

Stormwater Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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1 General Stormwater Issues

1.1 Q: What is stormwater runoff?

A: Stormwater runoff is water resulting from rainfall that does not get absorbed by the surfaces it touches and can be observed flowing over yards, streets, rooftops, parking lots, and other surfaces when it rains. Stormwater runoff flows into the stormwater collection system, which consists of catch basins (aka storm drains), pipes, and ditches. It is ultimately conveyed to our local streams, rivers, ponds, and Lake Champlain.

1.2 Q: What is a stormwater utility and why did Shelburne create one?

A: The EPA and the state require municipalities to meet new stormwater standards. The Town is responsible for at least \$3.5 M in known capital projects that need to be completed in Shelburne the next 10 years. It is anticipated that additional requirements and costs are on the horizon as well. In the Town of Shelburne, the Stormwater Utility is the method that is being used to provide dedicated funding for the Town's stormwater management program. The funding is provided via the stormwater user fee. The Town will spend approximately \$700,000 per year on the stormwater management program once all services are fully implemented. These costs will adequately cover all personnel and stormwater services, including: maintenance, capital improvements, permit compliance, erosion and sediment control, illicit discharge detection and elimination, engineering and design, system inventories, watershed assessments, and plan reviews.

1.3 Q: *How and when will this program address the water quality problems in Shelburne?*

A: It is important to remember that drainage and water quality issues that exist in Shelburne did not occur overnight. They are the result of incremental development. It will take time to remedy many of the existing issues. The stormwater fee was set at a level that will allow the Town to make consistent, gradual improvements, rather than setting a high fee that would be needed to fix all the problems at one time. Stormwater projects will have to be prioritized based on their severity, location, cost, State permit requirements/deadlines, and other factors.

To date, the Town of Shelburne has identified a number of capital projects that are needed to reduce pollutants and water quantity problems. In many of these cases, the Town has been aware of the problem for several years. However, a past lack of funding for stormwater has prevented the Town from adequately addressing these problems. With the stormwater fee, there will be a dedicated source of funding that is earmarked specifically to begin addressing this long list of capital projects. In addition, this dedicated revenue source will enable the Town to leverage other

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funding sources such as Federal and State grants, which commonly require some portion of local matching funds.

1.4 Q: What is an "impervious surface"?

A: Impervious surfaces are defined as those areas within developed land that prevent or significantly impede the natural infiltration of stormwater into the soil. Common impervious surfaces include, but are not limited to, rooftops, sidewalks, walkways, patio areas, driveways, parking lots, storage areas, compacted gravel or soil surfaces, awnings (and other fabric or plastic coverings) and any other surface that prevents or impedes the natural infiltration of stormwater runoff into the ground.

1.5 Q: Why are gravel driveways considered impervious surface?

A: For all practical purposes, these are indeed virtually as impervious as pavement. The State of Vermont considers gravel and dirt driveways and roads as impervious surfaces.

1.6 Q: How is the amount of impervious surface calculated on all of the properties within the Town?

A: Satellite imagery was used in determining the amount of impervious surface of all parcels within the Town.

1.7 Q: Have additional staff been hired for the Stormwater Utility?

A: No. Unlike other utilities you may be familiar with, such as water and electric utilities, there is not a separate stormwater department or entity that houses a multitude of utility maintenance and administrative staff. Instead, the Shelburne Water Quality Division oversees stormwater work. To ensure adequate stormwater services are provided to the community, the Water Quality superintendent will dedicate some time to overseeing stormwater topics. The superintendent will work with engineers, consultants, contractors, and the neighboring South Burlington Stormwater Utility to provide services.

1.8 Q: How were citizens involved in the development of Shelburne's stormwater management program?

A: A stormwater advisory committee (SWAC) was formed to provide input and guidance before and during the development of the stormwater utility and associated user fee. A variety of diverse interests were represented by the citizens committee, including: homeowners, developers, local business-owners, environmental organizations, technical experts (e.g., engineers or scientists), and members of the educational and non-profit community.

2 Stormwater Fee

2.1 Q: Which properties pay the stormwater fee?

A: All developed properties in the Town of Shelburne pay the stormwater fee. Impervious surfaces such as buildings and pavement are primarily responsible for increased stormwater runoff. Therefore, all developed properties with impervious surfaces are charged the fee. This includes tax-exempt properties such as churches, schools, Federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, etc. In fact, the Town of Shelburne and the State of Vermont pay the fee for their buildings and roadways.

