




STORM WATER UTILITY

Overview and Considerations for Implementation

City of Columbus
May 19, 2026



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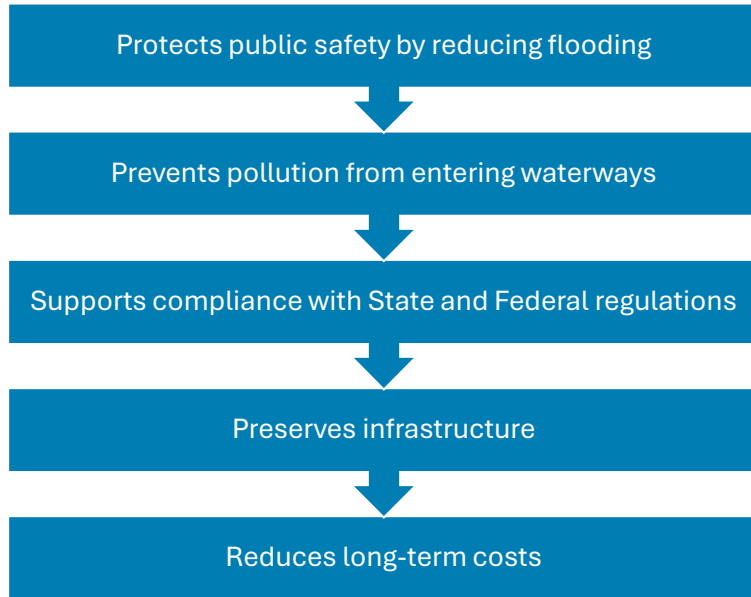
Agenda

- Why does storm water management matter?
- Review the City's current storm water system
- Challenges
- Present Options
- Storm water Utility Status
- Implementation
- Q/A



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Why Does Storm Water Matter?



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City of Columbus Storm Water System

Existing Infrastructure

- Miles of pipe
- Miles of channels and creeks
- 16 storm water basins
 - 4 dry
 - 12 wet
- Hundreds of inlets
- Multiple waterway discharge locations

Maintenance Responsibilities

- Sediment control
- Routine cleaning and inspection

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City of Columbus Storm Water System

History of Projects Completed Since 2021 from priority list

- #19 Gateway Swale
- #46 Ditch / storm sewer for 2023, 2024, 2025 street projects
- #69 Fuller Street Culvert
- #32 Fireman's Park Culvert Removal
- #25 Curb to Warner Street

\$1,378,800

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Current Challenges

Funding

- Storm water is currently funded out of the City's general fund
- Grants are in high demand and timing doesn't always work

Prioritization

- How does the City decide what to improve?
- Reactive vs. Proactive

Maintenance

- Costs (employee wages, infrastructure, etc.)
- Time spent (Resources available)



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Solutions?

Do Nothing

- City continues to treat storm water management like it has in the past
- Funding comes from the general fund
- Projects are completed based on what funds are available
- Reactive vs. Proactive

Create a Storm Water Utility Fee

- Funded by residents like water, sanitary, and electric utilities are currently
- Able to complete more projects
- Proactive vs Reactive
- Able to keep on top of maintenance

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The Story of the Storm Water Utility

2021

- City adopted a storm water utility ordinance
- Referendum failed
 - A user fee was not implemented

What's changed since 2021?

- The City does not need to go to referendum to adopt the fee.
- In 2022, a comprehensive plan was created to identify needs as requested by residents
- In 2023, the Council received a list of top storm water projects
 - 2023-2025, the City has completed a number of storm water projects

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Maintenance Dredging and Culvert Replacement

Replacement of a failing culvert beneath Fuller Street improved drainage capacity and roadway infrastructure.



 Ruekert • Mielke

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Fireman's Park Culvert Removal

Removed an existing culvert that 2nd Ward Creek was traveling through and daylighted the creek through Fireman's Park.



 Ruekert • Mielke

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Storm Water Utility

What is it?

