



STORMWATER COMMUNICATIONS

**Tools to help your
community understand
and support an
effective stormwater
utility plan**

INTRODUCTION

Stormwater pollution is a serious issue that is often hidden from sight. What happens below matters above—to our health, the safety of our rivers, the security of our vital infrastructure, and the prosperity of our communities. Additionally, many communities are required by law to address stormwater pollution.

But how do we pay for it? A stormwater utility, sometimes called an authority or management service fee, is an equitable solution that makes it possible for local governments to attend to their community's need for clean and healthy water.

The success of passing a utility depends on strong preparations, including detailed legislation that includes a clear explanation of:

- ① The proposed fee structure so that homeowners, business owners, religious groups and other non-profits know what fees they'll be facing
- ② Local projects the fee will help fund, and why these projects are important for your community
- ③ Specific actions that citizens and businesses can take to reduce their fees

Additionally, taking time to determine who your community's decision makers are, what they care about, who influences them, and what might stop them from supporting your bill is critical. By determining these things, you'll be able to create a strategy for finding the best messages and spokespeople to set your stormwater bill up for success.

In this guide you'll find a series of tools designed to help you through the process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE “STORMWATER TOP 10” 4

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE. 5

CAMPAIGN SOLUTIONS AND OPPOSITION. 9

DEFINITIONS 11

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS. 12

MEDIA GUIDE. 14

SAMPLE FACT SHEET/FAQS. 16

SAMPLE LETTER 18

SAMPLE OPINION PIECES 19

SAMPLE MATERIALS. 25

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA 28

SO, YOU’VE PASSED A UTILITY, WHAT NOW? 30

RESOURCES/CONTACTS 32

CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTESVILLE. 34

STORMWATER TOP 10

A QUICK CHECKLIST OF THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL STORMWATER UTILITY CAMPAIGN

- 1. Strong legislation with enough details to ensure strong implementation**
- 2. Outreach to your local community so that no one is surprised by the proposed utility**—Op-eds, letters to the editor, public meetings, FAQ flyers, social media, advertisements and face to face conversations
- 3. A clear guideline of approximate fees**
- 4. A clear explanation of ways to mitigate the fees and a list of exemptions**
- 5. Broad support with people and organizations outside the usual suspects**—local builders, religious leaders, equity champions and neighborhood groups.
- 6. Identify your decisionmakers.** Who are they? Not just city council, but who within the council is going to support the utility, who will oppose no matter what, who might you be able to convince?
- 7. What do those potentially moveable decision-makers care about?** Re-election? A specific region of your community? A specific issue. Tell stories that relate stormwater back to their pet issues and communities. Reach out to their specific constituents
- 8. Identify the people in your community who will likely oppose the utility.** Find out why, and create messages and stories that mitigate their concern, AND bring stormwater back to their values and needs.
- 9. Listen to your gut—do you feel like something's missing?** Sense a weakness in your argument. Don't plug your ears—dig into it. You are often the best judge of what your weakness is, and being able to plan for that is key
- 10. Paint a picture of the solution**—what does everyone get for the fees they are paying? Stormwater management can be beautiful and exciting for your community. Use visuals whenever possible.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

Overall Strategy to Pass and Support the Strongest Stormwater Pollution Utility for your Community

Answering the questions below will help build the foundation for your local stormwater communications strategy. Use your responses to guide your message, process, and to help customize sample materials included in this toolkit for your community.

To download a word document of these questions for easy editing, visit: www.stormwatercommunications.org

1. Which organizations are part of your coalition, and who is your contact person at each of them?

- ▶ Mobilizing a diverse local and regional coalition is one of the most effective ways to pass a utility. Keep all organizations in the loop of your efforts, strategies and materials. *The best efforts include people from local businesses, religious groups, and organizations focused on fair treatment of all community members.*

2. Is your community required by law to pass legislation? If yes, by when, and what are the consequences if you do not?

3. Do you have sample or proposed legislation from which to refer?

- ▶ Details can make all the difference between a successful stormwater utility and one that's passed but not well implemented. *(Please see links to sample legislation included in the resources section of this toolkit)*

4. Do you know how much the average homeowner, small business owner, and church might pay in utility fees?

- ▶ **This is a critical piece of information** – if you don't know it, we STRONGLY suggest that you work to determine some rough estimates before you start communicating with your community. Many people will resist anything that involves an unknown fee – even if it's for something good. This is totally understandable. It is also important to know if the fee will be charged as a flat rate or assessed based on how much impervious surface exists on the property.

5. Are there projects individuals, businesses or non-profits can initiate to reduce their fee?

- ▶ If so, be sure to outline these clearly and direct folks towards resources and support for projects to reduce their property's impervious surfaces. Highlight locals who have taken steps that will mitigate their stormwater fees, and more importantly, steps that will build an inspiring, clean future. We've found that the process of coming together to create healthier stormwater systems has been very empowering and exciting.

6. Who has the power to write and legislate your stormwater pollution utility? (Who are your decision makers? City council, state legislature, advisory committee?)

- ▶ Once you know which legislative body you're working with, spend some time learning more about them. Are there people who will strongly support your bill? People who might be persuadable? People who will never support it?

The more you know, the more ability you have to be strategic. For people who are likely supporters, reach out to them and make sure they have everything they need from you: share your materials and fact sheets. Make yourself available to answer any questions or concerns they might have.

For people who might be persuaded to support your bill, persuade them using the talking points provided – and focus on those points that you believe will resonate *most* with what matters to them. Provide feedback to those working on the utility development to see if there is an adjustment that might address a concern. For people who will likely never support, make sure they have the information and *find out what's stopping them from supporting you*. That information is incredibly valuable– if you know what matters to them, you can reframe the issue to address their concerns.

7. Do you have a contact within the local government or advisory committee charged with creating and managing the stormwater proposal?

- ▶ A working relationship with a community's officials is an important step in creating a strong, effective utility structure. Reach out and offer to help them with their communications and outreach. Offer up our sample FAQs tailored to your community's specifics. If your community has already passed a utility, but needs support in presenting it to the public, offer to help with their communications and outreach efforts.

8. What types of projects will be supported by the fee?

- ▶ Have a clear, articulate response for the inevitable question: “what will the fee be used for?” While “stormwater maintenance” may be the official response, make sure that your community understands what this maintenance entails and why it is important to do now. If it is primarily for fixing aging, underground pipes, explain the consequences of what would happen if they are not fixed.

It's very important to paint a picture of what the future can hold. Use visuals when possible (stormwater management projects can be beautiful and inspiring!). Reinforce the idea that the improvements made can have multiple benefits. A paved parking lot transformed into an attractive park is not only managing the stormwater, but also creating a powerful community asset.

9. What is of primary concern to your decision makers and who influences them?

- ▶ If your goal is to pass a proposed utility, we are making the assumption that getting re-elected, and therefore keeping their constituents happy, is a primary concern to all elected officials charged with voting on a final proposal. Therefore, not only the lawmakers, but also their constituents are key influencers.

This is a critical place to drill down into specifics though: Are there organizations or groups that have especially notable influence on the council members? Specific people who influence them? Do many of them have young children? Are they women or men? Do they have ‘pet’ issues? Do they vote in blocks? How many do you think will vote for the stronger utility, of those who don't, what will stop them? Are you– or other spokespeople– meeting with the decision makers in advance of their vote? As you learn more about them, you'll be better able to talk about stormwater as it relates to their values.

10. What does your community know about stormwater pollution?

- ▶ Is it an issue of concern, or do most people not even know about it? If you had to guess, what percentage of your community even knows about it?

11. What are the top-of-mind issues for your community?

- ▶ Your message about stormwater pollution must connect to the top-of-mind issues facing your decision makers – and your community. What messages could you use to connect the need to address stormwater pollution to other issues that your community cares about?

For example, in one town there was no raging debate on stormwater drainage – it was not a pressing concern. We needed to create awareness and concern around the issue, and we knew that the community cared about fair treatment of all citizens. So in our communications, we educated citizens about a relatively unseen, practical concern that has a simple solution: Stormwater runoff threatens health and safety, therefore it must be addressed. If left unaddressed, stormwater pollution unfairly impacts different members of the community. It's a simple problem with a simple solution.

In other communities, the problem of flooding may be an important issue to tap into. Has there been any flooding in your community? If so, what were the costs? Can you tell a specific story? Help residents understand why they are experiencing more frequent and severe flooding, and what can be done to help minimize it in the future. Offer examples of successful programs of using green infrastructure to help control flooding and beautify communities.

12. What people in your community might be best suited to appeal to your decision makers?

- ▶ Communications is as much about who says something as what they say. Key messengers are “trusted sources,” folks who are reliable and dedicated members of a community, and “unexpected sources,” folks whose support of the utility might be a surprise. A church leader, a local businessman or woman, a regular citizen are great messengers. Ask them to sign on to a letter to council, an op-ed, a paid advertisement, or to speak out at public meetings about the issue. Don't be shy, you'd be surprised how often folks are willing to support a well-planned, community effort when approached.