2.2 Q: How will staff administer the stormwater fees?

A: The amount a property owner is charged is based on the amount of impervious surface on the property. The Town evaluated all residential properties in Town to establish the median square footage of impervious surface (3,801 sq. ft.). The 3,801 square feet is used as a basis to establish 1 Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). All developed parcels are billed based on the number of ERUs for the property. These property types are broken into three categories:

Single-family Residential (SFR) – These properties are billed a flat fee for one ERU.

Single-Family Residential w/ greater than 1 acre Impervious (SFR10) – These properties are billed ten ERUs.

Non-Single Family Residential – These properties are billed based on the actual amount of impervious surface.

2.3 Q: Why was a stormwater fee chosen to fund the stormwater program?

A: After considering all of the options, the Town of Shelburne and the SWAC viewed a stormwater fee as the most equitable funding approach to fund stormwater services that provide a benefit to all property owners. The stormwater fee method distributes the cost of providing stormwater services fairly among *all* property owners that use the public stormwater system.

2.4 Q: Why use this rate structure for a fee?

A: This rate is based on an established structure used by South Burlington, Williston, Colchester, and Burlington and the majority of stormwater utilities across the country. A fee structure must have a nexus to what it is being charged

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for, otherwise, the fee can be overturned in court. For example, if a municipality were to propose to charge for stormwater based on the amount of drinking water used on the property it would be susceptible to legal challenge; There isn't a strong enough relationship between the amount of drinking water used on a property and the stormwater it generates to justify a fee on this basis. Shelburne's Stormwater ordinance creates a stormwater fee based on the amount of impervious surface on the property. There is a direct relationship between the amount of impervious surface on a property and the amount of stormwater runoff that is generated and must be managed.

2.5 Q: Why is there a flat fee for residential?

A: One of the main reasons for charging Single Family Residential (SFR) properties a flat rate is to reduce the administrative costs associated with the Stormwater billing program. There are currently 2,042 SFR properties in Shelburne. Evaluating each individual SFR property based on its measured impervious surface, whether as a total amount or percent of coverage, would require a significant amount of work to set up and maintain. It would also require staff to track slight changes in impervious surface on these individual properties and adjust invoices for each property in Town on a constant basis. This has not been done in Vermont. The administrative cost of such an effort is unknown at this time and would require substantial research. Two Vermont towns, Williston and Colchester, created a two-tier system for SFR property billing. Williston quickly abandoned their second tier because the administrative burden of calculating the exact percentages of impervious surfaces became too burdensome. They also experienced issues related to shared driveways in easements. This caused the property containing the driveway in an easement to pay the large fee even though the impervious surface it was being billed for benefitted the adjacent property. Ultimately, they determined that the effort was not worth the small amount of additional revenue or feeling of equity that the system provided. After one billing cycle, Colchester's second tier, which charges a flat fee of 10 ERUs for properties with more than one acre of impervious surface area, is still in place. A second tier similar to Colchester's has been created in Shelburne.

2.6 Q: Who set the rate?

A: The Selectboard set the rate after reviewing a proposed stormwater budget in August 2021. The rate will be phased in over three years to ease the initial impact on rate payers.

2.7 Q: What will my fee be?

A: The fee per ERU is \$5.20 per month. All single-family residential properties will be billed 1 ERU and receive a flat fee of \$5.20 per month.

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Single-family residential properties with one-acre or greater of impervious will be billed 10 ERUs and receive a bill for \$52.00 per month. All non-single-family residential properties will be billed based on the number of ERUs calculated for the parcel. See next question for actual billed amount due to phasing-in of the fee.

2.8 Q: Will there be any phase-in of this new fee?

A: Yes! The Selectboard decided that a 3-year phase-in approach would be beneficial and appropriate for all parcels in Shelburne. This would allow for NSFR properties to seek guidance on potential fee credits (discussed later in this document). The 3-year phase-in is: Year 1, 33%; Year 2, 66%; Year 3, 100%. Therefore, the fee for one ERU in year 1 is \$1.72 per month; year 2 is \$3.44 per month; and year 3 is \$5.20.

