

## **Arlington County Civic Federation Q&A Summary – 4/12/22 - Stormwater Utility**

***These questions are grouped together because they have a similar topic: Can the new utility be used to "reward" or incentivize private property owners to keep trees, including specifically older trees or species that soak up more water? For those of us who have hidden stormwater abatement, what is the appeal process? For example, patio set in sand and gravel, not mortar; driveway covered with gravel, not concrete or asphalt; etc. If one puts in a stormwater 'rock garden' in addition to my pervious driveway, will the total be reassessed? Will you charge people extra for the shallow-rooted non-native turf grasses?***

A credit program is required for any jurisdiction that creates a stormwater utility in Virginia. The credit program will be a way to say "thank you" for doing certain environmentally friendly activities, such as installing a permeable driveways or patio, rain gardens, planting trees, native plantings, etc. Arlington's credit program is still being developed. Stormwater utility credits are usually a relatively modest reduction for individual properties (typically credit programs comprise under 1% of utility fee revenues). For hidden stormwater practices, a typical approach is to offer a process for customers to address these with the utility, and that process will be considered as the County develops the credit program. It is important to note that the stormwater utility is primarily intended to be a cost recovery mechanism for funding the stormwater program.

**Can you explain how the % surface fees works?** For the stormwater utility, a property's impervious coverage would be estimated using the County's digital mapping system (GIS). The measurement would be in square feet of impervious cover, and not percentage (%) of impervious cover. The average impervious coverage for single-family detached properties in Arlington has been estimated at 2,400 square feet. This is an Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). A fee for one ERU will be established for the utility and properties would be charged based on how many ERUs are on the property. As part of the feasibility study, one ERU was estimated to be \$188/year. Please note that the fee estimates may change as the rate model and structure and future budgets are finalized.

**Does this cost apply to the County itself? Will County properties be included in the GIS survey and publicly accessible? Think of the Trades Center by 4 Mile Run - there is significant asphalt and high heat surfaces.** The fees do not apply to every organization – State law excludes properties that hold their own MS4 Permit, because the legislature recognized that there was an expense for regulatory compliance that comes with the MS4 Permit. The County has an MS4 Permit, but we note that other organizations do as well, e.g., APS, the Pentagon, Arlington Cemetery, National Airport, and George Mason University.

**I understand the structure around the existing permits. However, in the interest of public transparency, where can a taxpayer see if Yorktown vs. Discovery School need stormwater improvements?** When County projects go through the development process, the development plans are shared and reviewed at public meetings. There is information about the Discovery School on the school web site (<https://discovery.apsva.us/about/building/>). There is also information about the County's stormwater infrastructure and what locations need upgrades in the Stormwater Master Plan.

**Is there an incentive for the County to build with less concrete and impervious surface? This has not been evident with recent park construction.** All County projects strive to incorporate the highest

environmental performance standards, as per the green building policy linked below. All County projects must also meet stormwater management requirements for the particular project.

<https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/05/Final-Signed-Facility-Sustainability-AR.pdf>

**How big is the hit to nonprofits and churches?** Some organizations, such as churches and non-profits, have been exempt from paying stormwater fees under the sanitary district tax. They would no longer be exempt with a stormwater utility. The fee for these organizations would depend on the size of their property and amount of impervious area, or number of ERUs on their property. As part of the feasibility study, one ERU (2,400 square feet of impervious area) was estimated to be \$188/year. Please note that these fee estimates may change as the rate model and structure, and future budgets are finalized.

**Are homeowners charged for county sidewalks? Some lots go to the center of the street. Are homeowners charged for that area?** No, public sidewalks would not be included in a property's impervious area estimate, so homeowners would not be charged for public sidewalks and road rights of way.

**Will calculations be done manually?** The calculations will be done electronically based on the County's digital mapping information system.

**Wouldn't proportion of impervious surface encourage a more advantageous environmental outcomes such as the planting of more trees?** Using the proportion of the property that is impervious is referred to as the "intensity of development" method for a stormwater utility. It requires estimates of the pervious and impervious area on the parcel. One challenge with using this method is that it would require ground truthing pervious and impervious areas on the property, which would add to the administrative burden.

**I noticed that high rise commercial properties will pay less; why would that be?** Under the current sanitary district tax, properties with a high assessed value pay a higher fee. There is, however, no correlation between property values and properties' demand upon the County's system, since property values don't relate to the amount of impervious area on the property. Commercial properties that have a high property assessment, and a lower amount of impervious area on their property (such as more vertical developments) will pay less under the stormwater utility than under a sanitary district tax.

**Will the data be transparent? Will a parcel's ERU be publicly available?** The County will have a bill calculator tool available on the web site to allow property owners to estimate the ERUs for a property.

**If a single family residential detached property has less than 2400 sq ft, will it still be charged 1 ERU?** This will depend on the rate structure. One option for the rate structure under consideration has the initial tier at 0.6 ERU for properties with lower impervious area. The County will be discussing possible rate structures with the Stormwater Utility Community Advisory Group (SUCAG).

**In 2018, DES disclosed that Arlington is adding about 9 acres of impervious surface a year. What is the current percentage of land covered by impervious surface? (It was cited as 45% "with the 2017 update." Today?** The current estimate is around 46%, although we are aware that there are some regional estimates that may differ slightly from the County estimates (although the difference is,

presently, di minimis. We are, however, working to identify the reason for any difference, regardless of scale.).

**If three properties are on a stem from the main road with tarmac pavement leading to the residences, would this have a higher rate even though their property taxes are less for being on a stem?** The rate for properties with a shared driveway may depend on the size of the shared driveway and how much would be attributed to each property.

**My physics is pretty shaky, but doesn't height also impact runoff because it deflects a larger cubic area?** Within the legislative and regulatory definitions for stormwater programs, runoff is calculated based on what falls directly to the ground or horizontal surface, not diagonally or otherwise.

**Since all wastewater goes into the same system, it seems unfair to charge the same for a unit with say 150 units vs 75 units and much lower per unit than single family residences.** This stormwater utility project relates to stormwater runoff (which comes from rainwater falling on your property) and not wastewater (which comes from inside your home from water used for toilets, showers, washing, etc). For a multi-family property, the impervious area fee would be distributed among all the residents.

**How will this be assessed on condos? Will it be split between all individual owners based on the high rise total sq ft or something?** For a multi-family property, the impervious area fee would be distributed among all the residents.

**Why are we using complicated ERUs rather than simply doing it directly on area?** There are limitations to accuracy of the mapping data and the square foot measurement would be too fine-grained of a measurement for estimating fees. It would also require more administrative burden as compared with using a tiered rate structure with ERUs.