13. Where are the areas in your community that folks congregate and spend time?

- ▶ Once you've honed in on your top-of-mind messaging, you'll need to get the message out to your community. Work with your network to organize public outreach events at neighborhood gathering centers, schools, places of worship. Create and print simple fact sheets or flyers and hang them in local coffee shops, libraries, bulletin boards, laundromats in your community. If you have the budget, print postcard sized materials or stickers to hand out.

CAMPAIGN SOLUTIONS AND OPPOSITION

To begin with, it's great to have a name for your campaign to support an improved stormwater program.

A strong campaign name can help rally your supporters and audience around your goals and demonstrate a strong, cohesive coalition. Make sure the name resonates with the priorities and top-of-mind issues in your community.

You may find that your local government has named the program or the utility proposal you will be supporting (for example, Charlottesville used the title "Water Resources Protection Program"). Your campaign name may reference this, but be should be unique and action oriented. Below are some examples.

IF AGING PIPES AND INFRASTRUCTURE IS AN ISSUE IN YOUR COMMUNITY, TRY THIS:

**What happens below matters above:
Keep our [Community] Clean!**

IF POLLUTED WATERWAYS ARE MORE IMPORTANT ISSUES, PERHAPS THIS IS BETTER:

**Clean it Up!
Support [Your Community]'s Stormwater
Action Plan**

IF FLOODING IS A BIG PROBLEM, PERHAPS THIS IS BETTER:

**Soak it Up!
Support [Your Community]'s Stormwater
Action Plan**

Once you have a name, use it, use it, use it! Include it on all your materials. Make stickers or pins with the name. Share it with your social media networks. The more you can spread a cohesive message, the stronger your campaign will be.

Next, it's really important to take a few minutes to accurately assess what strengths and weaknesses your campaign has.

Here's a simple, four-part way to do that:

- ① List out all of the things inside ***your coalition*** or initiative that are strengths.
Examples: strong relationships within the community, some budget, passion, experience
- ② List out all of the things inside ***your coalition*** or initiative that could be weaknesses.
Examples: no budget, scattered support – no strong infrastructure, no experience trying to pass legislation
- ③ List out all of the things going on in ***your community*** that are strengths
Examples: your state is mandating action on stormwater, some city council members are strong advocates of the environment, there's community pride around your environment, there's community support around fair treatment of all community members
- ④ List out all of the things going on in ***your community*** that could be weaknesses
Examples: people don't know what stormwater pollution is, there are other more pressing local concerns, any additional fees will cause hardship for some community members, city council is anti-tax or anti-environment

Once you've listed all of these things, think about how to shore up your weaknesses – internal and external, and how to play to your strengths. That could mean developing specific strategies to get your city council people on board, finding local business people who support the stormwater initiative and are willing to speak publicly. It could mean creating a listserv or Facebook page to facilitate easier communications within your coalition.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE OPPOSITION

We've experienced opposition from some groups because of the perception that a utility fee is a tax, or because the stormwater fee has not been clarified up front, which is a major risk management issue. If the estimated stormwater fee range is not acknowledged from the onset, rumors can circulate, and many will staunchly oppose the fee because it's unknown. (This is quite natural.)

In order to succeed, you must identify the estimated fee range, explain what the fees will be used for, and proactively reach out to the following communities.

- ▶ Nonprofit community, specifically houses of worship (large landowners typically exempt from other taxes)
- ▶ Large land holders and builders
- ▶ People who are against taxes overall
- ▶ Folks who work to serve lower-income communities

Be sure to explain the credits or rebates (if available) that can reduce their fees. Provide resources for help in planning improvement projects. Give them examples of others in their community that have invested successfully in improvement projects.

What about the “Rain tax”?

Most folks working on stormwater have heard the phrase “rain tax” and cringed. How do we address those that think this really is a tax on our rain?

To begin with, don't indulge the opposition by repeating the term ‘rain tax.’ Instead, redirect the conversation right away with a statement such as: ***“It doesn't matter what you call it, what we're dealing with is pollution of our waterways.”***

Some further talking points to use:

- ▶ No amount of talking or cute terminology can solve the serious problem that we're facing: pollution of our water.
- ▶ This isn't about rain, it's about pollution. We have a simple problem: polluted water runoff has nowhere to go. We can subject ourselves to sewage flooding and polluted waterways, or we can invest, for the average homeowner, less than 25 cents a day to prevent these risks.
- ▶ The foundation of a healthy community starts with clean water, and that's the issue on the table.
- ▶ Stormwater runoff is pollution. It's a straightforward problem that we cannot afford to ignore: the health of our community starts with clean water.

DEFINITIONS

How to begin to talk about stormwater management

For many people, the subject of stormwater is either new, unimportant or too technical. In order to relate to your audience, use both terms and subjects to which they can relate.

Below is a list of terms to avoid and suggested alternatives to use in your outreach:

WORDS THAT ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND:	INSTEAD, USE THESE WORDS:
TMDLs	Pollution limits, blueprints
WIPs	water plans, cleanup road maps, blueprints
Pollution diet	Pollution limits
MS4 permit	Stormwater pollution permits
BMP's (Best Management Practices)	Conservation practices, stormwater controls
Regulations	Protections or safeguards, legal requirements
Stormwater	Polluted runoff, polluted stormwater
Low impact development (LID)	Modern and efficient infrastructure, Green infrastructure
Watershed	Land around rivers and streams
Agricultural land	Working farms
Urban sprawl	Wasteful and inefficient development
Environment	Land, air, water and animals

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

In order to make stormwater urgent and relevant—and to inspire action—we need to tell stories about people who have suffered the economic and health costs of stormwater pollution. This message comes best from someone in your community who can speak out at public meetings or provide quote for press releases. It could be talking about your river that you can't swim in or your beach that has been closed because of stormwater pollution. In a nutshell: Know what your audience cares about. Create a message that speaks to their concerns. Tell stories that do the same. And paint a picture of the solution.

Use your responses to the Strategic Development Questions above to customize the talking points below with ***specific examples and testimonials from your community***.

The **core messages** and **talking points** below are a platform or guideposts for communicators talking in their own language, from their own experience. In all cases, the message is strengthened by talking about specific examples and local conditions.

CORE MESSAGES

- ① We need a stormwater utility because many of our rivers and streams are polluted. The major cause of water pollution is the runoff after a rainstorm that picks up trash, motor oil, lawn fertilizer and other chemicals that accumulate on our roads, parking lots, roofs and driveways and then washes into our streams and rivers. We can no longer swim in or consume the fish from most local waterways because they are so polluted. In short, we have not been good stewards of our environment for decades and we are now paying the price.
- ② Our lives depend on having clean, healthy water.
- ③ Our communities depend on safe, efficient ways of protecting our waters by reducing pollution.
- ④ Innovative, efficient ways to manage our storm water bring additional important economic benefits to our community.
- ⑤ Stormwater utilities are a fair way to pay for the reduction of polluted storm water that is harming our local rivers, streams and the Bay.
- ⑥ Ignoring storm water pollution leads to flooding, health problems and property damage. We must address this problem together, in ways that are fair to people in every part of the community.
- ⑦ Ignoring storm water pollution and our aging, obsolete infrastructure will increase our future costs, and threatens the security of everyone in the community.
- ⑧ We have a responsibility to help care for creation.
- ⑨ Our children, grandchildren and wildlife deserve clean water.

continues >

TALKING POINTS

Benefits of stormwater management to [your community]

- Ⓐ Investing to reduce polluted run-off will improve our community, reduce flooding and clean-up our local rivers, streams and the Bay.
- Ⓑ Projects funded through a stormwater utility will create valuable, local jobs.
- Ⓒ We needed a stormwater utility so that committed funds can be used to overcome the polluted runoff from our paved surfaces including parking lots, driveways and roads.
- Ⓓ Smart stormwater projects will allow more water to soak into the ground and, at the same time, beautify our community.
- Ⓔ Dirty water causes harm to human health and the local economy.
- Ⓕ Stormwater management is more than diverting rain water into pipes and channels to keep it from flooding streets and properties, but includes conservation practices to remove or keep pollutants out of our rivers, streams and the Bay. These practices will also enhance and beautify our communities.

The low cost of the utility

- Ⓐ The average homeowner will pay \$XX/month, much less than they pay for cable television.
- Ⓑ A dedicated funding source will ensure that our money stays in our community to fix our stormwater problem.

It's the right and the fair thing to do

- Ⓐ As towns and cities grow, we add parking lots, roads, roofs and other surfaces where rain cannot soak into the land. If we don't address the problem, we will leave our rivers and streams too polluted for our children to swim or fish in.
- Ⓑ We all cause pollution, we all need to work and pay to clean it up.
- Ⓒ All community residents have a right to have clean drinking water, a reduced risk of flooding and healthy rivers and streams.

MEDIA GUIDE

Media strategy is an integral part of your campaign plan. Media is simply a tactic to accomplish your campaign goals.

RELATING TO YOUR AUDIENCE AND TALKING TO THEM THROUGH WHAT THEY —NOT YOU—VALUE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN DO TO FURTHER YOUR CAUSE.

There are many different types of media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazines) and many different types of media coverage (news, feature, editorial, community, paid). As much as possible, your campaign should include a variety of media tactics aimed at garnering a range of types of coverage. By making strategic decisions about your local priorities before starting your media work, your efforts will be more targeted and you can make better use of limited resources.

What makes an event or story catch the media's attention?