2.9 Q: When will I receive my first Stormwater bill?

A: *The first quarterly Stormwater bill will arrive in October 2021.* All parcels that currently receive a water and/or sewer bill will see the new Stormwater fee on their October bill.

2.10 Q: What is the money generated by the stormwater fee used for?

A: In accordance with State law, the money collected through the stormwater fee is used only for those staff members, equipment, and activities that are related to stormwater management in the Town of Shelburne. Activities can include, but are not limited to: system maintenance and repair, capital improvements, pollution prevention, and regulatory compliance. Money collected from the stormwater fees is dedicated only to stormwater and cannot be used for anything else.

2.11 Q: Isn't this just another tax?

A: No. It is a service fee, not a tax. Like a water or wastewater bill, it is a fee for a municipal service. Although the stormwater fee is an additional cost to property owners, it is not a tax on the value of a property. All properties with impervious surfaces will be charged a stormwater fee, even those that are otherwise considered exempt from property taxes (churches, schools, government properties, etc.).

2.12 Q: If the stormwater runs off my roof directly into the ground or into a nearby creek, I am not using the public stormwater system. Why should I have to pay?

A: Management of the entire stormwater system benefits everyone; therefore, all members of the community are required to participate in the program. The runoff

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from any property eventually contributes to a part of the public stormwater system, whether a pipe, ditch, channel or stream, and therefore everyone must contribute their fair share in order to carry out the stormwater program. Further, the Town is responsible for maintenance of the public stormwater system that may flow near your property. You may be benefiting from Town services performed upstream of your property.

Furthermore, State and Federal regulation requires certain stormwater maintenance activities and capital investment. Lake Champlain is subject to a Phosphorus TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) and Munroe Brook has been identified as a waterbody that is impaired principally by unmanaged stormwater runoff. The Town is burdened with the responsibility to oversee, monitor and regulate for water quality within these impaired waterbodies. The stormwater fee will provide the funding necessary for the Town to meet these obligations.

2.13Q: I have a Stormwater Treatment Practice (STP) on my property. Will the Town take over responsibility of this STP because I pay the stormwater fee?

A: The Town has a detailed policy regarding the acquisition of private, residential stormwater systems. Article IV, Acceptance and Inspection of Regulated Private Systems at this website (<https://www.shelburnevt.org/DocumentCenter/View/4452/Stormwater-Ordinance-Updated-2020>) discusses the policy. The Water Quality Superintendent can answer your questions and can be reached at (802) 985-3700 or crobinson@shelburnevt.org

2.14Q: Prior to the stormwater fee, how were stormwater related activities funded?

A: The stormwater program was previously funded through property tax dollars from the General Fund.

2.15Q: How do the stormwater fees in Shelburne compare to other stormwater utilities in the State?

A: Shelburne's stormwater fees is being phased in over a three-year period. However, even if the fee was being charged in full in the first year, it would be on par with the other Chittenden County Stormwater utilities.

2.16Q: Who is required to pay a stormwater fee?

A: All developed properties in the Town of Shelburne are required to pay the stormwater fee. The fee appears on the regular utility bills received by property owners. In general, the person that currently pays other utilities (e.g., water and sewer) is the person that receives the stormwater utility bill. Sometimes, this is not

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the property owner, and can be a tenant that, through written or verbal agreement with the property owner, normally pays the utility bill. In some special cases, the stormwater utility fee is billed to the property owner, even if that owner does not pay other utilities. An example of this might be a strip mall, where an understanding of the impervious area utilized by the multiple tenants that are located on one property is not known. In this case, a fee for each tenant cannot be calculated and the stormwater bill would be sent to the property owner.

2.17Q: How is the fee determined fairly?

A: The stormwater fee is determined based on the impervious area of a property. The amount of impervious surface affects how much stormwater is generated on the property. Fees are based on the number of Equivalent Residential Units determined for each property. See the next question for a detailed explanation of ERUs and how they are used to determine stormwater fees.

2.18Q: What is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU)?

A: An Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) is equal to the average amount of impervious surface that one would expect to find on a typical single-family residence within the Town of Shelburne. The median amount of impervious surface of a single-family residence was determined to be 3,801 square feet. Therefore, 1 ERU = 3,801 square feet of impervious surface area. Stormwater fees will be collected based on the number of ERUs allotted to each developed property at a rate of \$5.20 per ERU per month. Most single family residential (SFR) properties are assigned 1 ERU and charged the flat fee of \$5.20 per month. SFR's with greater than one acre of impervious surface (more than 11 times the median amount of impervious surface on a single family residential property) will be assigned 10 ERUs and charged a flat fee of \$52.00 per month.