- A dedicated municipal funding mechanism that **manages** and **finances** the control, collection, and treatment of storm water runoff.
- Similar to sewer and water utilities – storm water utilities provide a dedicated funding source for infrastructure maintenance, flood control, and water quality compliance.
- Columbus has utility created with no user fee

What are the benefits w/ fee?

- Provides a dedicated funding source for storm water projects.
- Makes capacity in general fund for other CIP projects

How is it Funded?

- User Fee
 - Base fee off of need (Today with 2021 Comprehensive Storm Water Plan)
 - Base fee on predetermined amount (2021 Referendum)



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Funding Scenario #1 – Maintenance Focused

- **Funds annual maintenance activities:**
 - Rotational ditch and channel maintenance
 - Rotational storm inlet cleaning
- **Funding capital work is limited to small targeted fixes**
 - Medium size project every few years
- **Major conveyance and flood mitigation remain deferred**
 - Such as projects the City has been completing
- **Between \$90 and \$120 per ERU annually**



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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**



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Funding Scenario #3 – Aggressive Capital Program

- Funds full annual maintenance activities:
 - Ditch and channel maintenance
 - Storm inlet cleaning
- Funds one capital project every year
 - Project will come from ranked priority list
- Builds on completed projects, addresses projects systematically
- Provides the fastest reduction in flood risk but has the highest fee impact
- Between \$150 and \$175 per ERU annually



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Funding

ERU Definition

- Equivalent Runoff Unit
 - Average horizontal impervious area of a single-family residential lot within the City of Columbus.
- 2021 Ordinance states 1 ERU = 3,600 square feet
 - Average area at the creation of the Ordinance

Fee Structure

- Single Family Residential billed at 1 ERU
- Two Unit Residential billed at 0.6 ERU
- Multi-Family and Commercial billed at 1 ERU times the total impervious square footage of the lot divided by 3,600 square feet.

When is it billed?

- Annual vs Monthly, both options have pros and cons

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Funding – When is it billed?

Annual

- With the property tax bill as a special charge
- One time payment per year
- Examples: Town of Onalaska (not able to find charge online), Town of Holland (\$55 annually)

Non-Annual

- With the other utility bills (Monthly, Quarterly, etc.)
- Split into lower payments
- Examples: City of Fitchburg (\$26 quarterly), City of Middleton (\$23 quarterly), City of Sun Prairie (\$10 monthly)

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Implementation

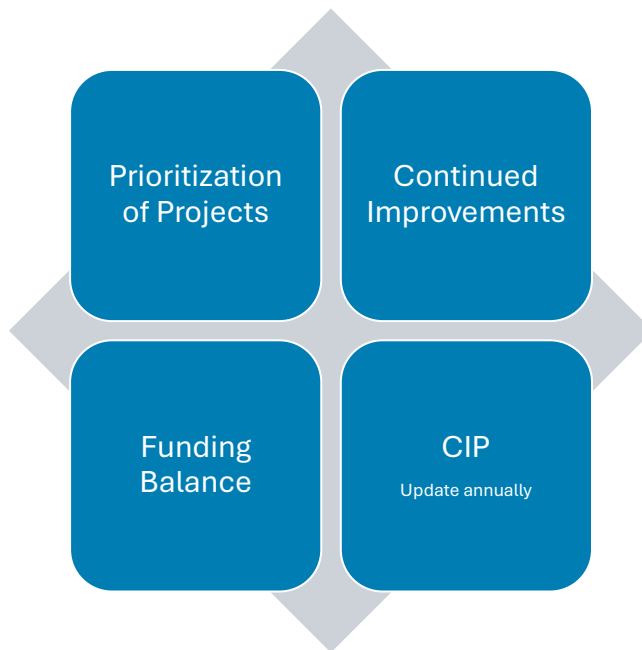


2025 Fireman's Park Culvert Removal

- Establish New project priorities (update 2023 priorities)
- Rate Study & Credit Policy Development
- Public Engagement
- Update Ordinance
- Council Review and Adoption
- Utility Launch



Vision for After Implementation



Summary

Review of Projects
Completed

What has been
happening in the
community will continue
happening but at a faster
rate with more funding

Questions?