There's no hard and fast rule to what makes it onto the nightly news, but there are some good rules of thumb that can help you get coverage for your event.

Envision your local tv news broadcast. ... What are they covering? Breaking news, conflict, controversy, intrigue, violence, human interest. Since you're trying to get coverage in your local news, you need to be thinking about how to tell your story in a way that will fit into their format. What are the human issues that stormwater causes? Are there people in your community suffering flooding? Are there people working together to do stormwater abatement projects, and having fun in the process?

See the media strategy cheat sheet on the following page to begin your strategy.

What you say to your neighbor may be the most important!

You and your allies, friends and family and community members are ALSO the media. More and more, we are creating our own news. Whenever you post on facebook, twitter and blogs, your and your community's messages become part of the media. Don't forget to be, make and distribute your own news: photographing and videoing not only your big moments, but the EXPERIENCE of working on your issue. And spread this news widely via social media, your website, and everyday conversations.

For a complete media guide with more tips on how to pitch a story and perfect your message, visit www.stormwatercommunications.org

MEDIA STRATEGY CHEAT SHEET

Goal of your campaign:

Who can make that happen? (Who's your decisionmaker(s)?)

Who influences your decisionmaker(s)?

What do they care about?

What media do they read, watch, listen to?

What's the reason you're going to the media?

What elements of newsworthiness does it have, or which can you insert into it? (Urgency, human interest, trend, etc)

What news outlets are you going to approach? Do you know specific reporters names who cover your type of issue? Do you have their phone numbers, emails, etc? Get this all together in advance of your event.

What's your dream headline?

What's your dream news outlet for this event?

Who is your spokesperson? Who will speak best to your decisionmaker(s) and the people who influence them?

What are your main messages:

What's your dream quote?

SAMPLE FACT SHEET LANGUAGE

Suggested language for outreach fact sheets/FAQs

It is important that you customize this fact sheet based on your community and your responses to the Strategic Development Questions. Include specifics on your community's proposed fees, how folks can find out their fees, and sample projects for which the fees will be used. Be concise in your communications—try to keep your fact sheet to one page, front/back. Use visuals whenever possible to connect the problem with the solution— before and after photos can be powerful, as long as images reflect local conditions.

To download an editable word document of these FAQs, visit: www.stormwatercommunications.org

WHAT HAPPENS BELOW MATTERS ABOVE

OR **CLEAN IT UP!** OR **SOAK IT UP!**

Support (YOUR COMMUNITY)'s Stormwater Pollution Plan

Underneath the streets of [our community] our infrastructure is in disrepair. The XX-year-old clay and metal pipes [confirm by community] that we rely on to transport our sewage and stormwater runoff are disintegrating, leading to pollution issues that affect our community's health and safety.

Polluted runoff is contaminating our rivers and streams. Erosion is threatening our homes and businesses.

While we can't see the drainage pipes that support the most basic functioning of our city, we all rely on them. And we all need to pitch in to make sure they're maintained, or face consequences such as sewage waste flooding into our rivers, creeks, streets and our homes. [Insert specific priorities of your community here.]

Stormwater runoff pollution is a straightforward issue with an equally straightforward solution:

- ① Support homeowners and businesses in upgrading their properties to reduce pollution by ensuring stormwater is absorbed or captured— and reduce their stormwater utility bills.
- ② Repair and replace outdated pipes and drainage systems.

What is Stormwater pollution? Why is it important now?

When it rains or snows, the water falls on rooftops, streets, sidewalks and parking lots and then flows through our community's stormwater drainage system. Along the way, it picks up all kinds of pollutants like pet waste, fertilizers and pesticides, oil and automotive fluids. Much of the ground in cities and towns is covered in surfaces that do not allow this water to be absorbed – surfaces like asphalt, cement, and roofing material (also called impervious surfaces) – it then flows into our rivers, streams and lakes. Twenty percent of the pollution affecting critical places like the Chesapeake Bay come from this stormwater runoff.

Cities and towns developed systems to handle all of this water – but in many cases, those systems were designed and built more than one hundred years ago.

They're not able to handle our current stormwater runoff, and they're breaking down.

Most of us don't think about the pipes that carry water to and from our houses and businesses, until they break, and then, with a backed-up toilet or no water coming out of our faucets, we have an emergency on our hands.

While stormwater pollution might not feel like an emergency now, there's probably someone in your community who's experienced flooding and associated health hazards associated, someone who knows firsthand what kind of problems we face if we don't update and repair our stormwater systems.

States and local communities have come together to come up with plans to fix our stormwater systems. They're doing it for many reasons:

- ① because it's the responsibility of local and state government to look out for our health and safety,
- ② because it's not fair to put undue burdens on some members of our communities who pay the price of our outdated stormwater pollution systems,
- ③ because we need a healthy environment in order to thrive, and stormwater pollution threatens that,
- ④ because not funding improvements will lead to increased flooding, threatening our businesses and homes and putting our economy at risk.

How does the solution get funded?

The fairest way to distribute the cost of these improvements is through a stormwater utility. A utility is a fee that's paid by everyone — homeowners, business owners and non-profits that own property. The fee shows up on the [XXX] bill. For the average homeowner, the cost will be between \$XX-\$XX/year — less than the amount most of us spend on milk every month.

Nobody likes new fees, but the cost of ignoring stormwater pollution will be much higher for our community —and far less equitable or predictable. Stormwater flooding in basements is a costly health hazard, and streets flooded with untreated water put all of us at risk.

How is this fee different from a tax?

Unlike a tax, a utility is a fee for service. In the same way that we pay water bills for the amount of water we use, or electricity fees for the amount of electricity we use, the stormwater utility fee is based on a property's impact on the community's stormwater system.

What will we get for our money?

Right now, our [Community's decision-making body] is looking at not only how to repair our stormwater drainage system, but also how to make the behind-the-scenes infrastructure of [our Community] be as world-class as the coffee shops, restaurants, and stores that line our streets.

[Insert an example of a specific project that your community will be working on.]

What are the benefits to our community?

- ① Restoration of eroded streams that threaten property, water and sewer lines
- ② Healthier streetscapes through the planting of trees, rain gardens and other vegetation to reduce rainfall runoff
- ③ Cleaner neighborhoods through educational programs and street sweeping

- ④ Cleaner drinking water as threats such as bacteria and toxins from polluted runoff are reduced

Why now?

If we don't want to face increased flooding in our homes, businesses, and streets; increased pollution in our rivers and streams, and increased fines for inaction, we need to act. The outdated and decaying pipes beneath our feet that we rely on to carry our stormwater are disintegrating and must be replaced. *[IF YOUR COMMUNITY COULD BE FINED:]* And if we don't act, our community could be fined for the pollution we are creating, funneling away local funds we could be using to improve our infrastructure and our community.

What about community members who cannot pay the utility fee?

All utilities in Maryland have a hardship program, insert specifics from your community.

Is there any way to reduce the utility fee I'm charged?

Insert information about credit or incentive programs, and provide local resources to get started.

What can you do?

Here is where you explain what you'd like people to do: do you want them to come to an event in support of the utility? Sign a petition? Call their council person?

For more information:

Include contact information for a local official or coalition member who can answer specific questions on fees, on credits/incentives and resources. If available, include a link to a site where folks can find out their fees.

POSSIBLE SIDE BAR:

[Insert specific #s from your community].

XXX million gallons:

The amount of polluted stormwater our [community] produces each year.

\$XX

The amount an average homeowner will pay per month to address the issue

SAMPLE SIGN ON LETTERS

Sample letter to local lawmaker/council member

It is important that you customize this letter based on your community and your responses to the Strategic Development Questions. Include specifics on your community's priorities and campaign strengths.

To download an editable word document of these letters, visit: www.stormwatercommunications.org

Date

[Names and titles of signatories: try to include a diverse group of local leaders]

Dear [Lawmaker name],

As you approach a decision on the measure of establishing a stormwater utility for *[your community]* we would like to express our strong support for the proposal. From faith-based leaders to environmental advocates to local business owners and engineers, there is an urgent call to address our *[community]'s* decaying and outdated stormwater system and the threat it poses to our community's health and well-being.

A stormwater utility creates an equitable solution to the problem posed by the current state of our stormwater system. If ignored, our decaying stormwater system places an undue burden on the unfortunate citizens and small business owners who suffer the random and unexpected flooding and ensuing health and environmental concerns.

The current proposals that you are considering *[insert language here about the specific benefits of the proposal in your community]*. The reasonable fees proposed, (less for an average family than what they spend every year on milk) *[Confirm on a community-by-community basis. Select a comparison relevant to your locality]* do a fair job of distributing the costs across our community in an equitable and low-cost manner. Additionally, because the proposed utility offers incentives to reduce impervious surfaces, our community will benefit.

We rely on you, [Insert decision makers's title, (or our civic leaders)], to proactively manage our [community]'s needs so as to ensure a vibrant, healthy, thriving community, and we appreciate your efforts to do so.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

OPINION PIECES

Penning an op-ed or letter to the editor can be a great way to build support for a utility, whether its been passed or is in the process of being passed. When writing, its important to use the information you gleaned from your answers to the strategic questions and media guide in this toolkit.

