

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

## **Why is Somers creating a new Stormwater Utility District?**

Prior to creating the new Utility District, the cost of the operation, expansion, and maintenance of the Village and Town drainage infrastructures and watercourses were paid by property taxes through the general fund. Infrastructure includes grassed swales and ditches, channels, storm sewers, inlets, and manholes. The general funds were strained by flood damage repairs because Somers did not have a revenue source to pay for the cost of creating, maintaining, and improving a stormwater management system. The damage to Somers public roads and bridges from the July 11, 2017 flood was approximately \$250,000, an unbudgeted expense to the general operating fund, prompting the Village Trustees to authorize emergency fund payments. Additionally, the flood caused \$1.7 million in damage throughout Kenosha County and 1,300 homes were affected by the July 11<sup>th</sup> flood reported by Wisconsin Emergency Management.

The good news is that there are solutions to these problems, and the impact of these events can be lessened or eliminated over time, if the resources necessary to address them are made available to the Village.

On January 23, 2018, the Village Board approved the creation of a new Stormwater Utility District Ordinance 18-001 which will shift funding of stormwater management from the general operating fund to a new Stormwater Utility Fund.

## **What is a Stormwater Utility District?**

It is a "stand-alone" service unit within the Village of Somers which generates revenues through fees for service. A stormwater utility, as authorized under Wisconsin Statutes, allows municipalities to create a system for collecting, transporting, pumping, treating or disposing of stormwater. Some examples of eligible costs are:

- Planning and design
- Construction and maintenance of storm sewers
- Construction and maintenance of curb and gutter
- Ditching
- Stream bank stabilization
- Construction and maintenance of detention retention basins

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

## **What is stormwater?**

All water is not the same.

- Tap water comes from a faucet and is used for drinking, bathing, cooking, and household purposes.
- Wastewater is water that has been used, as for washing clothes or flushing the toilet.
- Stormwater originates from rain or melting snow, or from other activities involving outdoor water use, such as car washing. Water that falls on an impervious surface and does not soak into the ground becomes runoff, and either flows directly into surface waterways or is channeled into storm sewers that eventually discharge into local water bodies.

## **What is the difference between a stormwater system and a sanitary sewer system?**

Water flowing through the sanitary sewer system is transported through collection systems and treated before it is released into the environment. Stormwater flows in large amounts directly into ponds and streams, streets, parking lots, etc. It is not treated like sanitary discharge.

## **How are stormwater fees determined?**

The fees are based on the amount of impervious surface located on each parcel in the Village (regardless of the total area of the parcel). The fees are calculated based on the number of Equivalent Runoff Units (ERU) generated by each parcel. One ERU is equal to 3,000 square feet of impervious area—the average amount of impervious area located on single-family residential properties in Somers. Single-family residential properties will be charged for one ERU each month. All other non-single-family parcels (i.e. commercial, industrial, etc.) will be charged based on the actual amount of impervious area located on the parcel. The ERU method is used by many stormwater utilities throughout the United States because it is one of the most equitable ways of raising revenue for stormwater projects. By calculating the amount of impervious area on each parcel in the Village and Town of Somers, we can more equitably tie the fee each property pays to the amount of stormwater the property generates.

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

How does the Village determine how much impervious surface is located on each property?

The amount of impervious area on each property is calculated based on aerial photography and the Village's Geographic Information System (GIS). The GIS system allows the Village to accurately measure and calculate the amount of impervious area created by every parcel in the Village and Town of Somers.

What is an impervious surface?

An impervious surface is any area within a parcel which prevents or significantly impedes the infiltration of stormwater into the soil. Examples of impervious surfaces include:

- Parking lots
- Roofs
- Driveways
- Patios
- Sidewalks
- Swimming pools
- Gravel and stone areas

Is there a cost to property owners?

Yes. It is mandatory that all property owners in the Village and Town of Somers pay this fee. Under the new funding approach, the fee will be calculated based on each property's impact on the stormwater system. Shifting to a stormwater utility system is designed to:

- Create a user fee system in which all property owners pay for their portion of the stormwater system's expenses, since all properties benefit from the system.
- Provide a predictable and sustainable funding source to properly maintain the stormwater system.

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

Where can I view the list of property owners and proposed fee amounts?

The proposed fees of all Somers property owners was presented for viewing at the public hearing held on January 9, 2018. [Click here to view.](#)

Is Somers the only community who has adopted a Stormwater Utility?

No. Nearby communities that have adopted storm water utilities include the City of Kenosha, Village of Pleasant Prairie, Village of Salem Lakes, Village of Silver Lake, Village of Caledonia, Village of Mt. Pleasant, Village of Sturtevant, City of Racine, Village of Union Grove and more.

Isn't this just another tax?

No. The stormwater utility fee is a user fee. Although the fee is a cost to property owners, it is not a tax on the assessed value of your property. The Stormwater Utility District fee is collected to pay or defray current costs associated with stormwater management in Somers.

When will the Stormwater Utility District begin?

The Stormwater Utility District became effective when the Village Board approved Village Ordinance 18-001 on January 23, 2018. Funding the District will occur on an annual basis after the Village Board approves the budget.

How much revenue will the Stormwater Utility fee provide?

We estimate the Stormwater Utility District fee will initially generate approximately \$250,000 in annual revenue based on the current fee schedule. Each year the Village Board will establish stormwater priorities and approve a budget.

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

## **Are grants available?**

Financial assistance is available for local stormwater and pollution control efforts through various Department of Natural Resources loan and grant programs. Unfortunately, the budget for funding the grants and loans are capped, limited, and include cost sharing. Grants and loans should not be a predictable or reliable source of funding.

## **How will the Stormwater Utility District fees be spent?**

The Stormwater Utility is dedicated to funding specific projects that will be rated in priority order by the Village of Somers Board of Trustees on an annual basis. Project descriptions and maps will be available for review at the Village/Town Hall and on the Somers website providing accountability and transparency.

The goal of Stormwater Utility projects is to improve the overall system drainage, maintain the conveyance system such as pipe, swales and culverts, control flooding, improve stormwater quality and implement the Environmental Protection Agency's stormwater regulations.

## **How will the stormwater fee be billed?**

Fees will be billed one-time annually and will be included on the tax bill.

## **To whom will the bills be sent?**

Since all parcels in the Village and Town of Somers are subject to the fees, there will be a bill for each parcel.

## **When will I receive the first bill?**

The first Stormwater Utility District fee will be included in your tax bill mailed December 2018.

# **Village of Somers Stormwater Utility Questions and Answers**

How can I pay the bill?

1. Mail
2. Personally at the Village/Town Hall during business hours.
3. The payment box located at the entrance of the sidewalk to the Village/Town Hall
4. On-line

How will current staffing levels be affected by the Utility?

The Village does not have any plans to hire additional staff at this time.

What is the process for appealing decisions that affect the Stormwater Utility District fee?

Decisions affecting stormwater fees including the classification of the parcel, the amount of impervious area, and the calculation of the Stormwater Utility fee will be made available by the Village's Clerk-Treasurer. Residents may appeal the decision by submitting a written appeal to the Somers Village/Town Administrator, William Morris. Decisions by the Administrator are final.

How can I get more information on the Stormwater Utility District?

For more information about the new Stormwater Utility District, please feel free to contact William Morris, Somers Village/Town Administrator at 262-859-2822, or email at [bmorris@somers.org](mailto:bmorris@somers.org) or view information on the Somers website [somers.org](http://somers.org). Information can also be found under the "department" tab under "public works".