



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: September 1, 2026

Item Title: Stormwater Utility Funding

Submitted By: Matt Amundson, City Administrator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

I have summarized from meeting minutes prior discussions regarding this topic....

May 7, 2024 Committee of the Whole

City Engineer, Jason Leitha, gave an update on the Stormwater project. There was a listening session which covered the history and future of stormwater in the city. The last referendum was discussed and what happened post referendum. Grant funding and ordinance updates were also discussed. The second session was held on April 24, 2024. The next steps were discussed – what are the next projects and putting the top projects into a plan. What does sustainable funding look like? Grants, borrowing and stormwater utility were all discussed, possibly looking at another referendum. Mayor Hammer shared that more information is on the website. There are 94 projects listed in the Stormwater study, and at that time the cost was between 15 and 20 million. The top 19 costing between 5.5 and six million. Leitha shared that study was in response to the feedback from the referendum, and it helped to bring us to where we are currently.

July 16, 2024 Committee of the Whole

Discuss Possible April 2025 Referendum for Funding of a Stormwater Utility: The County deadline for the Spring 2025 ballot is January 21, 2025. Amundson shared that we have a detailed plan and there are nineteen priority projects as listed by RuekertMielke. We need to identify a funding source that does not compete with the budget and projects already included in the budget. The council creates the verbiage they would like in the referendum question. There is a Public Information Meeting scheduled for July 24, 2024 at 6:00pm. Attorney Johnson shared that Ch.104, Stormwater Utility in the city code, specifically Ch.104-4, outlines the process. Council would like to review the last referendum question at a future Committee of the Whole meeting. There will also be future discussion in preparing to share the information to the community.

December 17, 2024 Committee of the Whole

Amundson gave some background on the possibility of the city going to a Stormwater Utility Referendum. The Council established the Stormwater Utility by ordinance on January 4, 2022. At that time, a rate charge ("user fee") upon each real estate parcel was not implemented. Subsequent amendments (2) to the Stormwater Utility Ordinance clarified the City's base charge (user fee) concerning timing of user fee increases and details on collection procedures. In 2023, Ordinance 782-23 was enacted

which created Sec. 102-63 whereby the Columbus Utility Commission is prohibited from establishing any rates or charging any fees for stormwater services until such time as the electors approve a referendum to allow for the collection of stormwater fees under Ch. 104 of the Code of Ordinances. There are four options for the Council to consider: 1. Continue to borrow for stormwater projects, 2. Go to a Referendum, 3. Do nothing, or 4. Repeal the Ordinance. The next plausible election date would be April 7, 2026, for a referendum. Committee agreed to move forward a discussion of the process and a recommendation to the January 7, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting.

December/January 2025

City staff learned that the City did not need to go to referendum to enact a fee for the Stormwater Utility in conversations with Ehlers the City's financial consultant. By taking a negative levy adjustment the Council could enact the fee.

January 7, 2025

Committee of Whole

As requested at the December 17, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting, the committee continued discussion regarding stormwater funding. Alder Motiff would like to see a stormwater fee enacted and the repeal of Ord. 782-23 in order to start increasing stormwater funding. Alders Lawson and Reid agreed, adding details they would like to see addressed such as rate differentials between residential and commercial. Committee members agreed to move forward with Public Information Meetings and to review Chapter 104 of the City Code at a future Common Council meeting.

May 19, 2026

Committee of the Whole

Jason Leitha and Sam Bowman with Ruekert-Mielke were present to share an update on the Storm Water Utility. He also discussed the impacts Storm Water Utility has on the community and what Columbus currently has for infrastructure. Funding and project priority challenges and solutions were also shared. He reminded members that the City does not need to go to a referendum to adopt a fee. He also shared a review of the Fuller Street project. Bowman shared reasoning for enacting a user fee for funding through either the Maintenance Focus, the Balance Program (recommended), or the Aggressive Capital Program, and also explained how the billing system would effect property owners. She then outlined how the process would proceed. Committee members agreed to move forward to a future Utility Commission meeting for review.

August 20, 2026

Utility Commission

[Link to Presentation](#)

Jason Lietha provided a presentation and answered questions from the commission. Motion by Sanderson, seconded by Finkler to recommend option 2 and charge via the utility bill. Motion carried on a unanimous roll-call vote.

Funding Scenario #2 – Balanced Program

- Funds full annual maintenance activities:
 - Ditch and channel maintenance
 - Storm inlet cleaning
- Funds one capital project every other year
 - Project will come from ranked priority list
- Builds on completed projects, addresses projects systematically
- Provides a predictable, defensible investment strategy
- Between \$120 and \$150 per ERU annually
- Recommended for City of Columbus

 Ruekert-Mielke

Next Steps for the Council if it wishes to proceed:

- Repeal Ordinance 782-23. In 2023, Ordinance 782-23 was enacted which created Sec. 102-63 whereby the Columbus Utility Commission is prohibited from establishing any rates or charging any fees for stormwater services until such time as the electors approve a referendum to allow for the collection of stormwater fees under Ch. 104 of the Code of Ordinances
- Pursuant to section 104-4(h), the City Council will need to adopt a resolution to establish the base rate. The base rate will remain in place for the remainder of 2026 and all of 2027. The Council resolution to establish the base rate should also establish the start date for the imposition of the fee. The Council will need to provide direction for staff to work with Ruekert-Mielke to develop the budget and fee structure for the stormwater utility.
- Beginning in January 2028, the Council will need to adopt another resolution if it wants to raise the base rate. If the Council wants to raise the rate, 3% is the maximum it can be raised without having to go to referendum.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

Draft Ordinance 822-26

Action Requested of Council:

Consider and take action on stormwater utility funding