If you'd like more tips on how to write the most effective Op-Ed, the Earth Institute at Columbia has a comprehensive guide here:

www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/press-room/media_outreach/OpEdGuide.doc.

We've included a number of examples of opinion pieces on the following pages to which you may reference as you pen yours.

Be sure to distribute your letter to the editor or op-ed to your networks! Even if it is not published, the piece can be used as an effective blog post or email blast.

Stormwater bill would create jobs

The Baltimore Sun, March 29, 2012

Between 2006 and 2011, during the worst economic period since World War II for design and construction firms, my company has quadrupled in size. We have hired both professional and semi-skilled workers. The reason for that is we have focused our work on fixing community stormwater systems.

These systems of pipes, trenches and ponds that drain rain water from our cities and suburbs have been badly neglected in the past few decades. Many jurisdictions estimate at least 30 percent of their stormwater facilities no longer function. That means increased flooding and the potential for catastrophic floods if a major failure occurs.

If unchecked and untreated, stormwater also picks up lawn fertilizer, pet waste and toxic chemicals and dumps the pollutants in creeks, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, causing beach closings throughout the summer in many areas. In fact, Maryland health officials warn us not to swim in state waters for 48 hours after a storm precisely because of polluted runoff.

Awakening to the dramatic scope of this problem, representatives from Baltimore City and Baltimore, Prince George's and Howard counties have testified in favor of state legislation that would help. A bill moving through the legislature establishes a potential source of funding for improved maintenance and upgrading of local stormwater systems. By establishing local stormwater utilities, this funding source would be implemented by, and at the discretion of, local municipalities throughout Maryland.

Every lobbyist in the halls of power seems to tout a job creation scheme these days, but I can state for a fact that government investment in stormwater facilities is one of the most cost-effective ways to boost private sector employment. Compared to other government subsidy programs, money for stormwater projects gets a terrific bang for the buck. This

is because much of the work requires less heavy equipment than other construction work, and more manual labor.

In Montgomery County, officials say they will employ 3,300 private sector workers tackling stormwater system projects in the next three and a half years. Prince George's County officials estimate they can create more than 2,600 private sector jobs if given the funds. Start multiplying these numbers times the number of counties and municipalities that would be helped by the legislation, and you begin to realize the employment potential for a modest investment.

I believe we can't depend upon traditional new housing construction and real estate activity to bring our economy back. I believe this because housing and commercial real estate assets were significantly overbuilt over the past several decades. I see a paradigm shift in employment in the design and construction industries. Simply put, the old ways will never return. But as the focus shifts to the regeneration of existing infrastructure and redevelopment in our existing cities and towns, stormwater system upgrades offer a double bonus: tremendous opportunity for employment, and improved water quality.

It is time for our legislators to get creative and establish new ways to create jobs. I believe establishing local stormwater utilities will do just that.

Some people say environmental initiatives are bad for business. My personal experience is the opposite.

Theodore Scott, Hunt Valley

The writer is executive vice president and owner of Stormwater Maintenance, LLC & Stormwater Consulting, Inc.

Polluted Runoff is Leading Cause of Beach Closures

By Tom Pelton

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Why should we pay fees to control polluted rainwater running off of parking lots and streets into waterways? A Maryland law required such fees to be created by the state's nine largest counties and Baltimore by July 1.

Polluted runoff is the leading cause of beach closures nationally, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council's report on the quality of water at swimming beaches, called *Testing the Waters*.

Last summer, beaches across the U.S. were closed or the subject of swimming health warnings for a cumulative total of 20,120 days, according to the report. Each closure day for a separate beach was counted separately. Local health officials issued more than 80 percent of these closings and advisories in 2012 because testing revealed bacteria levels in the water violated public health standards. This was a potential indication of human or animal waste.

Runoff was the largest known source of this pollution, contributing to 28 percent of the closing or advisory days, according to the report.

In general, the Great Lakes region had the highest rates of contamination at swimming beaches. Ohio ranked worst among the 30 states studied. These states were selected because they have shorelines along large lakes, bays, or oceans.

The Chesapeake region states did better, but still had some water quality problems and beach closures.

Delaware's beaches on the Atlantic Ocean were the cleanest in the nation, with Virginia's beaches ranked sixth best, Maryland's 11th best, and Pennsylvania's 23rd out of the 30 states examined. The low ranking for Pennsylvania was largely because of the Keystone state's beaches on polluted Lake Erie.

On the Chesapeake Bay, in Maryland, the beach-

es with highest rates of water samples exceeding health standards for bacteria in 2012 were Mayo Beach Park in Anne Arundel County (19%), Grove Point Camp in Cecil County (17%), Gunpowder State Park Hammerman in Baltimore County (15%), Sandy Point State Park East Beach in Anne Arundel County (11%), and Elk Neck State Park North East River in Cecil County (8%), according to the report. In Virginia, the beaches with water samples exceeding health standards most often in 2012 were Fairview Beach in King George County (25%), Lesner Bridge East in the city of Virginia Beach (17%), and 10th View Beach Access in the city of Norfolk (9%), according to the report.

On the positive side, the Natural Resources Defense Council awarded two beaches in our region "five star" ratings for their cleanliness and called them "superstar beaches." These were Ocean City beach in Maryland, and Rehoboth Beach, in Delaware. However, both of these beaches are on the Atlantic Ocean, which has a vastly larger volume of water than the Chesapeake Bay, and therefore can dilute polluted runoff from urban areas more easily than the Chesapeake Bay. For beaches on the Bay, polluted runoff remains a serious threat to the quality of water.

This is why we all need to follow the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint ([link](#)) to reduce pollution and allow our children to play on our beaches more often. There's nothing worse than a summer day with a "no swimming" sign spoiling your vacation.

Letter from Council Woman Mary Lehman, Prince George's County Council District 1.

Dear Neighbors:

In a few weeks, you will be receiving your annual property tax bill from Prince George's County, and it will include a new impervious surface fee that will average about \$45 per household.

I strongly support this fee and will explain its purpose as well as the formula the county used to apply it to every residential, business and non-profit tax account in Prince George's, including churches.

In 2012, the MD General Assembly enacted legislation requiring the state's 10 most populous counties to adopt a pavement tax to raise the necessary funds for an EPA-mandated clean up of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

In the case of Prince George's County, the second most populous jurisdiction in the state, this means treating 8,000 acres of roadways and parking lots at a cost of \$1.2 billion by the year 2025.

The council unanimously adopted the impervious surface fee July 24 in its final meeting before its summer recess. I endorsed the plan because our waterways, including the Patuxent and Anacostia rivers and their tributaries that run through District 1, are in such poor health. The major cause of water pollution is the runoff after a rainstorm that picks up trash, motor oil, lawn fertilizer and other chemicals that accumulate on our roads, parking lots, roofs and driveways and then washes into our streams and rivers. We can no longer swim in or consume the fish from most local waterways because they are so polluted. In short, we have not been good stewards of our environment for decades and we are now paying the price.

I do believe with smart leadership, beginning with our newly reorganized Department of Environmental Resources headed by Adam Ortiz, the county will spend the money wisely on local clean water projects like rain gardens and tree plantings. These projects, as they filter polluted stormwater runoff, will have the added benefit of beautifying neighborhoods. The legislation the council adopted, CB-45-2013, requires training and mentorship opportunities for Prince George's businesses that will create 5,000 green jobs.

I also support the fair and equitable application of the impervious surface fee. Although the law allows for economic hardship waivers, it does not exempt anyone upfront. Residential fees are based on zoning and there are three tiers with rates of \$33.12, \$41.48 and \$62.38. For non-residential tax accounts, including commercial properties and churches, the impervious surface rate is \$20.90 for each 2,475 square feet of paved area on the lot.

If you believe the county has made a mistake in its calculation of your impervious surface fee, there will be an appeal process. Those who can demonstrate economic hardship will be exempted. Finally, property owners can get a discount of up to 100 percent of their fee if they install storm water treatment devices such as rain barrels, green roofs, rain gardens, etc. For more information, go to DER's web site or feel free to call my office at 301-952-3887.

Sincerely,
Council Woman Mary Lehman
Prince George's County Council District 1

Religion and rain; Why faith institutions should pay stormwater fees

By Nina Beth Cardin

Nina Beth Cardin is a rabbi in Baltimore City.

Distributed by Bay Journal News Service.

Religious institutions get a pass on taxes. That is one of the sacred traditions of secular American society. And while there are occasional rumblings about this, most of us willingly, even gladly, endorse this exemption in return for what we know the faith community gives back to society.

Freed of property taxes, congregations can afford to be and stay in the most desperate of communities, providing their neighbors-in-need with invaluable spiritual uplift, financial assistance, material support, food, clothing and job training.

Freed of excise taxes, congregations can be partners with government in delivering social services that offer affordable childcare, senior care, after-school programs, recovery and re-entry programs, educational enrichment, neighborhood stability, citizen engagement and so much more.

Freed of taxes, congregations do not have to pursue the commercial model of fee-for-service or members-only but can serve all those who seek community, belonging, hospitality, a sense of transcendence and an open door, whether those served “qualify” for that service, have paid for that service or are members of the congregation.

