



STORMWATER UTILITY

Special Election August 23, 2016

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

When is the Stormwater Utility Election?

Norman citizens will vote on whether to establish a stormwater utility on Tuesday, August 23, 2016.

What is stormwater?

Stormwater is not just rain. Stormwater is the result of rain flowing over hard surfaces and picking up pollutants and contaminants. It makes its way through our drainage system, creeks and streams to the Canadian River, as well as to Lake Thunderbird, which supplies 70% of our drinking water.

Some pollutants – like pesticides, fertilizers, oil and soap – are harmful in any quantity. Other pollutants – like sediment from construction, pet waste, grass clippings and leaves – can harm creeks, rivers and lakes in sufficient quantities.

Did you know? Each year Lake Thunderbird supplies 3 billion gallons of water for our community?

Why do we need to manage our stormwater runoff?
Stormwater runoff needs to be managed just as our water, sewage, roadway, and solid waste systems are managed. Stormwater management is essential to protecting the quality of life and of our lake, which is used for drinking water and recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, and boating. Stormwater also needs to be managed to ensure that runoff does not flood or erode private property or otherwise put public safety at risk.

What are some examples of hard surfaces?

Hard surface (or impervious area) reduces the rainfall's ability to soak into the ground. Examples are buildings (homes and businesses), pavements, driveways, parking lots, and paved walkways. As rain runs off of these surfaces, it carries pollutants into Lake Thunderbird and the Canadian River. Runoff not only pollutes our waterways but also erodes streambanks. The mix of pollution and eroded dirt muddies the water and causes problems downstream.

How does the runoff get polluted?

Rain runs off of the hard surfaces and over lawns, picking up gasoline, motor oil, fertilizers, and pet waste. Rain washes off of roofs and along with it bird waste, dirt, dust and pollen that have collected on the roof since the last rain. The polluted runoff flows over the street and into the drainage system, collecting more contaminants, grass, and debris from the street. It flows through our underground system of drainage pipes into our streams and creeks, and untreated, into Lake Thunderbird and the Canadian River.

Stormwater isn't treated?

Storm drain systems are NOT sewer collection systems. Sewer collection systems take all water used inside homes and businesses (from sinks, bathtubs, washing machines, toilets, etc.) and send it to a water reclamation plant for treatment.

Storm drain systems, on the other hand, are designed to channel stormwater quickly to our waterways, assisting in preventing the flooding of our streets, homes and businesses. Stormwater that goes into our storm drains DOES NOT go to a treatment plant; instead draining directly into the nearest body of water picking up pollutants along the way. Stormwater that picks up pollutants can cause harm to fish, plants and other living things in our ecosystem.

What is the impact of polluted runoff flowing into streams and creeks?

Our streams and creeks feed into our rivers and lake. We all drink water so we are all affected when our water is polluted. As water treatment costs increase, the cost of drinking water increases.

Polluted runoff going into lakes may cause unhealthy water or encourage excessive bacterial growth in lakes. If you like to fish, swim or boat, you may have heard of advisories warning you not to swim, fish or boat in a certain area because of unhealthy water or too much algae. Unhealthy water in the lake could also impact tourism and water recreation.

What are the major pollutants?

- Pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers – over watering causes these pollutants to flow to storm drains
- Lawn clippings, other green waste, and animal waste
- Silt and soil from construction sites and exposed ground surfaces
- Oil and automotive fluids from leaks, spills and dumping
- Paint and paint thinners through improper disposal
- Paper, plastic, and other trash items such as cups, wrappers, and packaging

Why is Norman seeking to establish a stormwater utility?

A stormwater utility will provide a predictable and stable source of revenue to allow the community to address needs caused by stormwater runoff. This includes programs to:

- Protect drinking water
- Maintain creeks, streams, and drainage systems
- Repair erosion of streams and creeks
- Assist neighborhoods with stormwater system improvements
- Meet federal and state regulatory requirements (unfunded mandates)

Did you know? On the City's last Community Survey, 93% of respondents indicated that funding stormwater improvements to prevent flooding and protect water quality in lakes and streams was important, very important, or extremely important.

What are unfunded mandates?

