Stormwater Drainage System Service Charge

Frequently Asked Questions

General Information:

As Broken Arrow continues to grow, more of our City which used to be open fields, wooded areas, and agricultural sites are now covered by homes, businesses, roads, and parking lots. Without these areas the stormwater is forced to find a creek, ditch, pond, or storm sewer line. Increases in impervious areas from development pose greater challenges to stormwater quality, stormwater maintenance, and floodplain management. On April 15, 2002, the Broken Arrow City Council passed an ordinance creating the new Stormwater Drainage System Service Charge for the purpose of providing a reliable, equitable, and efficient funding source for the City of Broken Arrow Stormwater Management Program. The system service charge became effective May 1, 2002, to all properties within the City Limits.

- What is the stormwater drainage system service charge?
- Why does the City of Broken Arrow need a stormwater drainage system service charge?
- What are the charges used for?
- What is stormwater runoff?
- Are other communities implementing stormwater drainage system service charges also?
- Is this another tax?
- How was the charge determined?
- What is an impervious surface?
- As a commercial property owner, whom do I call if I think there is an error in the charge to my property?
- Why are churches and other tax-exempt properties charged?
- What happens if I don't pay my bill?
- I live in a duplex, what will I be charged?
- If I don't have any drainage problems near my property and my property drains directly to the creek, why do I have to pay?
- Hasn't the City always had creeks and storm sewers to maintain? Why are we being charged now?
- Will the City fix drainage problems that are on my property?
- My neighborhood has drainage problems. Whom do I call to report them?
- Why are the stormwater and sanitary sewer systems separate?
- What is a watershed?

1. **What is the stormwater drainage system service charge?**

   The stormwater service charge is a monthly charge applicable to all properties which contribute excess runoff to the stormwater drainage system. The service charge is to stormwater like a sewer charge is to sewage, and a water charge is to drinking water. It is a utility responsible for funding the management, construction, operation, and maintenance of the stormwater drainage system. That includes inlets, storm sewers, borrow ditches, detention facilities, and floodplains. A stormwater utility generates revenue through user fees, which are based upon the amount of stormwater runoff a particular property passes to the stormwater drainage system. The more runoff a property contributes, the greater the charge.

2. **Why does the City of Broken Arrow need a stormwater drainage system service charge?**

   Previously there were no funds for maintenance of stormwater facilities. However, mandates from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the area of stormwater are causing the need for a continuous funding program for maintenance of the stormwater system. The City of Broken Arrow is required to meet EPA stormwater quality requirements. This includes not only management of the stormwater, but an expensive testing program on water quality within creeks and streams. This will help monitor any toxic or damaged chemicals or materials in our stormwater. A utility provides the most reliable and efficient funding source needed to implement and maintain stormwater improvements, including detention facilities, floodplain maintenance, erosion control and required water quality programs.

3. **What are the charges used for?**

   The following list is an example of the types of projects targeted by the stormwater management program.

   - Creek and floodplain maintenance
   - Borrow and drainage ditch clearing, re-grading and maintenance.
   - Storm sewer system cleaning, maintenance, and repair.
   - Construction of new storm sewers.
   - Maintenance and repair of streets to reduce areas of standing water.
   - Creek erosion control projects.
   - Regional detention ponds that will also be used for recreational purposes.
   - Flood reduction programs.
   - Improved stormwater quality programs.
   - Required stormwater quality testing within creeks and streams.

4. **What is stormwater runoff?**
   Stormwater runoff is the water that flows off impervious surface areas such as roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rainstorms. Rather than being absorbed into the ground, it pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins, and storm sewers.
   As stormwater flows over driveways, lawns, and sidewalks, it picks up debris, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants. Stormwater can flow into a storm sewer or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland, or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the water bodies that are home to natural habitat and are not used for recreation. Polluted runoff is the nation's greatest threat to clean water.
   By practicing healthy household habits, homeowners can keep common pollutants like pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings, and automotive fluids off the ground and out of stormwater. Adopt these healthy household habits and help protect lakes, streams, rivers, wetlands, and coastal waters.