It is this indispensable value of just being there for all that adds immeasurably to the health and fabric of a community – both physically and spiritually – and enables our faith institutions to merit this coveted status of being tax-exempt. Without it, they might not be able to be there, and we would lose the very presence that serves us all.

It is a different matter, however, with stormwater fees. In this case, it is the physical presence of the faith institutions that harms us. It is the hard, impermeable surfaces of these buildings and parcels that generate polluted stormwater runoff that harms our

waters, our land – and us. It is the old design of the buildings, parking lots and downspouts that hurts the health and the economy of the very people the faith institutions are there to serve.

The good news is that we are learning ways to design better and build smarter, putting us in sync with the blessings and blueprints of the cycles of nature, allowing nature to do its magic in storing, filtering, cleaning and recycling our water – which nature does for free.

But in the meantime, we need resources to address the problems we have created. The stormwater utility fee, in partnership with the best water management behaviors we can pursue on our own properties, enables all of us to be part of the solution. And perhaps unintended but not unwelcome, it is focusing the attention of the faith community on environmental issues, which is as it should be.

Taking care of the earth is not disconnected from the spiritual enterprise of the faith community. Tending to the earth is, rather, every bit as much a spiritual calling as it is a physical one. As Liberty Hyde Bailey said almost 100 years ago:

“One does not act rightly toward one’s fellows if one does not know how to act rightly toward the earth.” And that includes our relationship with rain.

In many jurisdictions where stormwater fees are being assessed, faith institutions are being asked to contribute their fair share to help communities develop and implement comprehensive stormwater management programs that will serve us all. In response, some faith institutions have been resistant.

They shouldn’t be. Managing stormwater through fairly assessed fees and properly designed buildings and grounds is doing what we teach to our youngest children – cleaning up the mess we make. By paying our fair share of the fees, by creating water-

continues >

Religion and rain; Why faith institutions should pay stormwater fees (continued)

wise management on our properties, by modeling the ways our congregants and neighbors can manage water on theirs, we take responsibility for our own actions and lead the way to healthier communities.

Some of these model behaviors include disconnecting our downspouts and redirecting our water flow; creating rain gardens and attractive bioswales that improve both our water management and the aesthetics of our communities; installing curb cuts that allow rainwater to run into parking lot tree pits or planted areas, keeping the rain from our sewers and putting it where it can do immediate good; planting orchards that not only absorb vast amounts of rainwater but also provide fruit for neighbors in need.

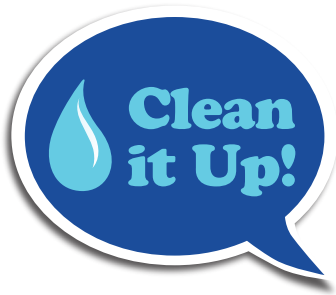
We are still unlearning the mistakes of the past and learning the best ways to build for the future. With a fair fee structure, meaningful credits, incentives for creating on-site water management, and a renewed sense of how nature can be part of the solution and not just a source of the problem, we can create healthier, more beautiful places for us to live. This task involves all of us. Faith institutions, too.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

Sample advertisement

It is important that you customize ad copy, imagery and calls to action based on your community and your responses to the Strategic Development Questions. Include specifics on your community's priorities and campaign strengths.

Sample campaign logos



Keep [our community] clean from top to bottom.

SUPPORT THE STORMWATER ACTION PLAN TO KEEP OUR CITY CLEAN!

Underneath the streets of our beautiful community, our water infrastructure is in serious disrepair. The century-year-old clay and metal pipes that we rely on to transport our stormwater runoff are disintegrating, leading to pollution and flooding issues that have a direct, negative impact on Charlottesville's health and safety.

While we can't see the drainage pipes that support the most basic functioning of our city, we all rely on them to carry the overflow of water that rushes from our streets, parking lots, yards and farms during storms. And we all need to pitch in to make sure they're kept in good, working condition.

Across [STATE] and throughout the country, stormwater runoff is a serious pollution problem that the federal (and state) government is making sure communities, including ours, address. To ignore the problem will mean an increase in the pollution in our rivers and lakes, contaminated drinking water, flooding, and sewage overflows—all of which have costly consequences to our health and homes and diminish the livability of our community.

Name One Organization
Name Two Organization
Name Three Organization
Name Four Organization
Name Five Organization
Name Six Organization
Name Seven Organization

The Stormwater Action Plan is a simple, fair solution to the problem beneath our streets.

For more information, visit www.learnaboutstormwater.org

Call to action here:
Join the Public Comment
Write your council person
Learn more

Sample Fact Sheet (page 1)

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Watershed Protection and Restoration Program

Bringing Green Jobs, Revitalization and Clean Water to Prince George's County

Required by a Federal mandate, the Watershed Protection and Restoration Program instructs Maryland's nine largest counties and the City of Baltimore to establish a funding plan to pay for stormwater management improvements by July 1, 2013.

This program provides an opportunity for Prince George's County to revitalize aging neighborhoods, launch a green economy and put people to work. It will benefit the County by creating 5,000 new jobs and new green local businesses; expanding existing local businesses and summer youth jobs programs; beautifying our neighborhoods; developing fellowship programs with local universities and colleges; and cleaning our waters.

CREATING 5,000 NEW JOBS

REVITALIZING AGING NEIGHBORHOODS

EXPANDING EXISTING AND LAUNCHING NEW GREEN, LOCAL BUSINESSES

DEVELOPING A FELLOWSHIP WITH LOCAL UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESSES

PROTECTING THE QUALITY OF OUR FUTURE WATER SUPPLY

MAKING OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS HEALTHY AND SAFE FOR RECREATIONAL USES

Anacostia River
Anacostia Watershed



For more information on the program, please see the frequently asked questions on the back.

Sample Fact Sheet (page 2)

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Watershed Protection and Restoration Program

Bringing Green Jobs, Revitalization and Clean Water to Prince George's County

FAQs

WHAT IS THE WATERSHED PROTECTION AND RESTORATION PROGRAM?

In 2010, the Federal government required states to meet new standards under the Clean Water Act to address stormwater runoff pollution from impervious areas (that don't absorb water) such as parking lots, roads and roofs. In 2012, to meet this mandate, Governor Martin O'Malley signed into law House Bill 987 (The Watershed Protection and Restoration Program) that requires nine Maryland Counties and the City of Baltimore to collect a fee from property owners to implement a program to address this issue, the Clean Water Act Fee.

WHAT IS STORMWATER RUNOFF POLLUTION?

Every day, trash, oil, sediment, chemicals and other pollutants collect on our roofs, roads, parking lots and driveways. When it rains, the pollutants travel over these surfaces, flow into the storm drains and eventually end up in our creeks, rivers, lakes and streams.

WILL THIS FUND CREATE JOBS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY?

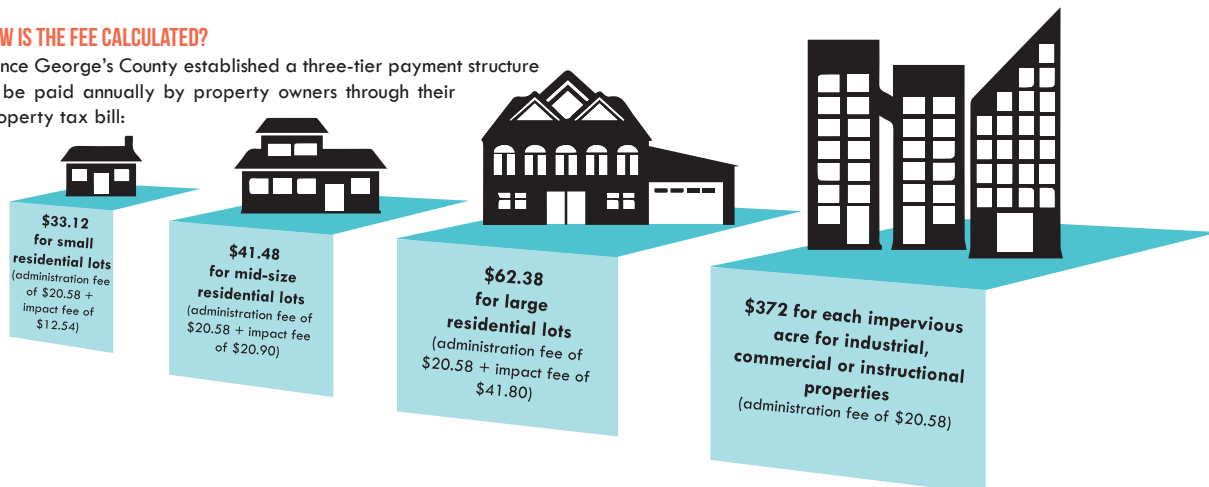
This fund provides an opportunity for Prince George's County to revitalize aging neighborhoods, launch a green economy and put people to work. It will benefit businesses and residents by creating 5,000 new jobs and new green local businesses; expanding existing local businesses and summer youth jobs programs; developing fellowship programs with local universities and colleges; and improving our waterways.

HOW WILL THESE FUNDS BE SPENT?

The funds will be used solely to retrofit parking lots, roads and roofs with various treatment devices that will naturally filter out pollutants from stormwater. To meet the Federal mandate, the County has to treat 8,000 acres of uncontrolled impervious surfaces at a cost of approximately \$1.2 billion and complete the program by 2025.