Norman, like over 40 other Oklahoma communities, has state and federal requirements to reduce polluted runoff into creeks, streams, rivers and lakes and protect drinking water. Because Norman has not had a stormwater utility, we have not had a dedicated revenue source to focus on pollutants at Lake Thunderbird, and now we have additional requirements to monitor and reduce the limits of pollution in our lake. If we continue to ignore these issues, we could face possible fines and penalties of up to \$10,000 per day not to mention to grave impacts on Lake Thunderbird and Norman's primary source of drinking water

For example, the federal 1972 Clean Water Act requires cities to take steps to reduce polluted stormwater runoff. These laws require cities in Oklahoma, since the 1990's, to:

- Conduct public education, outreach and involvement about polluted stormwater runoff;
- Detect illicit discharges (such as illegal dumping);
- Control construction site runoff;
- Control post-construction runoff;
- Perform municipal housekeeping (take steps to prevent runoff from city buildings and activities)

What are the rates for the proposed utility?

The monthly utility rate you will see on the ballot is \$1.25 per 1,000 square feet (rounded to the closest whole number) of impervious surface (hard surface area) in addition to a \$1 per month stormwater management fee.

Here is an example: The average home in Norman is a 2900 square feet home with 700 additional square feet of hard surface area, so a total of 3600 in square feet of impervious area. This home would pay \$6 per month.

FAST FACT: Sixty eight percent of Norman residents would pay less than \$6 a month. Over 82% of Norman residents would pay less than \$9 a month.



Each year Lake Thunderbird supplies **three billion gallons of water** for our community, including water for drinking fountains like this one at June Benson Park.

Why is the rate based on hard surface area?

Impervious area is the most common approach that cities across the nation use to measure a property's stormwater runoff. More impervious area means more stormwater runoff with its contaminants and pollutants that impact water quality. The rate is tied to the amount of impact a property's polluted runoff has on the community's water quality and drainage system.

What if the impervious area on my property is not calculated properly? Is there a process for appealing the calculation?

Yes, the ordinance provides for a simple administrative appeal process to determine the correct amount of impervious surface if it appears to be incorrectly calculated.

Will the University of Oklahoma pay stormwater utility rates?

OU is unique in that the university operates its own stormwater management program. The City will work with the university to determine what stormwater utility rate is appropriate, considering the university’s efforts to comply with state and federal unfunded mandates as a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) entity which operates its own stormwater management program.

Is there a reduced rate for low income families?

Yes, there is a 25% reduction in the rate for stormwater utility customers who are low income, as defined by the federal guidelines in Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937. The rate \$1.25 per 1000 square feet of impervious surface will be calculated at a reduction of 25% (\$1.25 - \$0.375 = \$0.875 per 1000 square feet of impervious surface).

What will the rate be for non-profit entities in our community?

An organization that has obtained a 501(c)(3) exemption from the IRS will have a maximum rate of \$300 per parcel per month.

What will the rate be for our public schools in Norman?

The ordinance includes a limit on the maximum amount that a public school would pay. Any parcel owned by any public school will have a maximum rate of \$300 per month. In addition, public schools that offer programs and education about best practices for improving water quality and conserving resources can be credited up to 100% of their fees. Policies regarding these credits will be approved by the City Council.

Are there any other credits available?

Yes, the ordinance provides the City Council the authority to establish policies about whether to grant credits for low impact development strategies that have been shown to reduce the quantity and/or improve the quality of polluted stormwater runoff. Low impact development is also known as “green infrastructure.” An example might be replacing an impervious (hard) surface with a pervious or permeable surface that allows stormwater to move through the surface, rather than “runoff” the surface area.

Is there an exemption for land that is not developed?

Yes, raw land or undeveloped lots will not be subject to the monthly stormwater management fee or the utility rate.

What about the rural areas in Norman?

One of the reasons so many communities use impervious area to measure a property’s stormwater runoff is that it is directly tied to the impact the polluted runoff has on the City’s water quality and drainage system. All hard surface areas result in some runoff.

The City Council has the authority to develop policies that may provide for offsets when the percentage of impervious area is significantly less than the pervious or permeable area.

How will these dedicated revenues from the utility benefit our community?

- More street sweepers to help reduce contaminants and debris in our streets
- More prevention of activities that cause pollutants and sediment to flow into streams, creeks, the Canadian River and to Lake Thunderbird.
- More educational programs about reducing pollution
- More repair and restoration of eroding streams that threaten property, water, and sewer lines
- More removal of debris that clogs pipes, which will improve the flow of runoff through the drainage system
- More maintenance and flood relief projects for neighborhoods such as detention basins, drainage facilities, and dams

Are there other ways would Norman benefit from a stormwater utility?

