

From the Mayor...

October 2, 2020

Next week, the Common Council will introduce an ordinance to adjust the storm-water utility fee. These funds are used to control drainage, improve water quality, control erosion, and address flooding. Living in a lakes community, these are critical issues that require significant planning and funding.

What benefits do property owners get from the storm-water utility fee? Probably the most critical is the city network of gutters, street drains, and underground pipes that allow rain and snowmelt to be carried away after it leaves your property.

With a significant portion of our economic growth and recreation linked to our lakes and streams, water quality and erosion control are other significant issues our storm-water utility maintains.

With the abundance of lakes and streams as well as the high water tables and challenging soils in our community, we continue to add to the list of projects needed to address those concerns. We prioritize the most critical projects and plan for emergencies. Unfortunately, these projects are also very expensive.

Our budget limits what we can do. For example, we have spent almost \$700,000 on two projects designed to improve drainage by expanding the Eisenhower Basin on the city's south side. A third project in Kelly Park is planned at a similar cost. The city has also spent around \$400,000 on shoreline stabilization on Pike and Center Lakes.

By virtue of its size, the City of Warsaw was mandated as a Municipal Separate Storm System (MS4) community, the result of an EPA amendment to the Federal Clean Water Act in 1999. An MS4 community is required to meet regulatory requirements to maintain clean water standards that are managed by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

In addition to the ongoing capital improvement projects previously mentioned, the city must also meet its federally mandated obligations as an MS4 community. In 2013, the City of Warsaw established a Storm-Water Utility. The utility provides for storm-water infrastructure maintenance, manages drainage and flooding issues, initiates public education and regulations to protect lakes and streams from pollution, manage erosion control, and administers capital improvement projects.

As you can imagine, the city is also required to fund all operational expenses and capital improvements. Funds come from residential and commercial storm-water utility fees, property tax revenue, grants, and other resources. Prior to the adoption of Warsaw's first storm-water utility fee in 2013, storm water maintenance and improvement projects were funded from street department funds and property tax generated Cumulative Capital Development (CCD) funds.

The current storm-water utility fee has not been raised since it was first implemented in 2013. All residential users currently pay a fixed fee as a part of the monthly sewer bill. Commercial users pay based upon the calculated surface runoff area (roof, parking lots, etc.) on their property.

The rate structure change being proposed will be phased in over a period of five years. As mentioned, the current rate is not sufficient to fund the storm water utility needs we have in our community. Because much of the system is underground, we typically don't think about it too much!

I can assure you, we all benefit from the Storm Water Utility.