

STORMWATER

Sugar Hill Stormwater Management Program

All developed properties in a community contribute stormwater runoff to the public drainage system and, in some cases, to recurring drainage problems. Stormwater runoff is water that drains off houses, rooftops, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, roads and other surfaces that prohibit the rainfall from soaking into the ground when it rains. This stormwater runoff then flows into the City drainage system and, eventually, into our streams and creeks with increased speed and higher volumes. In addition to potential flooding and erosion problems, the stormwater runoff washes chemicals, debris, trash and other pollutants into the drainage system and our local surface waters.

Management of stormwater runoff has become an increasingly important responsibility for local governments like the City of Sugar Hill. Recently enacted stormwater regulations, combined with aging infrastructure and deferral of needed capital projects, have created a need for local governments to develop and implement more comprehensive stormwater management programs to achieve compliance with new State and Federal Stormwater Regulations and to address drainage system maintenance issues; high priority capital projects; and development regulation & oversight.

The Sugar Hill Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) is responsible for the management and regulation of stormwater and drainage issues within the City. A Stormwater Utility has been formed to collect revenues that will be dedicated solely to addressing stormwater management and drainage issues. The following activities have been identified for implementation by the SWMP:

- Achieve Compliance with Applicable State and Federal Regulations
 - NPDES Phase I Stormwater Permit
 - Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District
- Implementation of Capital Drainage Improvement Projects
 - Capital Construction
 - Drainage System Retrofitting
 - Drainage Basin Masterplanning & Floodplain Mapping Updates
- Drainage System Operations & Maintenance (O&M)
 - Improve City Responsiveness / Capabilities
 - Enhanced System Inspections
 - Routine & Scheduled Drainage System Cleaning / Repair
 - Capital Replacement of Aging Drainage System Components

The SWMP must undertake various activities including the cleaning of ditches and other stormwater conveyance systems; replacement of aging culverts and drainage structures; and construction of new culvert systems to increase or improve conveyance capacity. In addition, the City will need to formulate and implement an ongoing regulatory compliance strategy to address new and expanding requirements. The City will also be implementing an Operation and Maintenance (O&M) program that is focused on being more proactive through routine and scheduled drainage system maintenance. In order to successfully implement the SWMP, a Stormwater Utility and user fee charge has been approved to fund the stormwater program. The Stormwater Utility and user fee charges encompass all residences, businesses, institutions and government facilities because all developed properties generate stormwater runoff. Please review the following FAQs for more information.

What is a Stormwater User Fee? A Stormwater User Fee is a charge for stormwater management services provided by the City to all residential and non-residential properties in the service area. The service area contains all properties within the corporate boundaries of the City of Sugar Hill. The revenue is collected in a user fee system that can only be utilized for the provision of stormwater management services.

What is the user fee charge based on for a property? The user fee charge is based on the amount of **impervious surfaces** on a parcel. Impervious surfaces are typically manmade features on a property that cannot absorb rainfall including rooftops, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, and other similar structures and areas. The square footage of impervious surface on a property has a direct correlation to the stormwater runoff characteristics for the parcel including runoff volume, velocity, discharge rate and pollutant concentration. Increased runoff volume, velocity, discharge rate and pollutant concentration place a greater demand on the City drainage system to safely and efficiently convey runoff from that parcel. Larger parcels with greater amounts of impervious area will be charged a higher user fee based on the relative demand placed on the City’s drainage system and the increased service level provided to that parcel. The City used the County’s aerial photography to determine the amount of impervious surface on each parcel. In the future, a combination of aerial photography, building permits and field inspections will be used to update the system.

Isn’t this just another tax? *No, a stormwater user fee is not a tax.* Each house and every business (old or new) makes use of the public stormwater system. The stormwater utility is structured so that each user (property owner) contributes their share toward the upkeep of this vital service as a cost of living and doing business in Sugar Hill. Although the user fee is a new charge to residents and businesses for stormwater services, the cost has always existed and was absorbed by the City from general tax revenue. Furthermore, the user fee is not based on the assessed “value” of a property like a tax is typically calculated and all stormwater user fee revenues **must** be spent on stormwater and drainage related issues whereas General Fund Tax Revenues are not subject to such restrictions.

How will the user fee charge be calculated? The City has developed a rate structure that apportions costs to properties based on the relative demand (or amount of stormwater runoff contribution) that a parcel places on the City drainage system and Stormwater Management Program. The Stormwater Fee is currently set at a monthly fee in increments of \$1.50 per every 1,000 square feet of impervious surface, which equates to an annual fee of \$18.00 per 1,000 square feet. You can determine your rate by measuring the square feet of impervious surfaces on your property and using the chart below. The Stormwater bill will be sent to the property owner.

	Impervious Surface (sq ft)	Stormwater Monthly Rate	Annual Fee	
	0 - 999	Exempt	Exempt	
Residential & Non-Residential	1,000 – 1,999	\$1.50	\$18.00	* The Chart continues in increments of 1,000 square feet at \$1.50 a month (\$18.00 annually)
	2,000 – 2,999	\$3.00	\$36.00	
	3,000 – 3,999	\$4.50	\$54.00	
	4,000 - 4,999	\$6.00	\$72.00	
	5,000 - *	*	*	

How does this fee compare to what County residents pay? The County’s rates are based on paying a fee of \$2.46 per 100 square feet of impervious surface area per year. The City will bill in increments of 1,000 square feet of impervious area per year, however, in order to provide a true comparison, we have calculated that a City resident would pay an average of \$1.80 per 100 square feet of impervious surface area per year. The lower fee reflects the unique differences between the County’s Stormwater Management Program and the City’s needs.

Why do some residential properties pay more? The Stormwater Fee is based off of the demand placed on the City’s drainage system. The more impervious surface a property has, the more demand it places on the City’s drainage system. Note that everyone pays the same rate: \$1.50 per 1,000 square feet of impervious surface, but the more impervious surface area a property has, the higher the annual Fee, as shown in the chart above.

Is there any way to reduce the Stormwater Fee that is being charged? Both residential and non-residential customers can apply for and secure credits against their stormwater user fee charge by following the procedures outlined in the Stormwater Utility Credit Manual. The credits are based on those methods used to directly reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on the City’s drainage system. The Credit Manual is available at the City’s web page: www.cityofsugarhill.com

Who pays for private streets, common driveways and parking areas? Customers that live in developments with common areas such as private streets, parking areas, Amenity areas, etc..., the property owner (most likely Home Owners Association) will be billed for the impervious area associated with the development.

What will be the frequency of billing and the billing mechanism? At this time it is anticipated that the annual Property Tax bill will have a separate line item for the Sugar Hill Stormwater Utility Fee. Property owners in unincorporated Gwinnett County have been billed this way since 2006.

Who do I call if I have additional questions? Contact the City of Sugar Hill with any questions at 770-945-6716.