HOW IS THE FEE CALCULATED?

Prince George's County established a three-tier payment structure to be paid annually by property owners through their property tax bill:



ARE THE FEES FAIR AND EQUITABLE?

Prince George's County is dedicated to meeting our Federal requirements while keeping the fees as low as possible. Our fee structure is equitable and lower than most Maryland Counties.

CAN THE FEE BE MODIFIED OR REDUCED?

Property owners that retrofit their property with approved runoff treatment practices can receive up to a 100 percent reduction in the impact fee. The County will also provide a limited amount of rebate funds each year to property owners to retrofit their properties. A fee can also be appealed to the Department of Environmental Resources (DER) if there is an error in the way the County calculated the fee.

WILL THERE BE A PROGRAM FOR FINANCIAL HARDSHIP?

Yes, property owners who receive the homeowners tax credit or benefits from the Energy Assistance subsidy during the tax year for which the fee is billed, will automatically be exempted.

DO AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES PAY THE FEE?

Yes, but the fee is based only on the impervious surfaces of the principal residential property and not the land in agriculture.

DON'T I ALREADY PAY FOR A STORMWATER PROGRAM?

Yes, but that program is designated for flood control and not clean water.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The Clean Water Act Fee is administered by the Department of Environmental Resources. Please visit DER's website at <http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Government/AgencyIndex/DER/index.asp> or call (301) 883-5833 for more information.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a valuable and inexpensive resource for stormwater communications. Effective use of Facebook, Twitter, blogging and e-blasts can help build your coalition and spread your strategic message. All successes, events, and press should be shared via your social media outlets.

It's important to note that social media is just one tool in your overall communications strategy. As you use this tool, make sure to keep in mind the "Stormwater Top 10" and always refer to the top-of-mind issues that will appeal to your audience. There are many comprehensive resources to help you plan your social media strategy out there. (Check out the toolkits on www.idealware.com and www.bridgespan.org if you need help getting started.)

Sample Facebook posts (Blue Water Baltimore)

 **Blue Water Baltimore**
August 1

Blue Water Baltimore is offering a FREE informational one-hour workshop on rain garden basics on Tuesday, August 13th at 6pm.

Learn how a rain garden works, what to do to build one, and how to maintain it.

RSVP is required, and space is limited, so sign up today!

http://www.bluewaterbaltimore.org/events/?event_id=526




 **Blue Water Baltimore** shared a link.
August 8 near Baltimore, MD

Sewage overflows are more common after rain storms. If you see or smell something weird on the street or in a stream, report it to us and 311.

<http://www.bluewaterbaltimore.org/the-waterkeeper/report-pollution/>

Report Pollution | Blue Water Baltimore
www.bluewaterbaltimore.org


WATERKEEPER will contact your local agency when a pollution report is made thru our website. However, we always encourage community members to report incidents themselves as well. Find your local environmental agency here

 **Blue Water Baltimore** shared Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper's photo.
July 19

"Everyone needs to remember that the root of this event in the harbor is nutrient pollution, mostly from polluted stormwater discharges," said Tina Meyers, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper.

Read more:
<http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/green/blog/bs-gr-fish-kill-20130718,0,5018685.story#ixzz2ZV5f1EB4>

Strange looking water coming out of the Jones Falls outfall (between Piers 5 and 6) into the Harbor with dead menhaden fish floating in it. MDE has sent their emergency response team, but no final word on what it is. What do you think it is?



Blue Water Baltimore does a great job of posting a variety of effective posts— including posts that provide valuable current information, posts that point out the problems of the current system and posts that paint a positive picture of what can be done to address these problems.

Sample tweets



MD Environment @MDEnvironment

16 Jul

See how this #MD town established a #stormwater management fee to help reduce flooding, clean up rivers and streams
youtu.be/51uBB-wvtNg



Chesapeake Bay Found @chesapeakebay

30 Apr

#AnneArundel County #stormwater "Fee is Impt. for Recovering Our Waterways", @SouthRiverFed Exec Dir in @cappgaznews
bit.ly/14PhhRx

Expand



Chesapeake Bay Found @chesapeakebay

13 Aug

Breaking: Poll shows 9 of 10 #VA voters support #ChesBay restoration efforts, want next gov to continue Blueprint
cbf.org/VA4theBay

Expand

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite ⋮ More



Chesapeake Bay Program @chesbayprogram

13 Jun

Ever wonder where #stormwater goes? This elementary school's Beautification Club informs through art! ow.ly/IZSFv

Expand



Chesapeake Bay Found @chesapeakebay

13 Aug

Make sure to pick up after your pets. Waste contains nutrients that can be harmful to the #chesbay #baytip #savethebay

Expand



Nitsch Engineering @nitscheng

9h

Wondering how #stormwater utilities provide incentives for property owners? Check out our article in @NEREJ: bit.ly/19vwh9J!

Expand



Potomac Conservancy @TheNationsRiver

12l

Great online resource focused on helping homeowners & businesses take charge of #stormwater #runoff @AllianceForBay
stormwater.allianceforthebay.org

Expand



Chesapeake Bay Trust @baytrust

14 Aug

Poll shows #VA voters show strong support for #Chesapeake Bay clean up ow.ly/nV0Yj @chesapeakebay

Retweeted by Chesapeake Bay Found

View summary

Sample blog posts

Hating on the Rain Tax? CBF Rebuttal Will Make You Reconsider

Written by: Tom Zolper | Friday, Jul 19, 2013
11:53am

Baltimore Fishbowl (baltimorefishbowl.com)

Before this year the average Marylander probably knew little about storm water. Environmentalists used the word. But then, environmentalists do weird things, like pay higher prices for food grown locally.

All that changed April 12. Comedian and Fox News commentator Steven Crowder used the phrase “rain tax” in a Fox Business News segment with anchor Neil Cavuto. They ridiculed Maryland (and its Democratic governor) and specifically utility fees dedicated to reducing polluted runoff.

You have to give it to Fox. They know how to make people sit up and get angry. Critics of the fees in Maryland started using the term “rain tax.” Reporters picked it up in their stories. Suddenly it was in headlines across the state (first in quotes, then without), most recently in Robert O’Brien’s blog in Baltimore Fishbowl, “Nobody Should Like This New Rain Tax, Here’s Why.”

The whole thing reminded me of when my social studies teacher called on a funny kid in class during a lesson on the Louisiana Purchase. His response got us all laughing. Suddenly we were all paying attention. But we didn’t learn much more about the Louisiana Purchase.

In the same way, the “rain tax” hype has made Marylanders generally aware of storm water, but much of the coverage of the topic doesn’t really teach us enough about the problem. While people are still paying attention let me slip in a few facts:

- This type of pollution is the only major source of water pollution increasing in Maryland.
- Rain washes dog waste, litter, fertilizer, and other contaminants straight into local creeks, rivers, the Inner Harbor and the Bay. This polluted soup isn’t treated in most places.

- In many areas of the state polluted runoff is responsible for a major portion of pollution in local rivers and streams.
- The Maryland Department of the Environment cautions the public not to swim in ANY waterways of the state for 48 hours after a significant storm because stormwater carries harmful bacteria into those waters.
- If we do this work, not only will our kids be able to safely swim in the water, but we’ll create 178,000 full-time private sector jobs in the region, according to the Economic Policy Institute.
- The state legislature last year budgeted tens of millions of dollars to help local governments reduce this problem, but also decided Baltimore City and the state’s most populated counties should pony up, too, because that’s where the problem is worse. The localities were asked to raise a fee dedicated only to upgrading their local stormwater systems.
- Local governments asked that they be given flexibility to decide the size of the fee, and the way it was collected. So it was no surprise this year when different counties passed different fees, one county as low as one cent per household per year.

And here’s one last thing missing from most lampposts of the “rain tax:” an alternative solution. Should we continue to ignore this problem? Should we siphon off money from other government services to upgrade our storm water systems?

I’m willing to pay a little more for a valuable government service, just as I’m willing to pay more for meat from a steer grown here in Maryland. I see value in that investment. But some people just want the least expensive product.

By setting its own storm water fee, whether one cent or something higher, each local government made a similar decision.

Tom Zolper is the Maryland Communications Coordinator for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

WHAT'S NEXT?

So you passed a stormwater utility, what's next?

First of all, congratulations. Take time to celebrate your victory with everyone involved - from community members to local civic leaders, allies, and any groups such as churches, and neighborhood groups who might have been involved. Celebration is important, and it helps create more long-term commitment to the cause. Ideally, you would even invite press to your celebration. (Use the tips from our media guide to help you contact and communicate your success with them.)

Once the dust settles, it's time to turn your attention to the most important issue: ensuring your legislation does the trick, meaning that you get the best possible implementation of your stormwater legislation. This next phase of the campaign just as - if not more important than getting the legislation passed, and all of the tools presented in this toolkit apply.

Instead of listing your goal as: 'passing legislation and building a campaign strategy,' define your goal as 'most effective implementation of stormwater legislation,' and get to work!

As you secure support for your stormwater utility, the "Stormwater Top 10" are perhaps even more important at this stage and it's very important to get specific about what your goals are, including:

1. What successful implementation of the bill looks like
2. Defining the decisionmaker(s) for each element
3. Reaching the people who influence the decision makers
4. Creating a plan—including messages and tactics - to influence them.