5. **Are other communities implementing stormwater drainage system service charges also?**
   Yes, hundreds of communities nationwide are currently using stormwater utility fees as a method of funding stormwater programs. As of October 2024 the City of Tulsa charges all Residential Customer Fees - $12.22/month (1 ESU). Commercial, Multi-family, Industrial Fees - $10.63/month for each ESU.

6. **Is this another tax?**
   No, this is a stormwater drainage system utility fee set up to pay for the utility services provided by the City of Broken Arrow in relation to the stormwater system.

7. **How was the charge determined?**
   The $10.72 per month charge for 2,650 square footage of impervious area is based on the average impervious area of homes within the Broken Arrow region. The $10.22 per month per Equivalency Service Unit (ESU) charge was calculated after study of the costs of services necessary for the City of Broken Arrow Stormwater Management Program.

8. **What is an impervious surface?**
   An impervious surface is generally one that retards the entry of rainwater into the soil under natural conditions, causing water to run off the surface in an increased rate of flow than was present under natural conditions. Examples include, but are not limited to, rooftops of homes, businesses and other structures, asphalt or concrete sidewalks, driveways, roads, and parking lots, storage areas, and gravel areas.

9. **As a commercial property owner, whom do I call if I think there is an error in the charge to my property?**

   Call the City of Broken Arrow Stormwater Manager at (918) 259-2426, ext. 3360.

10. **Why are churches and other tax-exempt properties charged?**

    The stormwater drainage system service charge is based on how much the property contributes to the amount of stormwater runoff to the stormwater drainage system. The fee is a service charge and not a tax. Properties with impervious areas must make an equitable contribution to the stormwater system maintenance.

11. **What happens if I don't pay my bill?**

    If you currently receive City water, sanitary, or solid waste disposable, you have the risk of having these services stopped for delinquent payment. In addition, the City could place a lien against your property or file civil charges to collect.

12. **I live in a duplex, what will I be charges?**

    Each dwelling unit (side) of the duplex (through a quad plex) will be charged the standard rate per month.

13. **If I don't have any drainage problems near my property and my property drains directly to the creek, why do I have to pay?**

    There may not be a specific stormwater drainage problem in your area or neighborhood, but the runoff from your property does contribute to the City's overall stormwater drainage system. This includes floodplain areas within the Haikey Creek, Broken Arrow Creek, Arkansas River Tributaries, Spunky Creek, and Adams Creek drainage basins. Floodplain maintenance, multi-use detention facilities, major bridges, and culverts on arterial roads, and improved water quality within the creeks are examples of portions of the program which affect all citizens.

14. **Hasn't the City always had creeks and storm sewers to maintain? Why are we being charged now?**

    Yes, the City has had storm sewers for a long time. However, EPA regulations that require a more stringent comprehensive approach to stormwater management became effective in March of 2003 for the City of Broken Arrow and cities and towns throughout our nation. The stormwater drainage system service charge enables the city to meet state and federal requirements on stormwater quality and to meet the responsibilities to manage the stormwater drainage system more closely, Study the contents of the stormwater, seek out and eliminate illicit connections and illegal dumping, enforce codes more strictly, and educate the public on floodplain and stormwater issues.

15. Will the City fix drainage problems that are on my property?

The City cannot legally perform maintenance or work on areas within private property. Private drainage problems between adjacent private property owners are the responsibility of the property owners.

16. My neighborhood has drainage problems. Whom do I call to report them?

Call the City of Broken Arrow Citizens Action Center at 918-258-3587 or report the problem online at ActionCenterBA.com. The City will keep track of the problem areas reported, and maintenance or repair will be prioritized based on factors such as threat to public safety, benefit –cost ratio, and funds available.

17. Why are the stormwater and sanitary sewer systems separate?

Unlike waste water, which is treated before it is released back into the environment, stormwater goes directly into a community's ponds, streams, and lakes. Because stormwater comes in large amounts at unpredictable times, treating it as waste would be very expensive.

18. What is a watershed?

A watershed is an area of land in which all rain that falls in that area flows to the same body of water.