

**CITY OF URBANA  
STORMWATER UTILITY FEE  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**GENERAL QUESTIONS**

**1. What is the stormwater utility fee?**

A stormwater utility fee is a fee that produces revenue that is dedicated to improving drainage, controlling flooding, improving water quality and implementing the Environmental Protection Agency's stormwater regulations. The stormwater utility fee is charged to each property based on the potential runoff that would result from that property in a storm event.

**2. What is a stormwater utility?**

A stormwater utility is a funding concept in which an enterprise fund is created to fund stormwater management. Similar utilities exist for water, sewer, electricity, and similar services. The enterprise fund typically has a dedicated revenue source such as the stormwater utility fee. Revenues that have been dedicated to the enterprise fund by ordinance, as has been done for the stormwater utility fee, may not be used for any unrelated purposes.

**3. When did the fee go into effect?**

The stormwater utility fee was adopted on May 7, 2012. The effective date of the stormwater utility fee was September 1, 2013 and the first bills were mailed by the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District in their September-October 2013 billing cycle. The ordinance is found in Article VIII of Chapter 24 of the City of Urbana Municipal Code.  
<https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>

**4. How was the management and operation of our stormwater drainage system funded before this stormwater utility fee?**

The funding source for the City of Urbana stormwater management program prior to the stormwater utility fee was traditionally the City's general fund. Revenue in the general fund comes from a variety of sources, including taxes and fees.

**5. Why is the stormwater utility fee necessary?**

The City has elected to create the stormwater utility fee for a number of reasons.

- a. Aging infrastructure: The city is over 190 years old and has infrastructure that is in dire need of rehabilitation and/or replacement.
- b. Equity: Since the development of each property determines the amount of stormwater that runs off each property, not its taxable value, the stormwater utility fee funding approach is the most equitable way to fund the stormwater program.
- c. Competition for funds: The City funds a large number of programs from its general fund. The demand for funding by these programs has grown at a faster pace than the funding itself. As with other infrastructure programs, stormwater program costs can be reasonably and fairly quantified and distributed among users of the services.
- d. Mandatory programs: The City is subject to a National Pollutant Discharge System (NPDES) stormwater permit and is required to implement six minimum control measures

as defined by the state and federal government to manage the quality of stormwater runoff.

- e. Accountability and transparency: Because user fees are dedicated to funding specific programs the citizens can see exactly how the city is using the revenues that are collected.

**6. Who is in responsible for maintaining and repairing the public stormwater drainage system?**

The Public Works Department of the City of Urbana is responsible for all aspects of the City’s stormwater management program.

**7. Is there a way to reduce fees?**

There are no stormwater utility fee reductions available to single family residential, duplex, or vacant properties. For all other property classes there are two ways to reduce the stormwater utility fees charged to the property. First, you may reduce the number of billing units by reducing the amount of impervious area (see #2 & #3 under Technical Questions) on the property. Second, you may control stormwater runoff on-site in a manner consistent with the City’s Storm Water Utility Fee credit program. (The stormwater utility fee credit program is described under Credit & Incentive Questions.)

**8. With whom can I speak regarding billing issues?**

If you have a general billing question or a specific question about your account balance, your question should be directed to Customer Service at the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District (UCSD). UCSD provides the billing services for the Stormwater Utility Fee and can be reached at (217) 367-3409. Business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

**9. To whom would I direct technical questions about the stormwater utility fee?**

If you have a technical question about the City’s stormwater utility fee, please contact the City’s Engineering Division at (217) 384-2342 or please send an e-mail to [swuf@urbanaininois.us](mailto:swuf@urbanaininois.us).

**10. Do other Illinois communities charge stormwater utility fees?**

There are at least sixteen other cities in Illinois that have adopted similar fees, including:

Rantoul	Bloomington	Normal	Champaign
Morton	Rock Island	Moline	East Moline
Downers Grove	Highland Park	Tinley Park	Northbrook
Richton Park	Palatine	Aurora	Rolling Meadows

**TECHNICAL QUESTIONS**

**1. How is the stormwater utility fee calculated?**

The stormwater utility fee is based on the amount of impervious area (an area that either prevents or impedes rain water’s ability to soak into the ground) on a property. Single family residential and duplex properties are assessed 1 Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU), and vacant properties are assessed 0.5 ERUs. (For more information on ERUs, see #1 under Commercial Customers Questions.)

**2. Why is the user fee based on impervious areas?**

Stormwater runoff from individual properties can be directly attributed to the amounts of impervious surfaces on the property. Impervious and compacted surfaces allow the water to fill up our pipes and streams more quickly, increasing the potential for street and/or storm system flooding during heavy rains and increasing maintenance and repair requirements of the storm sewer system.