Securing your win

It's imperative that folks are aware of what to expect before they receive the first bill in the mail. This will take significant grassroots effort, so just as you did before the bill was passed, plan to hit the pavement at community meetings, distribute informational flyers at coffee shops, laundromats, grocery stores, attend chamber of commerce meetings,. The more face-to face communication with your community, the more likely they will be supportive when the bill does arrive.

It's very likely that your local government will be organizing public informational meetings. If so, plan on attending and encourage your coalition members to show up. Use the talking points to be vocal about your support. Emphasize the specific benefits and projects the plan will bring to your community.

Reach out to your local officials to see if they need help organizing these meetings or producing materials to distribute—they will often be thankful for the help!

RESOURCES/CONTACTS

Got questions? Got ideas?

Below you'll find a list of real people who have already passed or are working to pass stormwater legislation—people who'd be happy to talk with you and answer any questions as best they can.

You'll also find a list of more valuable resources—from sample legislation to how to write and op-ed—all of which can help you and your coalition in creating an effective strategy.

CONTACTS

The Choose Clean Water Coalition is a great place to start: www.choosecleanwater.org

Deb Kleiner, Communications Manager

ph: 443-759-3409
cell: 443-794-5162
kleinerd@nwf.org

Tanya A. Dierolf, Field Manager

ph: 443-927-8047
cell: 717-991-3017
dierolft@nwf.org

Maryland citizens involved in creating or supporting stormwater legislation

Anne Arundel County:

Erik Michelsen, South River Federation
410-224-3802
erik@southernriverfederation.net

Howard County:

Nancy Fayer, Earth Forum of Howard County
410-750-1479
nanfayer@verizon.net

Prince George's County, statewide, and District of Columbia:

Brent Bolin, Maryland League of Conservation Voters
703-505-9504
bbolin@mdlcv.org

Claudia Friedetzky, MD Chapter of the Sierra Club

ph: 301-277-7111
claudia@mdsierra.org

Pennsylvania citizens involved in creating or supporting stormwater legislation

City of Lancaster:

Fritz Schroeder, LIVEGreen, a program of the Lancaster County Conservancy
717-392-7891 ext. 207
fritz@livelancaster.org

Lackawanna County:

Bernie McGurl, Lackawanna River Corridor Association
570-347-6311
director@lrca.org

Statewide:

Liz G. Deardorff, American Rivers
717-763-0742
ldeardorff@americanrivers.org

Virginia citizens involved in creating or supporting stormwater legislation

Jacob Powell, Virginia Conservation Network
804-644-0283
jacob@vcnva.org

Charlottesville:

Robbi Savage, Rivanna Conservation Society
434-977-4837
exec@rivannariver.org

City of Falls Church:

Tim Stevens, Virginia Sierra Club and Fall Church Environmental Services Council
703-534-7311
tk505@verizon.net

Virginia citizens (con't.)

Fairfax County:

Stella Koch, Audubon Naturalist Society

703-628-6983

smkoch@aol.com

Petersburg:

Adrienne Kotula, James River Association

804-788-8811, ext. 206

akotula@jrava.org

Local Government contacts willing to share information on their experiences with stormwater management and utility structures

Chris Trumbauer

Anne Arundel County, MD

ctrumbauer@aacounty.org

Charlotte Katzenmoyer

Lancaster, PA

CKatzenm@cityoflancasterpa.com

RESOURCES

If you're looking for more information, the following sites offer all sorts of details, from outreach campaigns to frequently asked questions:

- ▶ The City of Lancaster, PA developed a wonderful campaign called "Save It!" with a website to help educate folks about the city's stormwater problem.

www.saveitlancaster.org

Check out the "Local Leaders" section: a great example of how to highlight local folks involved in efforts to mitigate the city's stormwater pollution.

www.saveitlancaster.com/local-projects

Also informative is their "Cost of Dealing with Stormwater" FAQs page:

www.saveitlancaster.com/thecost/

- ▶ Op-Eds can be a great way to build support for a utility. The Earth Institute at Columbia University has a comprehensive guide on how to effectively pen one.

www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/pressroom/

[media_outreach/OpEdGuide.doc](#)

- ▶ **Howard County, MD's local gov't site:**
www.howardcountymd.gov/WatershedFund.htm
 - ▶ **Howard County's Stormwater Utility FAQs:**
www.livegreenhoward.com/beta/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/HoCo_WatershedFeeFAQs_April2013.pdf
 - ▶ **Fairfax County stormwater fee information**
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/stormwater/servicedistrict.htm
 - ▶ **City of Rockville, MD stormwater management Utility**
<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/residents/swm/>
 - ▶ **Town of Berlin, MD: Stormwater Financing Feasibility Study:**
<http://berlinmd.gov/content/docs/BerlinStormwaterFeasibilityStudyFinalReport1.pdf>
 - ▶ **Falls Church Stormwater Fund:**
www.fallschurchva.gov/content/government/departments/publicworks/stormwaterfloodplain/2013docs/fc_sw_faq.pdf
 - ▶ **University of Maryland, Environmental Finance Center, Stormwater and Financing Outreach:**
<http://efc.umd.edu/stormwater.html>
 - ▶ **Western Kentucky Stormwater Utility Survey (a list of utilities around the country)**
<http://www.wku.edu/engineering/documents/swsurveys/swsurvey-2012.pdf>
 - ▶ **Charlottesville, VA Water Resources Protection Plan**
www.charlottesville.org/Index.aspx?page=2308
- Sample Stormwater Utility legislation**
- ▶ **Takoma Park, MD**
www.epa.gov/owow/NPS/ordinance/documents/takoma_park_misc.pdf
https://s3.amazonaws.com/cityclerk_takomapark/public/ordinances/2011/or201121.pdf
 - ▶ **Charlottesville, VA**
www.charlottesville.org/modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=24695

CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

Background:

In order to be compliant with the Clean Water Act, state regulations, and local ordinances, the City of Charlottesville was required by law to address the issue of stormwater pollution and runoff. To do this, it needed the support of City Council and the public to pass a Stormwater Utility fee—a fee designed to provide a stable funding source to solve the problem of stormwater pollution and runoff.

Strengths:

- ▶ Active and engaged local partners
- ▶ Specific provisions already in place in City Government to address stormwater issues
- ▶ A diverse and knowledgeable Stormwater Advisory Group, with a strong connection with city officials charged with writing and implementing the utility
- ▶ A transparent process by which community members were able to find out how much they would pay under the proposal
- ▶ Funding for campaign materials
- ▶ Civic pride

Weaknesses:

- ▶ Previous attempts to pass a fee were deferred
- ▶ Limited public awareness about the issue
- ▶ Concern that the proposal was coming from a vocal environmentally-minded group
- ▶ Opposition from businesses who saw the utility as another ‘tax’
- ▶ Concern that with a weak economy, stormwater management was not an urgent priority
- ▶ A short turnaround for the communications strategy development—just one month to develop and implement a plan before the proposal would be voted upon

Solutions:

The Rivanna Conservation Society, a communications firm, the Choose Clean Water Coalition, a group of local NGO partners worked together to clearly define the issue’s goals, identify its opposition, locate supporters, and identify the key decision makers. Since Charlottesville’s City Council members would ultimately decide whether or not to pass the utility proposal, the message needed to appeal to their primary concerns, as well as to generate visible support for the measure amongst their constituents.

While most members of the coalition care about the issue because of the environmental impact of stormwater runoff and pollution, they worked with the communications firm to identify the issues that the decision makers, (in this case, the city council) cared about,

It takes a lot of discipline to let go of why something matters to you and instead, focus on why it might matter to your decision makers, but it’s the most important thing you can do.

and created messages that resonated with their concerns. The main message, which proved successful, didn't even reference environmental impact. Instead they focused on issues of public health, flooding, aging infrastructure and civic pride. Here's the main message: Stormwater management is a must for Charlottesville citizens because continuing to ignore the problem will put property values and public health at risk. It's a straightforward issue with a simple solution. This message was boiled down to a simple campaign slogan and logo: "What Happens Below Matters Above: Keep Charlottesville Clean".

This brand and messaging was applied to all campaign outreach materials, including:

- ▶ Two-full page ads placed in local papers, co-signed by a coalition of diverse local and regional supporters
- ▶ A concise one-page fact sheet distributed to coalition members' networks, at meetings and outreach events, and shared with the City for its official outreach
- ▶ Campaign stickers worn by supporters attending the public comment meetings. This is an important and easy way to show broad support for your issue. Despite a few opponents who spoke out against the proposal, council members were able to discern that the vast majority present were there to support the utility proposal.

Perhaps most importantly, local partners conducted extensive outreach in their networks to find "unexpected messengers" to show up and speak out at the proposal's public comment meetings: developers, citizens who had experienced flooding and church leaders. Civic leaders and local 'influentials' were asked to give their public support to the campaign. (And not the usual suspects, meaning environmentalists.) This is a very important step in creating broad support for an initiative – and broad support is key. In fact, the best strategy often involves the environmentalists finding messengers who influence their decision makers, and then getting out of the way. That means that at a city council meeting, you might yield the speaking opportunities to people who are more likely to sway your decision makers that you are.

