

... From the Mayor  
August 2013

How can I make a discussion of storm-sewers interesting? I can't. But please plow through this because the City has been mandated to create a new storm-water utility, and I will be asking the Common Council to support this over the next few months. Keep in mind that a storm-water system is separate from a sewage collection and treatment system.

We all have roofs with gutters, downspouts, and underground tile, etc. that keep rainwater away from our foundations and out of our houses. Our driveways shed water. The slope of our property sheds water. Businesses and industry have larger roofs and hard surfaces (parking lots) that shed even greater amounts of water. The owner bears all of the costs to create and maintain residential and commercial "private storm-water systems."

The runoff from your private system is then partially, if not completely, conveyed into the City's public storm-water system (curbs, gutters, catch basins, underground "storm sewers," ditches, tunnels, pipes and conduits).

The purpose of storm-water systems, both private and public, is to guide rainwater away from buildings and roadways toward areas that will absorb the runoff back into the soil or carry it away via creeks, ditches, rivers, streams, or lakes. If the storm-water system is working properly, it will help control erosion and flooding. Another critical concern is preventing polluted runoff from entering the storm-water system and finding its way into our lakes and streams, and eventually our drinking water.

At the direction of the federal government, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) has directed smaller urbanized municipalities (including the City of Warsaw) to follow the rules of the Clean Water Act. The City of Warsaw was designated as an MS4 (municipal separate storm sewer system) community and thus, must comply with environmental rules that govern storm water collection and distribution. In fact, Warsaw must comply with the rules in order to keep their storm water system "permitted." This is mandated by the EPA and must be funded by the City (unfunded mandate). We have no choice. In Indiana, there are approximately 150 "MS4" cities and towns. Warsaw is the only MS4 municipality in the county.

So there you have it. Warsaw, like many other Hoosier communities with a population over 7,000, has been mandated to comply. Now what?

First and most importantly, our storm-water utility, under the watchful oversight of IDEM, must maintain certain standards ("Rule 13") to keep our storm-water collection system "permitted." This includes inspection, maintenance, and repair of the current system. It also requires the development of a comprehensive capital improvement plan that must be implemented to replace aging

infrastructure (e.g. storm sewer pipe relining), roadside ditches, storm pipes, culverts, dams, levees, and diversion. All guided by a long-term control plan.

In addition, the utility will be charged with the detection and elimination of industrial, commercial, and residential illicit discharges. Other responsibilities will include erosion control, public education, and pollution prevention.

So how do we support this unfunded mandate? We are in the process of evaluating the requirements necessary to establish and maintain this new utility. This will serve as the basis for establishing a monthly storm-water utility fee that would affect all landowners in the City.

There are over 170 communities in Indiana that have storm water system permits who have been handed this unfunded federal mandate. Most of these communities have already implemented a monthly storm-water fee to support this. While we don't have a choice, the impact of this will certainly be positive for our "City of Lakes" and high water tables. I would be happy to discuss any questions you may have.