STORM WATER SERVICE CHARGE

(FAQ)

General Information:

As Fargo continues to grow, more of our city's area is now covered by improved parcels including homes, businesses, roads, parking lots, and other well-drained open spaces. Those areas, which at one time soaked up water from rainfall and snowmelt, now force this storm water to creeks, ditches, ponds or storm sewer lines. Increases in impervious areas and improved drainage practices for parcels inside the City pose greater challenges to storm water quality, storm water maintenance, and floodplain management. Through the adoption of this revised storm water policy in 2019, all parcels will be benefitting properties through the ability of increased repairs and needed improvements to the storm sewer system. In 1998, the Fargo City Council passed an ordinance creating the original Storm Water Service Charge for the purpose of providing a reliable, equitable, and efficient funding source for the City of Fargo Storm Water Management Program. The storm sewer system service charge became effective for all properties being serviced by a water meter, with the last service charge increase being approved in 2002.

The newly proposed storm sewer utility service charge is based on the amount of parcel surface area and impervious surface percentage of the total area (a surface which water cannot easily penetrate) on each property within Fargo City Limits. All single-family residential homes pay a common service charge per month. Non-residential properties are charged based upon the total area and impervious area on the property. Details of the residential and non-residential charge and billing are listed as follows:

Single-family residential properties billing:

The updated Storm Water Management Ordinance continues a monthly Storm Water Service Charge. All single-family residential homes within the City limits of Fargo are billed per month at the rate approved by the most recent City Commission resolution. The charge appears on your utility bill for residents already receiving City water, sanitary, or solid waste services.

Non-single family residential properties billing:

Multi-family, apartments, businesses, retail, commercial and industrial sites are examples of non-single family residential properties. These properties have been evaluated to determine the actual amount of impervious surface on the property. Aerial photography maps were used for impervious area determinations, with site investigations performed where necessary. Each property is assessed per month, for each square foot of impervious surface area along with the overall parcel size based on the approved rate formula. All non- single family residential properties with impervious area will be charged a minimum fee per month per approved resolution

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

What is a Storm Water Service Charge?

The storm water service charge is a monthly charge applicable to all properties which contribute runoff to the storm water drainage system. The service charge is to storm water like a sewer charge is to sewage, and a water charge is to drinking water. The Fargo Storm Sewer Utility Fee is responsible for funding the management, construction, operation, and maintenance of the storm water drainage system. The system includes inlets, storm sewers, ditches, detention facilities and flood plains. A storm water utility generates revenue through user fees, which are based either on a base rate charge for single family properties or on the amount of storm water runoff that a particular property contributes to the storm water drainage system. The more runoff a property contributes due to parcel size and impervious area, the greater the charge.

Why does the City of Fargo need a Storm Water Service Charge?

The City of Fargo spends approximately $5 million dollars annually to administer, maintain, and renew its storm water systems. Therefore, the City charges a fee for storm water service to fund major portions of the storm sewer system rehabilitation and maintenance. In addition to these fees, the total revenue contributed to storm water needs has historically come from sources such as sales tax, special assessments, and State Aid funding. In order to keep up with increasing regulatory demands, aging infrastructure, and balancing the use of these other funding sources, the City is adopting an expanded fee system that distributes the cost more equitably to benefiting users of the system.

What Regulations Contribute to the overall Storm Water Management Costs of the City?

Fargo discharges its storm water into the Red River under the authority of Federal law (permit), enforced by the state. The unfunded mandates of the permit require strict monitoring and reporting of storm water quality issues. This increases the need for more administration and maintenance of the storm water program and system. There is a growing cost to implement and maintain storm water programs and improvements, including permitting administration, detention facilities, floodplain maintenance, erosion control and required water quality standards. A dedicated storm sewer service charge provides the most reliable and efficient funding source to meet these requirements.

Is this another tax?

No. this is a storm sewer system service charge is designated to pay for the utility services provided by the City of Fargo in relation to the storm water system.

What will the charges be used for?

The following list is an example of the types of projects targeted by the storm water management program:

- Drain and floodplain maintenance.
- Drainage ditch clearing, re-grading and maintenance.
- Storm sewer system televising, cleaning, maintenance, and repair.
- Re-construction of storm sewer system components.
- Maintenance and repair of streets to reduce areas of standing water.
- Drain erosion control projects.
- Regional retention/detention ponds that could also be used for recreational purposes.
- Improved storm water quality programs.

Are other communities implementing storm sewer system charges also?

Yes. Hundreds of communities nationwide are currently using storm water system charges as a method of funding storm water programs, including Grand Forks and Moorhead. The City of Fargo charges a per month storm water utility fee for all contributing properties to the system (Storm water charges approved by City Commission Resolution).

How was the charge determined?

The rate formula determines the per month charge which is calculated after a study of the costs of services necessary for the City of Fargo Storm Water Management Program correlated to the total gross and impervious area of the City to support the storm sewer department revenue and expenditure model.

What is an impervious surface?

An impervious surface is generally one that inhibits the entry of rainwater into the soil causing water to run off the surface at an increased rate of flow than was present under natural ground cover conditions. Examples include, but are not limited to, rooftops of homes, businesses and other structures, asphalt or concrete sidewalks, driveways, roads, and parking lots, storage areas, and gravel areas.

As a commercial property owner, whom do I call if I think there is an error in the charge to my property?

Call the City of Fargo Engineering at (701)-241-1548. The evaluation of the existing storm sewer charge shall follow the Policy and Procedures document available online on the Engineering storm sewer website page as to the required submittals and subsequent steps for the review process.

Why are churches and other tax-exempt properties charged?

The storm sewer system service charge is based on how much the property contributes to the amount of storm water runoff to the storm water drainage system. The fee is a service charge and not a tax. Properties with impervious areas must make an equitable contribution to the storm water system rehabilitation and maintenance.

What happens if I do not pay my bill?

The balance of any unpaid storm sewer system charges shall be certified for collection with real estate taxes in the year following any non-payment.

I live in a duplex or townhome, what will I be charged?

Each single family dwelling unit will be charged the monthly amount (or as amended by City Commission Resolution).

If I do not have any drainage problems near my property and my property drains directly to the legal drain, why do I have to pay?

There may not be a specific storm water drainage problem in your area or neighborhood, but the runoff from your property does contribute to the City's overall storm water drainage system. Floodplain maintenance, drain maintenance, river slope stability, multi-use detention facilities, major bridges and culverts on arterial roads, and improved water quality within the drains are examples of portions of the program, which affect all citizens.

Why are the storm sewer charges so different than previously collected?

The City has historically maintained its storm water infrastructure through multiple funding sources such as assessments, state aid, sales tax, and the existing flat rate fee system. However, in order to more equitably distribute the cost of maintaining both the storm water system and competitive funding sources, the City is adopting this change of fee method. The City previously had established a flat rate storm sewer fee in 1998, which set residential and commercial fees of $3 and $15, respectively, based on the existence of a water meter(s) on each parcel. The storm sewer charges have been restructured to enable the parcels with larger impacts to the system to pay at a higher amount due to the level of impervious area and the size of the contributing parcel.

Will the City fix drainage problems that are on my property now?

The City cannot legally perform maintenance or work on areas within private property. Private drainage problems between adjacent private properties owners remains the responsibility of the property owners.

My neighborhood has drainage problems within City right-of-way. Whom do I call to report them?

Call the City of Fargo Engineering at 241-1545. The City will investigate the possible causes and keep track of problem areas reported. The maintenance or repair will be prioritized based on factors such as threat to public safety, benefit-cost ratio, funding sources, and the funds available.