Result:

On the 19th of February 2013, the Charlottesville City Council approved a Stormwater Utility Ordinance by a vote of 4-1. The revenue generated by this utility will be dedicated to an expanded Water Resources Protection Program.



CHARLOTTESVILLE'S MAIN STRATEGIC MESSAGE:

Stormwater management is a must for Charlottesville citizens because continuing to ignore the problem will put property values and public health at risk. It's a straightforward issue with a simple solution.

Keep Charlottesville green from top to bottom.



SUPPORT THE WATER RESOURCES PROTECTION PLAN TO KEEP OUR CITY CLEAN!

Underneath the streets of our beautiful city, our infrastructure is in disrepair. The century-year-old clay and metal pipes that we rely on to transport our stormwater runoff are disintegrating, leading to pollution and flooding issues that have a direct, negative impact on Charlottesville's health and safety.

While we can't see the drainage pipes that support the most basic functioning of our city, we all rely on them. And we all need to pitch in to make sure they're maintained.

To ignore the problem will mean an increase in polluted rivers and lakes, contaminated drinking water, flooding— all of which have costly consequences to our health, homes and diminish the livability of what we call our "World Class City."

To learn more about the Charlottesville's Water Resources Protection Plan visit www.charlottesville.org/stormwater or email stormwateraction@gmail.com



Full page and web banner ads placed in local Charlottesville papers, signed on by a group of local and regional supporters.



Campaign stickers given to supporters at the city's public comment meetings.

CHARLOTTESVILLE'S WATER RESOURCES PROTECTION PROGRAM

WHAT HAPPENS BELOW MATTERS ABOVE

Keep Charlottesville Clean!

Underneath the streets of our beautiful city, our water infrastructure is in serious disrepair. The century-year-old clay and metal pipes that we rely on to collect and transport our stormwater runoff are disintegrating, contributing to pollution and flooding issues that have a direct, negative impact on Charlottesville's health and safety.

While we can't see the drainage pipes that support the most basic functioning of our city, we all rely on them to carry the overflow of stormwater that rushes from our streets, parking lots, yards and farms during storms. And we all need to pitch in to make sure they're kept in good, working condition.

Across Virginia and throughout the country, stormwater runoff is a serious pollution problem that the federal (and state) government is making sure communities, including ours, address. To ignore the problem will mean an increase in the pollution in our rivers and lakes, contaminated drinking water, flooding, and sewage overflows—all of which have costly consequences to our health and homes and diminish the livability of what we call our "World Class City."



Modern green infrastructure and engineering design techniques can absorb runoff and filter pollutants out of stormwater, providing protection to our streams in a cost-effective way.

Stormwater runoff pollution is a straightforward issue with an equally straightforward solution:

1. Repair and replace the century-year old pipes and underground infrastructure.
2. Support homeowners, churches, farmers and businesses in managing polluted runoff.



While we can't see the drainage pipes that support the most basic functioning of our city, we all rely on them to carry the overflow of water that rushes from our streets, parking lots, yards and farms during storms.

To ignore the problem will mean an increase in the pollution in our rivers and lakes, contaminated drinking water, flooding, and sewage overflows.



WHAT HAPPENS BELOW MATTERS ABOVE

How to pay for these necessary services is the question.

After years of study and analysis, the Charlottesville City Council is considering the fairest way to distribute the cost of these improvements and will be taking public comment on a proposal to create a stormwater utility.

On Tuesday, January 22, the City Council performed the first reading of a new ordinance that proposes a utility rate of roughly \$3.25 per month per 1,000 square feet of impervious surface on a property. Revenue raised through the user fee would be specifically dedicated to a defined stormwater program of services. It is proposed that the stormwater utility would be established as of January 1, 2014.

A utility is a fee that's paid by all property-owners (not renters) based on the amount of stormwater runoff their property generates. Revenue raised through the user fee would be specifically dedicated to important infrastructure repairs and improvements that will help address our City's stormwater pollution problem.

Nobody likes new fees, but the cost of ignoring stormwater pollution will be much higher for our community—and far less equitable or predictable. Stormwater flooding in basements is a costly health hazard, and streets flooded with untreated water put all of us at risk. As one of our founding fathers once said, 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'

What will we get for our money?

Right now, our city council is looking at not only how to repair our stormwater drainage system, but also how to make the behind-the-scenes infrastructure of Charlottesville be as world-class as its restaurants, cafes and art galleries that line our streets. Advanced engineering makes fixing this system more efficient, effective and far-reaching than ever before.

How much will I pay?

Charlottesville officials have been working hard to make this utility as fair, equitable and transparent as possible. For the average homeowner, the annual cost will be between \$55-\$78/year—less than the cost of a few cups of coffee

“ An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. ”

a month. And that cost can be reduced by making improvements to your property that cut down on the amount of stormwater it generates. To aid the public in determining the amount that each home or building owner would pay, the city has created a web tool, <http://gisweb.charlottesville.org/GISViewer>. You can learn more about the program, and estimate your potential fee by entering your address at the city's site here: www.charlottesville.org/stormwater.

Why now?

Flooding and pollution in our waterways is on the rise and causes serious damage to our homes, farms, businesses, churches and schools. The clay and metal pipes beneath our feet that we rely on to carry our stormwater are disintegrating and must be replaced for our city to remain as livable and as beautiful as it is. We've put off the decision on what to do for decades, and since fixing the stormwater problem has been mandated by the federal government, we have no choice but to act now. The Water Resources Protection Program ensures that the fees are fair, and will be directed immediately towards fixing the problem.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Contact City Council with your comments and attend the second reading of the ordinance on **February 4 at 7:00pm** City of Charlottesville's Council Chambers 605 E. Main St., Charlottesville, VA Phone (434) 970-3333

For more information, visit the city's site here: www.charlottesville.org/stormwater.

Presentation by Robbi Savage, Executive Director, Rivanna Conservation Society, before the Local Government Advisory Committee
March 9, 2013

To address the stormwater concerns of our organization, and those of other environmental nonprofits in our community, RCS, the Southern Environmental Law Center and the UVA Environmental Law and Conservation Clinic conducted intense reviews of the stormwater codes and ordinances of the largest jurisdictions within the watershed. Comprehensive evaluations were conducted and specific recommendations presented to the Charlottesville City Council and the Boards of Supervisors in Albemarle, Fluvanna and Greene Counties. A number of our recommendations have been implemented in all jurisdictions, with the most comprehensive ordinance changes taking place in Albemarle and Fluvanna Counties.

The City of Charlottesville – the most urban of the communities had a number of provisions in place and yet funding was lacking. For this reason the City developed a proposal to create a utility to collect fees that will fund the implementation of the stormwater provisions of the Clean Water Act, the State stormwater regulations and the local ordinances in place at the City.

On the 19th of February 2013, the Charlottesville City Council approved a Stormwater Utility Ordinance by a vote of 4-1. The revenue generated by this utility will be dedicated to an expanded Water Resources Protection Program. This was exciting news for those who care about and have dedicated their careers to the protection of the natural environment.

There were no “slam dunks” here. In fact, the initial introduction of a utility in Charlottesville dates back to 2003, with focused efforts, including the creation of two stakeholder advisory committees, taking place in 2008 and 2012. This was truly a joint effort, a partnership between local government personnel and leaders/partners within the community. Environmental and conservation related organizations supporting the Stormwater Utility included; the Center for Watershed Protection, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, League of Women Voters of the Charlottesville Area, Piedmont Environmental Council, Rivanna Conservation Society, Sierra Club of the Piedmont, Southern Environmental Law Center and the Virginia Conservation Network.

Extensive public outreach was conducted throughout the process and web tools were made available to anyone who wanted to calculate what the fee for their property might be. (City stormwater documents: <http://www.charlottesville.org/stormwater>.)

Rehabilitation of failing stormwater infrastructure will be supported by utility revenue.

The Water Resources Protection Program has a number of priorities, including;

- 1) Perform enhanced system operation and maintenance (also known as rehabilitation) to maximize infrastructure capacity and integrity.
- 2) Meet increased regulatory mandates such as TMDL compliance planning, implementation, and documentation; post-construction inspections, operation, and maintenance verification of stormwater management facilities (i.e., BMPs); increased local oversight of development; and pollution prevention and good housekeeping for municipal operations.
- 3) Develop a city wide Master Plan that integrates water quality protection with drainage system improvement projects.
- 4) Invest in long-term capital drainage improvements.

The challenge of how to generate required revenue to address the program priorities was a key part of the process. Options considered included;

- Generate revenue through user fees (based on contribution to stormwater runoff),
- Generate revenue through real estate/property taxes (based on the tax-value of property), and
- Re-appropriate current funds.

In the end, City Council selected the user fee strategy and, based on the acknowledgement that there are significant stormwater contributions from City-owned parcels, roads, and rights-of way, determined that general funds should continue to be used to support the program.

There was considerable debate within the Council and the public about whether this will be a fee for service or a tax. While it may sound like semantics, the utility is a fee for service, not a tax and localities are authorized to establish a utility or enact a system of service charges to support a local stormwater management program. The good news for the City and staff responsible for the delivery of the Water Resources Protection Program is that a utility provides a dedicated, sustainable source of funding.