A quantity of ERUs has been calculated for each developed Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR) property, based on the percentage of impervious area measured with satellite imagery and the total area of the property. Properties are charged for their number of calculated ERUs at the rate of \$5.20 per ERU per month. There is a flow chart that describes how the fees are calculated on the Town's website.

2.19Q: What are considered to be Single Family Residential (SFR) properties?

A: All properties that have only a single-family house, a duplex, or a triplex with fee simple ownership are classified as Single Family Residential (SFR).

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2.20 Q: How are multi-family residential properties such as condominiums and townhouses billed?

A: Residential condominiums and townhouses that have fee simple ownership and have three or less units per building are regarded as SFR properties and charged the flat fee for 1 ERU (\$5.20) per month. Typically, the stormwater bill is sent to the owner of the condominium or townhouse. Multi-family properties (such as apartments) that have more than three units per building or do not have fee simple ownership are regarded as Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR). The stormwater fee is computed for the entire property, based on the number of equivalent residential units (ERUs) on the property. The stormwater bill is sometimes sent to the owner of the apartment facility or the property management group. In cases where the stormwater user fee is charged to individual unit owners, the stormwater fee for the entire property is distributed evenly amongst unit owners.

2.21 Q: What properties are considered Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR) properties?

A: The most common Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR) properties are businesses and industries, schools, churches, parking lots, and roadways. Also included are residential and commercial (i.e., business) condominium complexes.

2.22 Q: Why are most Single Family Residential (SFR) properties being billed the same flat fee of \$5.20 per month while those with greater than an acre of impervious surface are being charged \$52.00? Why not break this out into more categories or directly measure impervious surface on each SFR property?

A: The majority of the properties in the Town of Shelburne are single-family. A considerable amount of time and money would be needed to initially determine and then maintain impervious surface measurements for each SFR property. Therefore, in order to be able to spend the stormwater fees where it is needed most, in improving and better maintaining the stormwater system, the Town made a policy decision to charge all SFR properties with less than an acre of impervious surface the same flat rate (1 ERU), and those with more than an acre of impervious a flat rate (10 ERUs).

2.23 Q: What is the billing period for the stormwater fee?

A: For billing convenience and efficiency, the stormwater fee has been included on the regular utility bills from the Town of Shelburne. Bills are sent on a quarterly basis; therefore, the billing period will be once every three months.

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2.24Q: How do you calculate the stormwater fee for my non-residential property?

A: Calculation of a non-residential stormwater fee is not too difficult but involves multiple steps. Please refer to the flow chart for calculating NSFR properties. The Process Flow Chart for Calculating the Fee can be found at this website: <https://www.shelburnevt.org/221/Stormwater-Water-Quality>

3 Credits

3.1 Q: Is anyone exempt from paying a stormwater fee?

A: All developed properties, including tax-exempt properties, are charged the stormwater fee. Only undeveloped properties (i.e. those without impervious surface) are exempt from paying the fee.

3.2 Q: What is a credit against the stormwater fee?

A: A stormwater credit is an ongoing reduction in the stormwater fee for activities or practices that can reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff that is discharged into the public stormwater system. The rationale behind stormwater fee credits is to encourage property owners to reduce both their dependency on, and contribution to, the public stormwater system. Credits are available for up to 75% of the total stormwater fee for a property.

3.3 Q: Who is eligible for a credit?

A: Non-Single Family Residential (NSFR) Property owners that qualify are eligible for the following credits:

- A Stormwater Treatment Practice Credit is available to properties that construct and maintain Stormwater Treatment Practices (STPs) as defined in the *Vermont Stormwater Management Manual*.
- An Education Credit is available to Educational Institutions that inform their students about the importance of local surface and groundwater resources and how they can be protected. The rationale behind this Credit is that the information provided by the Educational Institution will translate into appreciation and stewardship of water resources and thereby reduces negative impacts (such as pollutant impacts) on local streams, ponds and lakes that can result from uninformed citizens.
- A NPDES Permit Credit is available to NSFR properties that due to federal requirements have a valid NPDES permit and perform BMPs specifically intended to reduce impacts on non-point source Stormwater runoff and/or provide an on-going public benefit related to Stormwater management may also be eligible to receive this Credit. A final determination regarding whether or not

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the terms of a particular NPDES permit makes a NSFR property eligible for NPDES permit Credit will be made by the Stormwater Superintendent.