**3. What is the difference between an impervious surface area and a pervious surface area?**

Impervious surface areas are those areas that prevent or impede the infiltration of stormwater into the soil. Common impervious areas include, but are not limited to, rooftops, sidewalks, walkways, patio areas, driveways, parking lots, storage areas, compacted stone, and permanent awnings. Pervious surface areas include undeveloped lands, lawns, gardens, and other forms of vegetative cover.

**4. How does the type of surface affect the user fee?**

For properties other than single family residential and duplex, as the amount of impervious surface increases, the stormwater utility fee will increase also. Development that minimizes impervious footprint, such as building multi-story structures rather than sprawling single story structures effectively provide the same useable space with less impervious area and therefore are billed less.

**5. Are any properties exempt from the stormwater utility fee?**

All properties are subject to the stormwater utility fee except the public right-of-way. In Urbana public streets are designed to be part of the stormwater system and are, therefore, exempt from the fee.

**6. What is a storm sewer system?**

The storm sewer system consists of sewers, storm drains, curbs, gutters, ditches, swales, retention and/or detention ponds or basins, dams, manmade channels or storm drains, and flood control facilities and appurtenances which are designed or used for the collection, control, transportation, treatment or discharge of stormwater.

**RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER QUESTIONS**

**1. I am on a septic system. Do I have to pay this bill?**

Yes. All properties benefit from the City's stormwater management program. The Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District is the City's billing agent for the stormwater utility fee. There is no relationship between the sanitary and stormwater management programs or their fees.

**2. I pay homeowners' association fees to maintain a retention pond/basin for stormwater. All of the stormwater in my neighborhood drains into this retention pond/basin. Why should I have to pay the stormwater utility fee?**

The stormwater utility fee was developed based on the cost of stormwater services provided by the City of Urbana. Credits are provided for activities that lower the City's cost of

providing these services. Building and maintaining retention ponds/basins are requirements of the City of Urbana that must be met in order to develop properties and do not represent an element of the City's stormwater program cost.

**3. Are there ways to reduce my stormwater bill?**

The stormwater utility fee credit program is not available to single family residential, duplex, or vacant properties. If your home is on more than one parcel, you will be paying a fee for each parcel. You may be able to reduce your fee by combining parcels. For more information on combining multiple properties, please contact the Engineering Division of the Public Works Department.

**4. I have water in my backyard every time it rains. Will the City fix this problem with the new fee?**

With some exceptions, the City's stormwater program is provided within the public right-of-way. Backyard drainage is typically considered to be outside the extent of these services. The Public Works Department will meet with you to discuss your problem and possible solutions. Please contact Public Works at (217) 384-2342 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday or at <https://urbanaininois.us/citizens-voice>.

**COMMERCIAL CUSTOMER QUESTIONS**

**1. What does "ERU" on my stormwater bill mean?**

ERU stands for "Equivalent Residential Unit". It represents the average level of impervious area found on single family residential and duplex properties in the City of Urbana. Based on measurement of the impervious surfaces on 120 single family residential and duplex properties, it was estimated that the average amount of impervious area on these properties is 3,100 square feet. The ERU in turn is used as a billing unit for properties other than single family residential and duplexes. The imperviousness on these properties is measured and divided by 3,100 square feet to determine the number of billing units, or ERUs, on the property.

**2. May I see a map that shows the impervious areas on my property?**

Single family residential, duplex, and vacant properties are billed at a flat rate and the impervious area of each individual lot is not measured. For all other properties, a map that shows the measured impervious area on top of the aerial photograph can be provided to you. Please contact City's Engineering Division at (217) 384-2342 or please send an e-mail to [swuf@urbanaininois.us](mailto:swuf@urbanaininois.us).

**3. What can I do if I do not agree with the City's estimate of ERU's on my stormwater bill?**

The process for adjusting the number of ERUs billed to a property is defined in Sections 24-194 and 24-195 of the City of Urbana Municipal Code <https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>. The Director of Public Works will make the final determination on any adjustments upon presentation by the parcel owner of factual evidence that establishes that the impervious area used to determine the parcel's computed number of ERUs was incorrect. The owner of the parcel is

responsible for initiating any review of the impervious area computation for a parcel and for presenting factual evidence in support of a change in the impervious area.

