

Manor, Texas

Stormwater Utility Fee Communication Strategy

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Situational Analysis

Manor's Stormwater History

The City's stormwater program is currently funded by the City's General Fund, primarily through the Streets Department budget, and it is managed by the Streets Department and a contracted engineering firm. The team currently performs services to fulfill the obligations under an NPDES Phase II MS4 permit issued by TCEQ, including public outreach, site inspections and permit reviews. They also maintain the drainage system infrastructure on City property and City Right-of-Ways, including storm sewers, roadside drainage and streets.

Stormwater costs are expected to rise over the next five years, from approximately \$500,000 to \$1.6 million as the city implements a more proactive program. Costs include activities related to continued compliance with the TCEQ water quality permit and preventative and proactive maintenance and repair of the City's aging infrastructure, so the City can continue to maintain a safe environment for current residents and anticipated future development.

Short Term Stormwater System Goals

- Enhanced preventative and proactive maintenance, asset management
- Street sweeping program to meet MS4 requirements
- Stormwater Master Plan and capital planning

Long Term Stormwater System Goals

- City takes over responsibility of surface drainage, maintenance of all culverts and ditches (three crew members and equipment (dump truck, gradall, vector trailer)
- Capital projects, such as, street re-profiling to prevent flooding and other projects as identified in SWMP

Communications Opportunities

The City has a fairly limited communications environment currently but has some opportunities to inform the public about the upcoming fee, the rationale behind it, and the growing and improving stormwater program.

- The City hired a branding company to support its communications about initiatives related to the upcoming bond referendum. The City could use the outreach associated with this effort to communicate the value of a broader set of City services (including stormwater management)
- A new website is being developed for community engagement, which could be leveraged to engage residents in conversations about the new stormwater fee.
- Some open houses have been conducted in the past, most recently related to the City's long-term development planning process, and the same avenue could be used to build awareness and start collecting feedback about the stormwater fee.
- A public City event is scheduled in October, where the City could table and feature information about the enhanced stormwater program or its program plans, but this will not be early enough to inform people about the upcoming fee. Rather, it can be used to demonstrate or share upcoming program enhancements.
- City Council meetings provide monthly opportunities to share updates about the fee to the public.

Communications Goals and Audiences

Goals

- The community is aware of, understands and supports the need for a stormwater utility fee. They are aware of the City's efforts to address regulatory, environmental, and financial challenges related to stormwater management.
- There is general agreement about the equity and fairness of an impervious-based fee.
- Untaxed properties and others don't derail the change.
- Property owners have an opportunity to learn how the new fee is associated with their property characteristics, how it may impact them financially, and have some recourse should they believe their fee to be calculated incorrectly.

Stakeholder audiences

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that have an interest in the stormwater fee and may be directly or indirectly affected by the fee. Internal stakeholders that work for and lead the City are also included in the stakeholder group.

The following stakeholder audiences have been identified as having a connection and interest to the outcome of a decision on a stormwater fee:






- Commercial property owners and managers
- Subdivision Leadership/Homeowners Associations
- City Council and City employees
- City business community
- Faith-based and other nonprofit organizations
- Single family residential property owners
- Environmental groups
- Affordability Advocates
- Local news media

Levels of Public Engagement

Identifying the proper role of the public and the level of engagement (public participation) is a critical component of developing effective engagement strategies. We used the following International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum to organize the myriad stakeholder audiences into three categories of priority: Involve, Consult, and Inform.

We recommend the following approach to engagement with Manor’s different audience segments:

Manor’s Impervious Surface Fee Public Participation Spectrum

	 Inform	 Consult	 Involve	 Collaborate	 Empower
GOAL	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions	To make sure that concerns and needs are considered and understood	To partner with in each aspect of decision-making	To make final decisions
PROMISE	“We will keep you informed.”	“We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns.”	“We will work with you to ensure your concerns and needs are directly reflected in the decisions made.”	“We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible.”	“We will implement what you decide.”
Audience	All Community	All Community	Business, Nonprofit, and Faith-based Community Environmental and Affordability Advocates	Employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance & Billing • Streets, Planning • Community Relations 	City Council & Mayor

Collaborate and Empower

Only the consultants, staff, and the elected officials are a part of the Collaborate category, as they provide advice to the elected officials in their decision making. Only elected officials are in the Empower category, as they have the power to make the final decision on the fee that’s implemented. Collaboration tools and techniques include memos, emails, presentations and workshops.

Involvement

Stakeholder audiences have influence and interest in a new impervious surface fee for a variety of reasons: some may be financially impacted by a new fee, and some may have influence in its success because of their role in the project. It will be important to reach out often to stakeholders in this category and engage with them to ensure they understand the basis for the change, how it will impact them, and provide opportunities to provide input into key elements.

