

The Importance of A Stormwater Management Program

Stormwater management is a broad term that you may hear often in Township meetings or read frequently in Township publications. Due to increasing management regulations, climate change, and increasing development density, managing stormwater is a significant challenge for municipalities.

What does stormwater management entail? Broadly, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines stormwater management as the effort to reduce runoff of rainwater or melted snow into streets, lawns or other sites, and the improvement of water quality.

There are several ways to accomplish this goal. Generally, stormwater management is accomplished through a miles-long network of inlets, pipes, lined or vegetated channels, holding basins, etc. that help direct stormwater from yards, streets, and other areas into groundwater or surface water resources such as our streams, rivers, and lakes. The goal of this network is to reduce flooding and filter pollutants such as fertilizers, vehicle oil, and sediment from the stormwater before it enters our natural water bodies, which are habitats for wildlife and sources of our drinking water.

Cheltenham has a broad network of streams associated with the Tookany Creek Watershed, which flows into Philadelphia and, eventually the Delaware River. The

Township receives stormwater from Abington, Jenkintown, Philadelphia, and other upstream communities. All communities located within the watershed are required to do their part to mitigate the effects of stormwater in accordance with regulations established by the EPA. Each year, municipalities report the steps they are taking to meet these regulations to the EPA via the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Municipal actions include providing education to residents and businesses in the community, involving the community in mitigation

projects, detecting and minimizing illicit discharges into the watershed, controlling runoff from construction sites, ensuring best practices are used in constructing new stormwater management facilities, and implementing good housekeeping strategies to reduce pollution. In addition, as of 2018, municipalities are required to construct facilities to reduce pollutant load in the watershed. Projects like the stream channel redesigns at Conklin Pool and Curtis Arboretum (near the dog park) are examples of these projects.

Over the past year, Cheltenham has embarked on a study to determine the feasibility of implementing a stormwater fee to exclusively cover the costs of managing the Township's stormwater program. One of the recommendations of the Strategic Financial Management Plan adopted by the Township in August 2020, this fee will be assessed to all properties in the Township, including properties that do not currently pay taxes.

The fee will cover the costs of meeting the EPA's regulations as discussed above and includes items like inlet cleanouts, street sweeping, and leaf collections – important housekeeping measures taken to reduce flooding and reduce pollutants entering our waterways. In addition, it will fund larger capital projects that will help increase the system's capacity to manage increasing stormwater flows and reduce the amount of pollutants in the streams. According to the feasibility study, this program will cost \$3.373M in 2022, which is approximately 10% of the Township's operating budget.

The proposed fee would be assessed to each property in the Township. Residential properties would pay a flat fee based on the size of the property. A three-tiered approach has been discussed. Nonresidential properties would pay a fee based on the amount of building, parking and other impervious cover they possess.

For more information on the stormwater fee feasibility study, visit the Township's website. The Stormwater Matters page can be found under Hot Topics or Departments and Services > Projects, Plans and Studies > Stormwater Matters.

A meeting will be held on July 28 via Zoom. To register for the meeting and to register for any future meetings or information about the stormwater fee, please email stormwater@cheltenham-township.org.

It is anticipated that the Board of Commissioners will consider adopting the fee in the fall of 2021 and that the fee will be added to the Township's tax bill in 2022.



The natural bioswale at Conklin Pool is an example of a stormwater management project, filtering pollutants and moving rainwater through a slower, meandering channel.