**4. Can I reduce my stormwater bill by building ponds or other stormwater controls?**

Yes, it is possible to reduce your stormwater bill by implementing a variety of on-site stormwater management practices. The stormwater management practices that qualify for Stormwater Utility Fee credits and the credit amounts that are available are described in the **stormwater utility fee credit and incentive manual**. The manual can be downloaded from the Stormwater page of the City's website [https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater\\_UTILITY\\_Fee](https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater_UTILITY_Fee), or can be obtained at the Public Works Department, 706 South Glover Avenue, Urbana, Illinois 61802 for free.

## CREDIT & INCENTIVE QUESTIONS

**1. What is a stormwater utility fee credit?**

Stormwater utility fee credits are recurring discounts against a property's stormwater utility fee. The credits are granted based on the property owner's commitment to on-site stormwater management practices that reduce the cost of the city providing stormwater management services. Credits are not available to single family residential, duplex, or vacant properties.

**2. Where can I get more information on the stormwater utility fee credit program?**

The stormwater management practices that qualify for stormwater utility fee credits and the credit amounts that are available are described in the **stormwater utility fee credit and incentive manual**. The manual can be downloaded from the stormwater page of the City's website [https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater\\_UTILITY\\_Fee](https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater_UTILITY_Fee) or can be obtained for free at the Public Works Department, 706 South Glover Avenue.

**3. Why are stormwater utility fee credits limited to 50%?**

The City's stormwater management program provides two distinct categories of service; it manages the stormwater runoff from individual properties and it provides communitywide stormwater management that allows safe movement around the city both during and immediately after rainfall events. Credits are limited to the portion of the program costs that are related to managing stormwater runoff from your specific property.

**4. What is a stormwater utility fee incentive and how is it different from a credit?**

Incentives are one-time disbursements that help a property owner who wishes to manage runoff from his or her property in a manner not currently required by city standards. Credits are recurring discounts for providing on-site stormwater management services that favorably impact the City's cost of providing services.

**5. Where can I get more information on the stormwater utility fee incentive program?**

The stormwater management program incentives are described in the **stormwater utility fee credit and incentive manual**. The manual can be downloaded from the stormwater page of the City's website [https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater\\_UTILITY\\_Fee](https://urbanaininois.us/Stormwater_UTILITY_Fee) or can be obtained for free at the Public Works Department, 706 South Glover Avenue, Urbana, Illinois 61802.

## BILLING QUESTIONS

### 1. How often will I receive a stormwater bill?

Most accounts are to be billed on a bi-monthly basis. There are some accounts that will be billed either monthly or annually. The Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District will be billing the stormwater utility fee for the City. If you currently receive a bill for sanitary service from the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District, the stormwater utility fee will be a new service on that same bill.

### 2. Who do I contact if I believe there is a billing error?

If you believe there is an error related to crediting of past payments, your call should be directed to the Customer Service Department at the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District. The phone number is (217) 367-3409. Business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

If your question relates to how the number of billing units, or “ERU’s,” for your property was determined, your call should be directed to the City’s Engineering Division at (217) 384-2342 or please send an e-mail to [swuf@urbanaininois.us](mailto:swuf@urbanaininois.us).

### 3. Is there an appeal process?

Yes, there is an appeal process. The process is described in Section 24-204 of the City of Urbana Municipal Code.

<https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>.

### 4. I own more than one property, can I receive one bill for all of them?

The policy of the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District is to send an individual bill to each service address.

### 5. I am a tenant at this property; do I have to pay these fees?

If you are a tenant on the property you should not receive the bill for the stormwater utility fee. Section 24-172(c) of the City of Urbana Municipal Code <https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf> specifies that the property owner is the responsible party for payment of the fee. You should refer to your lease agreement to determine your contractual obligations to the property’s owner.

### 6. I am buying this property on contract; do I have to pay these fees?

The ordinance that establishes the stormwater utility fee defines the property owner as being responsible for payment of the fee (City of Urbana Municipal Code Sec. 24-172(c))

<https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>.

Unless you are identified in the property records of the Cunningham Township Assessor as the property owner, you are not responsible for payment of the stormwater utility fee.

### 7. Are we allowed to split this fee between our tenants?

The ordinance that establishes the stormwater utility fee defines the property owner as being responsible for payment of the fee (City of Urbana Municipal Code Sec. 24-172(c)).

<https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>. This is

consistent with the policies of the billing agent, the Urbana and Champaign Sanitary District, for sanitary sewer charges.

**8. I received a bill for a vacant property that I own. What should I do?**

The minimum stormwater utility fee to be charged to any property in Urbana is one half of an ERU (City of Urbana Municipal Code Sec. 24-172(e))

<https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/ord-no-2012-04-043.pdf>. You should pay the amount shown on the bill from UCSD.