



## **STORMWATER UTILITY**

### **WHAT IS THE UTILITY, AND WHY WAS IT CREATED?**

Recent requirements mandated by the federal government significantly affect the environmental and flood protection management of municipal stormwater systems. Specifically, the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit regulations for stormwater discharges became effective on November 16, 1990.

It is the EPA's intent to evaluate stormwater City wide in an integrated and comprehensive manner. This permitting program will require the City to substantially increase water quality evaluation and monitoring activities and to develop a Master Plan and Management Plan for the elimination of substandard stormwater systems.

In addition, under the provisions of the "Florida Air and Water pollution Control Act", (Chapter 403, Florida Statutes, at section 403.0891) , local governments are required to develop stormwater management programs. Furthermore, in accordance with that law, (at section 403.0893), local stormwater utilities may be established and can adopt stormwater utility fees, which shall be used to: PLAN, CONSTRUCT, OPERATE, and MAINTAIN public stormwater management systems.

In order to comply with the mandated federal requirements, and in accordance with the state law, the City of Sweetwater have established the local Stormwater Utility Ordinance.

Stormwater run-off transports a variety of pollutants and carries them into our ground and surface waters. The State of Florida declared that stormwater run-off pollutants include, but are not limited to:

- I. rubber, grease, and oil from paved areas
- II. metals and chemical residues from industrial sites
- III. pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer from lawns,

These pollutants can have long-term effects on water resources. Many are toxic, and can kill aquatic life or prevent plant and animal reproduction. Others may be stored in the ground, or in plant and animal tissue, and passed up the food chain to man. Clearly, it was essential that action be taken.

### **WHAT DOES THE UTILITY INTEND TO ACCOMPLISH?**

The Stormwater Utility will improve the maintenance of existing local drainage systems and will develop a comprehensive master plan for the design and actual construction of major capital improvements and system betterment throughout the city's public storm sewer system in accordance with federal and state

requirements. Specifically, drainage systems will be improved so that the amount of pollutants discharged into surface waters is reduced.

In addition to attacking pollution problems, the Stormwater Utility will work to further reduce the flooding of roadways and developed property. As many residents of Sweetwater have experienced, with our subtropical climate here in southeast Florida we average sixty (60) inches of rainfall annually; however, most of the rainfall is concentrated within a few months of the year. As a result, during the rainy season, frequent and substantial flooding occurs in many areas of the city.

The City's Stormwater Utility Master Plan will address the needs of those neighborhoods and local drainage systems that need improvements. The stormwater utility will operate and maintain the public stormwater management system throughout the City.

The focus of the Stormwater Utility, of course, is on storm sewers. There are, however, generally two separate and distinct types of sewer systems: storm sewers, and sanitary sewers. For the sake of clarity, here are basic descriptions of both. A storm sewer is a sewer (an underground pipe or open channel) designed to carry storm waters, surface run-off, street wash waters, and drainage. In contrast, a sanitary sewer is an underground pipe that carries liquid and water-carried solid matters from residences, commercial buildings, industrial plants and institutions. Many people associate "sanitary sewers" with the transport of wastes from sinks and toilets.

## **WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WITH STORMWATER?**

The City of Sweetwater Stormwater Utility is being created to address the problems caused by stormwater run-off, "Stormwater" means the water discharged as a result of rain. "Run-off" means the rainfall that is not absorbed by the soil.

Specific problems caused by stormwater run-off include pollution of our surface and ground waters, as well as flooding.

Because of more industrial, commercial, and residential construction and its "hardened" surfaces, there are fewer green areas for unpolluted rainwater to soak into the soil. These hardened surfaces are also referred to as impervious areas. "Impervious area" is defined in the local ordinance as the part of the ground, which is incapable of being penetrated by rainwater. Examples of impervious areas include, but are not limited to: "all structures, roof extensions, slabs, patios, porches, driveways, sidewalks, parking areas, swimming pools, athletic courts, and decks."

The City of Sweetwater Public Works Department and Maintenance Department are responsible for most of the public storm sewers in Sweetwater.

Miami Dade Water and Sewer Department is responsible for most of the public sanitary sewers in Sweetwater; also, because the Water and Sewer Department is well established, it is assisting with the new utility's billing system, as explained in the following "utility operation" section.

## **HOW DOES THE UTILITY OPERATE**

The Stormwater Utility is supported by user fees, which are to be used only for the management, maintenance, and improvement of the public stormwater system.

Specifically, user fees are paid by the owner, tenant, or occupant of developed property pursuant to City Ordinance. The Code defines "developed property" to mean "any parcel of land which contains an impervious area."

In this way, the costs of addressing the pollution and flooding problems of stormwater run-off are associated with the sources, which are the impervious areas of developed properties.

The Stormwater Utility fee rate is based upon a standard which is referred to as an "Equivalent Residential Unit" (ERU).

The Stormwater Utility fee rate, was set by the City Council at \$ 4.00 per month, per ERU. That is the basis of the utility billing system.

Billing is divided into two (2) categories: residential properties and non-residential properties. All residential units are charged the user fee rate for one ERU. In other words, the stormwater utility user fee of \$4.00 per month applies to each residence for example, to each single-family home, each condominium, each apartment, each half of a duplex, each townhouse, or to each mobile home .

On the other hand, nonresidential properties are charged a user fee, which is specific for the actual, calculated, impervious area of the nonresidential developed property. The fee is determined by applying this formula: calculate the impervious area of the parcel of land; divide it by 1,548 square feet (which is the value assigned to one ERU) Multiply the quotient (that answer) by the rate for one ERU (\$4.00) The result is the monthly fee for that nonresidential property.

Billing is accomplished in the following way. The stormwater utility fee will appear as a line item on the monthly, or bimonthly, statement issued by the Water and Sewer Department. For those residential bills that are rendered bimonthly, the fee will also be computed bimonthly: \$2.00 per month for two months equals \$4.00 per billing cycle.

In conclusion, the City of Sweetwater Stormwater Utility will help to prevent the contamination of surface and ground waters from stormwater run-off; in addition it will decrease the risk of flooding. This program will help to ensure that both the environment and public health will be safeguarded for generations to come.

Thank you for your interest in the Sweetwater Stormwater Utility. Please feel free to address any comments or questions regarding the Stormwater Utility to:

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