



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE – COMPLIANCE, MAINTENANCE AND FUNDING

#### NOTE: THIS IS A WORKING DOCUMENT AND HENCE IN DRAFT MODE

#### *What is Stormwater and how is it different from Sewer?*

You've seen one drain, you've seen them all. They are all the same, right? I can pour this cleaner down the drain because it goes to a wastewater treatment plant, right? Not so! It's important to understand the difference between sanitary sewers and storm drains so we can prevent environmental damage.

The **sanitary sewer** is a system of underground pipes that carries sewage from bathrooms, sinks, kitchens, and other plumbing components to a wastewater treatment plant where it is filtered, treated and discharged.

The **storm drain** is a system designed to carry rainfall runoff and other drainage. It is not designed to carry sewage or accept hazardous wastes. The runoff is carried in underground pipes or open ditches or swales and discharges untreated into local streams, rivers and other surface water bodies. Storm drain inlets are typically found in curbs and low-lying outdoor areas. Some older buildings have basement floor drains that connect to the storm sewer system. Disposal of chemicals or hazardous substances to the storm drain system damages the environment. Motor oil, cleaners, paints and other common household items that get into storm drains can poison fish, birds, and other wildlife, and can find their way into drinking water supplies. In addition, grass clippings, leaves, litter, and organic matter can clog storm drains and cause flooding.

Here are some things you can do to help maintain our sewer systems and keep our environment clean:

- Do not pour anything into storm sewer drains. Don't pour paints, solvents, cleaners, etc. into any drain – take it to your local county household hazardous waste collection.
- Keep storm drains clear of leaves, grass clippings, sticks and litter
- Repair any leaks and drips from your vehicle.
- Collect and recycle motor oil.
- Clean up spills and don't wash them into a storm drain.
- Maintain swimming pools and septic tanks properly.
- Minimize the use of herbicides and pesticides. Create a more sustainable landscape. Use lawn chemicals in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Always pick up after your pet.

Watch this easy to understand video from the City of Durham:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ak-js9MPSMU>

and this one from Maine:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLt8c2fO3QU>

### **What is NPDES / MS4 Permit?**

NPDES stands for: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System

MS4 Permit stands for: Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit.

#### **What now?**

Polluted storm water run-off (rain water collected from roofs /driveways and other impervious surfaces going through those square grates on the side of the streets also known as catch basins) is often transported through our town's storm drain systems (Municipal Separate storm water systems) and ultimately discharged into local rivers and streams without treatment.

EPA's (Environmental Protection Agency) Stormwater Phase II Regulations establishes an MS4 management program that is intended to improve the Nation's waterways by reducing the quantity of pollutants that stormwaters pickup and carries into the storm drain systems. Common pollutants include oil and grease from roadways, pesticides from lawns, sediment from construction sites, and carelessly discarded trash (cigarette butts, plastic bottles etc.). These impair the waterways, thereby discouraging recreational use of the resource, contaminating drinking water supplies, and interfering with the aquatic wildlife.

### **What does it mean for us in Ashland?**

Most of the Town of Ashland, in within the SuAsCo (Sudbury, Assabet, Concord) water shed and a small section of Ashland is within the Charles River watershed. Our town went through the MS4 2003 permit which mandated that all catch basins are cleaned, outfalls are identified. For some towns that are mostly within the Charles River watershed the MS4 requirements were extensive and included treatments eliminating Phosphorus and some Nitrogen compounds to tackle the issue of pollutants in the Charles River.

The new MS4 permit regulations (where the Notice of Intent(NOI) is due in Sept 2018), include (not limited to):

- Outfall stormwater Quantity and Quality measurements,
- Pollution prevention by cleaning and maintaining our drainage infrastructure and outfalls, and
- Culvert maintenance. See link for detailed information:

[https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/stormwater/MS4\\_MA.html](https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/stormwater/MS4_MA.html)

### **What have we done so far?**

Department of Public works has a couple of line items budgeted every year to clean catch basins and do street sweeping. Due to budget cuts over the course of the past 10 years we have been unable to clean all catch basins and sweep all streets in the town every year. This means, we have not been able to handle pollutants and maintain drain infrastructures in a standard manner. We sometimes lean on grants / funds from state / federal programs to be able to accomplish this, the best way we can. Unfortunately, these funds are not available consistently every year and the funds are not sufficient most every year.

### **What's the plan and how does it affect me?**

In order to comply with the NPDES / MS4 regulations, we will need to establish consistent funding and utilize it solely for the purpose of storm drain infrastructure maintenance, cleaning and treating the stormwater. Establish plans and programs per the EPA regulations. There are some options for how to fund this program regularly on an annual basis.

Option 1: General Fund – Revenues from property taxes.

Option 2: Stormwater Utility (Enterprise Fund) – Revenues from fees based on percentage of impervious cover.

We have been discussing these options and others at our Storm water Advisory meetings. The primary objective of the Stormwater Advisory Committee is to determine the best way for the Town of Ashland to fund its compliance with the EPA's Draft Massachusetts Small MS4 General Permit. This may involve creating an enterprise fund (stormwater utility) to raise the funds necessary to comply with the permit terms.

