

# **City of Salem Public Works Department Implementing a Stormwater Utility**

## **Fact Sheet**

### **STORMWATER RUNOFF**

Stormwater runoff occurs whenever water from rain and snowmelt are not absorbed into the soil or intercepted by trees and other plants. In Salem, impervious surfaces such as rooftops, roads, highly compacted soils, and parking areas prevent water from infiltrating into the ground. These impervious surfaces also cause stormwater to run off at a much faster rate and with a higher volume than runoff from undeveloped landscapes. High stormwater flows and volumes can threaten property, public health and safety, and environmental quality. High flows are only part of the problem. Stormwater runoff can also contain sediment, gasoline, oil, pesticides, bacteria, and other pollutants. These pollutants are then carried into our creeks, our wetlands, our groundwater, and the Willamette River, negatively impacting water quality. The City of Salem provides stormwater services that are designed to help address the problems associated with stormwater quantity and stormwater quality.

### **STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The City of Salem provides its residents with stormwater services within an area that comprises more than 44 square miles and 13 urban watersheds. Salem's stormwater collection system consists of more than 85 miles of open channels and ditches, 90 miles of waterways, 420 miles of pipe, 800 detention basins, and 22,000 storm drainage structures. Conducted by the Public Works Department, Salem's stormwater services include an array of activities and projects, including stormwater system operation and maintenance, stormwater quality monitoring, public education and involvement, flooding response, street sweeping, stream cleaning, spill response, municipal regulations, stormwater quality complaint response, facility inspections, capital projects, and much more. Over the past 20 years, the importance of managing urban stormwater runoff has become clearer. Salem's citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the adverse impacts of stormwater runoff. State and federal regulatory demands on the City's stormwater programs have also grown substantially over the past two decades.

### **CURRENT STORMWATER PROGRAM FUNDING**

Historically, Salem's stormwater services have been funded by the City's wastewater ratepayers. This means that a portion of the sewer fee paid by each homeowner and business helps pay for the City's stormwater services. However, wastewater rates have no relationship to the impacts a property has on the stormwater system. Beginning in late 2009, the City began working on a proposal that would decouple stormwater funding from the City's wastewater fees and fund stormwater services with a separate stormwater fee. The purpose of developing a separate stormwater fee is to more closely link the stormwater fee paid by our ratepayers to the impacts of the ratepayer on the stormwater system, which in turn, relates the fee to the stormwater services received by the ratepayer.

### **FUTURE STORMWATER PROGRAM FUNDING**

On December 6, 2010, the Salem City Council approved creation of a stormwater utility and implementation of a stormwater rate that will more closely align the stormwater fee to the impacts of the ratepayer's property. The new stormwater fee will have two components. The first will be based on the amount of impervious surface of each ratepayer's property. Impervious surface can be directly related to stormwater flow running off a property. The second component of the stormwater fee will be a fixed

base charge that will be paid by all ratepayers regardless of the amount of impervious surface. This base charge will support stormwater programs such as dispatch services, street sweeping, and account maintenance; the base charge also accounts for the impervious surface area of public streets and a portion of the mandated parking on commercial properties.

### **IMPLEMENTING THE STORMWATER FEE**

As part of the City Council's decision, the new stormwater fee will be initially implemented when either one of two conditions are met: (1) unemployment rates in the Salem Metropolitan Service Area are 7 percent or less for one full quarter; or (2) beginning January 1, 2013, whichever occurs first. The stormwater fee will be phased in over four rate cycles, which will take a total of three years to complete. During the phasing-in period, ratepayers will see adjustments that decrease their wastewater charges as the new stormwater fee is incorporated into the billing statement. Between now and initial implementation, the City will continue working with the community in order to implement the new utility and associated fee. City staff will ask for feedback regarding the accuracy of the impervious surface area estimates and request that ratepayers notify the City of on-site stormwater facilities that might qualify the ratepayer for a stormwater rate credit.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR RATE CREDITS**

Non-single family residential ratepayers can request a reduction in their stormwater fee if there is a stormwater facility on their property that reduces the impacts of their property on the City's stormwater system. Stormwater impacts can be reduced by having a flow control facility that reduces the volume and/or the rate of runoff leaving a property. Stormwater impacts can also be reduced by a treatment facility that removes pollutants from stormwater through mechanical, biological, or other means. Single-family residential (SFR) ratepayers are not eligible to receive a credit because of the high costs to administer such a program for this large number of ratepayers, who would realize a relatively small reduction in their rates.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

An extensive public outreach effort was conducted during the 12-month process leading up to the December 2010 Council vote. The initial proposal to establish a stormwater rate was endorsed by the Water/Wastewater Task Force, the citizen advisory body for the Director of Public Works, at its December 17, 2009, meeting. City staff then met with the public more than 60 times during 2010, including 19 meetings with Neighborhood Associations; two meetings with the Salem Area Chamber of Commerce; six meetings with government agencies; meetings with 14 trade associations, business organizations, and individual corporations; and meetings with 13 civic groups, citizen boards, and committees. Two work sessions were conducted for the City Council during 2010 and the public hearing spanned two Council meetings.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For more information, including answers to Frequently Asked Questions, please visit our website at:

[http://www.cityofsalem.net/Departments/PublicWorks/Pages/sw\\_utility.aspx](http://www.cityofsalem.net/Departments/PublicWorks/Pages/sw_utility.aspx)

**For more information about the stormwater utility, contact Mike Gotterba at the Salem Public Works Department by telephone at 503-588-6211 or at [mgotterba@cityofsalem.net](mailto:mgotterba@cityofsalem.net).**