The property owner must take the initiative to pursue a stormwater credit by completing an application and supplying the necessary documentation. A single property cannot get more than a 75% credit. However, properties that have an eligible STP that controls stormwater from other private properties are eligible to receive the STP credits for the other properties, up to a maximum fee reduction of 100% for the property that the STP is located on.

3.4 Q: Are credits available for stormwater management practices already in place on my property?

A: Stormwater credits will be available only for non-single family residential (NSFR) properties to incentivize Stormwater best management practices. A credit is an ongoing reduction in the stormwater fee for activities or practices that can reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff discharged into the public stormwater system. The rationale behind stormwater fee credits is to encourage property owners to reduce both their dependency on, and contribution to, the public stormwater system. Credits would be available for up to 75% of the total stormwater fee for non-single family residential properties that qualify. A credit manual was created as a companion document to the ordinance. Any credits applied for and approved will be eligible on year 3 of the phase-in period.

3.5 Q: How do I apply for a credit?

A: Contact the Water Quality Superintendent in the Water Quality Department. The superintendent has more information available regarding crediting procedures and policies, and can send the appropriate credit application forms. Contact the Water Quality Superintendent at (802) 985-3700 or at crobinson@shelburnevt.org.

4 Citizen Involvement Information

4.1 Q: I'd like to find out more about the stormwater program. What can I do?

A: The Water Quality Department directs the Town's stormwater program. If you want to talk to someone about the details of the stormwater program, please call the Water Quality Superintendent at (802) 985-3700. Information is also available online at <https://www.shelburnevt.org/221/Stormwater-Water-Quality>.

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4.2 Q: How were citizens involved in the stormwater program development?

A: A Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) was formed to provide input and guidance during the development of the stormwater program and the resulting fee. A variety of diverse interests were represented by the SWAC including: homeowners, developers, businesses, environmental organizations, engineers, educators, and members of the non-profit community.

4.3 Q: How were members selected to the Citizens Advisory Committee?

A: Members to the Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) were requested to serve on the Committee by Town staff and appointed by the Selectboard.

5 Complaints and/or Problems

5.1 Q. I have a stormwater problem (drainage, flooding, pollution, etc.) to report. What should I do?

A. Please call the Town's Water Quality Superintendent at (802) 985-3700. Keep in mind that basement flooding is most commonly caused by groundwater and is not typically the purview of the Town's stormwater program.

5.2 Q. I think that my stormwater fee is not calculated correctly. What do I do?

A. If you are questioning the fee for your single-family home, it should be \$5.20 per month unless you have over an acre of impervious surface. In that case, the fee should be \$52.00 per month. If you are questioning the fee for your business or another Non Single Family Residential (NSFR) property, please contact the Water Quality Superintendent. Be prepared with the account number shown on your bill. The Water Quality Superintendent can verify the impervious area and the calculated fee for the property. The Superintendent can be reached at crobinson@shelburnevt.org.

5.3 Q. Why are churches and other tax-exempt properties required to pay?

A. The stormwater fee is based on the demand placed on the system by a property. Therefore, all developed properties in the Town of Shelburne must participate regardless of ownership or tax status because they contribute stormwater to the public stormwater system. All impervious surfaces (e.g. roofs, sidewalks and parking lots) contribute to the problem and, therefore, all of these

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property owners are to share in the cost of the program. The stormwater fee is not a tax.

5.4 Q. What if a property owner REFUSES to pay the stormwater fee?

A. All developed properties are required to pay the fee per town Ordinance. Stormwater runoff from developed properties discharges to local streams, rivers, and Lake Champlain. The fee is set up fairly in that all developed property owners share equitably in the cost of stormwater management. The Town will take legal action to collect any current and/or past due stormwater fees associated with a property, as necessary.

5.5 Q: Why is the stormwater fee on the water and sewer bill?

A: Since the stormwater fee is a user fee similar in nature to the water and sewer fees, it was natural to place the stormwater fee on the utility bill to consolidate user fees. Including the stormwater fee on the water and sewer bill was a matter of convenience and cost savings.