The committee has evaluated multiple options and determined a fair and equitable approach is the best and hence recommended a Stormwater Enterprise (stormwater utility) approach.

### **Why do we need a stormwater fund?**

The purpose of establishing and implementing a stormwater fund is to generate a stable and adequate source of funding to pay for stormwater management expenses related to regulations and infrastructure costs. Ashland's costs for managing stormwater have continued to rise while budgets have not kept pace. The Town's drain pipes and stormwater infrastructure are very outdated and are in need of regular maintenance and repair. Additionally, state and federal laws now require cities and towns to reduce pollution in stormwater runoff.

### **Who is responsible for what?**

Like our water and sewer infrastructure, portions of the drain system are owned by the Town, while others are privately owned and maintained. Generally, the Town is responsible for parts of the stormwater system that are in the public right of way and located on public property. [This includes storm drain manholes, catch basins, culverts, conveyance piping and stormwater outfalls.] Typically, property owners are responsible for everything on their property, unless there is a deeded easement to the Town.

**Will the stormwater program fix all my flooding problems?**

The regulatory requirements focus mainly on quality issues. However, some of the regulatory requirements will help reduce flooding and the Town of Ashland can address quantity issues by adopting regulations to reduce future flooding problems. Private property issues are not likely to be addressed by the use of public funds. Improvements to storm drainage systems within the public rights of way are likely in a few years.

**My home is on a street with no catchbasin / storm infrastructure. Hence my property does not pollute the streams. Why should I pay towards a fund?**

Rainwater falling on rooftops, pavement, and other impervious surfaces runs off in greater quantity and contains more pollutants than rain falling on unimproved forests and grasslands. In developed areas, this runoff must be managed to keep it from causing flooding and to remove the pollutants before it is discharged into streams and rivers. The revenue generated from the stormwater fee is used to maintain ditches, piped systems, and other stormwater structures, and also to ensure that pollutants carried by stormwater runoff are removed before the runoff reaches our waterways. Yes, your street may not have a stormwater infrastructure such as a catch basin, but the run off is leading to an intersecting street or creating ponding / flooding in or near your street. Request a copy of the Town of Ashland's map of all stormwater infrastructure that the town needs to maintain all across the town.

**Why do we need to manage our stormwater runoff?**

Stormwater runoff needs to be managed just as any other process in Town is managed, such as water, sewer, roadway, or solid waste systems. Management is essential to protect the quality of our natural waterways for drinking water supplies and recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, and boating. Stormwater also needs to be managed to ensure that during storm events runoff does not flood or erode private property or otherwise put public safety or private property at risk.

**Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?**

Everyone in the Town benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. If stormwater runs off your property, the Town must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits may include protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property / waterways downstream from your runoff, and improving water quality in the SuAsCo and Charles River water sheds. Stormwater from public roadways that everyone uses is also required to be treated.

**Where is the money going?**

This fee stems from an unfunded federal mandate from Congress via the Clean Water Act, where urbanized areas such as Ashland must implement a stormwater management program to improve the water quality of receiving waters in our community.

Since this is an unfunded mandate, local governments must determine how to fund this program. The Stormwater Advisory committee has been tasked with evaluating the different options to fund the program.

A portion of the stormwater revenue would go towards town wide efforts to reduce flood risks, improve water quality, and restore streams (for e.g. drain maintenance, street sweeping, catch basin cleaning, water quality monitoring and analysis, illicit discharge detection and elimination, stormwater plan review, construction and post construction inspections, public education and involvement activities).

The Town of Ashland has approximately:

- 150,550 feet of storm drain pipes
- 600 storm drain outfalls
- 2500 storm catch basins
- Undetermined number of open channel conveyances (like swales, bio retention areas/ponds)

NOTE: None of the drain water is treated chemically before it enters the streams / water bodies. However, catch basins do provide some form of treatment by removing total suspended solids.

The Stormwater Utility will be used to support the planning and implementation of a Stormwater Management plan for both watersheds.

The Town is responsible for managing all aspects of stormwater within its jurisdiction, which means it is only responsible for the portions of the stormwater system that are in city maintained street right-of-ways, permanent stormwater / drainage easements conveyed to and accepted by the town, or otherwise explicitly stated in a written agreement with the Town. The Town does not maintain facilities that are located on private property, in easements not dedicated specifically to the Town, or that fall under the jurisdiction of other governmental jurisdictions. The Town can and may have to inspect private facilities with recorded maintenance agreements to confirm the facilities are functioning properly.

### **How were the Stormwater Rates Determined?**

The Board of Selectmen elected to set the Stormwater Rates at \$8.75 per quarter for Tier 1 residential properties and \$0.80 per square foot of Impervious Area for Tier 2 commercial and exempt properties with a minimum of \$20 per quarter. For Tier 2 properties, stormwater rates were determined via an impervious area study that produced an Impervious Area Map that is available to the public on the DPW Stormwater page.