Yes, Lake Thunderbird not only supplies 70% of Norman’s drinking water, it also provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. A stormwater utility would help lessen the impact of pollutants that could lessen the quality and safety of the water at Lake Thunderbird. Dirty water causes harm to humans, wildlife, aquatic life and the local economy.

Recreational tourism is a benefit to our economy. Norman competes with other cities in the state for recreational tourism dollars, jobs, and economic development. Clean water plays a role in our local economy.

Is water quality monitored in Thunderbird Lake?

Yes, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board does water quality testing on an annual basis through a contract with the Central Oklahoma Master Conservancy District (COMCD). They monitor phosphorous, nitrogen, dissolved oxygen (the amount of oxygen in the water), and turbidity which is the degree to which the water loses transparency due to suspended solids that are usually visible to the naked eye. They also measure things such as the pH and temperature.

Continued monitoring of the lake will allow us to measure the improvements to water quality that we gain by the stormwater management practices we are able to employ if the utility is approved by voters.

Will the stormwater utility reduce future flooding issues like those experienced in May 2015?

Yes, investments made possible by this stormwater utility will reduce impacts of flooding and allow public infrastructure to withstand larger flood events. For example:

- Projects to lessen flooding along major drainage ways will improve the water flow capacity and reduce overflow from creeks into homes and businesses
- More maintenance of the existing streams and channels in Norman
- More maintenance of 140 miles of existing underground stormwater pipes
- Projects to assist neighborhoods, property owners, and homeowner associations with repairs or upgrades to drainage facilities, detention basins, dams and structures

Did you know? Norman has 320 miles of existing streams and channels.

Norman has experienced flooding since it was founded in the late 1800s. Over the last ten years, the City of Norman made efforts toward improving flood control and flood relief in Norman through the adoption of the revised Floodplain Ordinance and the adoption of the Stormwater Master Plan. Over time, the stormwater utility will enable the City to reduce flooding in Norman.

How much revenue is the stormwater utility expected to generate?

The stormwater utility is expected to generate \$4,900,000 in the first full year. This revenue will be used for:

- \$1,100,000 in basic maintenance of stormwater pipeline and channel maintenance;
- \$1,680,000 to meet state and federal regulatory requirements for stormwater quality, street sweeping, and to reduce pollutants in Lake Thunderbird; and
- \$2, 120,000 to enhance maintenance in neighborhoods and small-scale capital flood relief projects.

Will the money collected through the Stormwater Utility be enough to cover all stormwater management costs?

The amount collected through the stormwater fees will not cover all of the city's stormwater management costs. The

City will prioritize the financial needs of the stormwater program based on regulatory requirements and public safety priorities. The City will continue to supplement the stormwater management costs from the General Fund and through other sources.

Why didn't the City set the rates so that the revenue does cover the costs of the stormwater management?

In public meetings and through public input, the City Council heard concerns from residents about the costs of fully-funding the utility and felt that it was best to find a balance between funding sources. Dedicated revenues from the stormwater utility will help the City meet new regulatory requirements and begin to address many of the water quality and flood relief projects that have been previously identified as priorities for our community but which could not be funded through the General Fund due to budget constraints.

Do other cities in Oklahoma have stormwater utilities?

Yes, in addition to over 20 other Oklahoma cities, Midwest City, Oklahoma City, Edmond, Broken Arrow, and Stillwater have stormwater utilities. Most recently, the City Council in Chickasha passed an ordinance to establish a stormwater utility in that city.

Did you know? Norman is the third largest city in Oklahoma but is the only large city in the state that does not have a stormwater utility.

When would the stormwater utility rate go into effect?

If approved by voters, the proposed stormwater utility would be effective November 1, 2016.

Where can I find more information?

You can find more information on the City's website at www.NormanOK.gov. From the homepage, there is a link on the right side of the page that says Stormwater Election – August 23. You can also go directly to the information at www.bit.ly/NormanSWU

In addition, Norman City Council members are hosting Ward meetings and there will be a public meeting for all residents. City staff and City Council members will be present to provide information and answer questions about the stormwater utility. You can find more information about these meetings at www.bit.ly/SWUmeetings.