in Town. From there the cost per ERU is calculated using simple math. (The annual cost divided by the total ERU’s.) This is a little oversimplified as other factors are weighed such as Senior and other discounts and credits.

Similar to water and trash utility billing programs, the Stormwater fee system provides a discount of 50% to all eligible seniors parcel owners age 65 and older.

**Approved Fee Schedule**

The stormwater utility fee will begin to appear as a line item on quarterly water/sewer/trash bills in October 2020.

**STORMWATER FEE SCHEDULE  
Effective FY 2021**

Description	Fee Class	Impervious Area (ERUs)	Quarterly Fee	Annual Cost
<b>Small Residential</b>				
Single Family Residential (SFR)		1 ERU	\$24	\$96
Condominium Unit		1 ERU	\$24	\$96
2 / 3 Family Residential (R2)		2 ERUs	\$48	\$192
Senior (Over 65 SFR) & Lifeline		0.5 ERU	\$12	\$48
<b>Non-Residential and Residential Greater than 3 units</b>				
	Proportional	Parcel # of ERUs	x \$24 / Quarter	