Involvement Communication and Engagement Strategies and Tactics

STAKEHOLDER AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND TACTICS
<p>Top Tier Infrastructure Users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Large commercial property owners ● Subdivision/Home Owner Associations ● Business community ● Non-profit organizations ● Faith organizations 	<p>Informational Conversations</p> <p>These stakeholders will be invited to have conversations with the City staff prior to City Council action to help build an understanding of their knowledge and concerns about the City’s stormwater infrastructure in general, to inform them about the impervious surface fee, and to learn how we can best communicate with them, their community and/or network, and other stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop individualized slide deck ● Offer meetings, with group representative ● One-page fact sheet with infographics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Environmentalists/Smart growth / People connected to the City’s stream restoration efforts or who support sustainability efforts ● Economic Development Authority ● Affordability Advocates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Email updates on this effort, send materials out and specifically invite them to share information with their own network, and invite them to share any information they are hearing from the communities they represent with the city to help prevent misinformation.

Consult and Inform

The stakeholders represent audiences who will have interest, as it relates to their bill or as they see the direct impact to their quality of life.

Consult Communication and Engagement Strategies and Tactics

STAKEHOLDER AUDIENCE	COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND TACTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All 	<p>To provide information about the City’s stormwater infrastructure and fee plans, and to capture and any concerns they have about it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Website with information, including imagery and sample measured impervious area, and FAQs ● Social Media Posts ● Postcard mailed to all residents/businesses

Key Message Platform

A message platform provides consistency and relevancy to the City's communications about the City's proposed stormwater fee. Sharing this with all employees and the City's leadership and elected officials assures consistency, which builds trust in the City and the program. Messages are intended to be simple and informative.

The City of Manor shares with its residents a strong value for clean, healthy streams and is committed to programs and services that enhance the beauty of our City and our property values.

- A. The City's Department of Public Works manages, maintains and repairs storm drain pipes and various storm sewer structures throughout the City.
- B. In addition to the structural components of the stormwater system, the City also regulates and protects the floodplain throughout the City limits.

Stormwater management has become an increasing and urgent priority for the City with the increasing frequency and severity of storms.

- A. Severe storm events are occurring more often and with more intensity than they were when much of Manor infrastructure was built many decades ago.
- B. One inch of rain falling on 3,000 square feet of pavement generates more than 1,000 gallons of runoff.
- C. Managing stormwater isn't about managing where it comes from to a property, it's about how it's handled on a property and where it goes from there.

The primary reasons why we need to manage stormwater effectively are flood control and stream health. We've been making progress on both, but more must be done to protect our property values and comply with the regulations that protect our waters.

- A. Manor complies with water quality requirements related to the Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (TPDES) General Permit No. TXR040000 and specific pollutant reduction requirements for Gilleland Creek.
- B. To maintain the health of local waterways, we should minimize the pollution reaching them. Rainfall runoff typically moves quickly to these waterways and carries pollutants like fertilizer and motor oil with it. Slowing these waters allows pollutants to be removed resulting in cleaner waterways.

The City is currently partially funding its stormwater program with property taxes. This is problematic because property value is not correlated with a property's demand on the stormwater system.

- A. The City currently funds its stormwater program through real estate taxes.

- B. The City has been spending about \$25,000 per year on infrastructure maintenance, municipal stormwater permit compliance, environmental, and drainage improvement projects but it doesn't fund a sufficient program.
- C. The General Fund supports additional program expenses such as administrative and personnel costs, overhead, materials, and equipment.
- D. City leadership worked with stormwater program staff and funding consultants during late 2022 to assess near-term and future costs of service for the City's stormwater infrastructure, and to evaluate how well the current method of funding the City's stormwater services recovers its costs. The City is currently underfunding its program and should establish a stable and sufficient revenue stream to enhance the program to meet community needs.

A dedicated impervious surface-based fee is a proposed solution.

- E. The study showed that a dedicated fee, based on the amount of hard (impervious) surfaces on a property is a more equitable way to recover the costs of stormwater management, since it's directly related to each property's demand on the City's stormwater infrastructure.
- F. A dedicated *stormwater fee* will help transition the City toward a sufficient and stable revenue source to effectively address the City's drainage issues and meet Texas DEQ's regulatory requirements.
- G. To determine the fee for each property, the City is using Geographic Information System (GIS) data and aerial imagery to determine the amount of impervious surface on parcels within the City.
- H. The City's proposed billing unit (an equivalent residential unit or ERU) is equal to 2,730 square feet of impervious surface, so every 2,730 square feet of impervious cover equals one ERU.
- I. The City's proposed rate structure includes a flat rate for single-family residential properties, each of which will be charged for 1 ERU of impervious area.
- J. The City's proposed rate structure includes a variable rate for all other properties, each of which will be charged per ERU (2,730 square feet) of impervious area.
- K. As an example, if a shopping center has a rooftop, parking lot, and walkways that equals 50,000 sq.ft of impervious cover, you would calculate the number of billing units like this:

$$30,000 \text{ sq.ft} \div 2,730 \text{ sq.ft} = 10.9, \text{ then round up to the nearest whole number} = 11 \text{ ERUs.}$$

- L. The proposed fee per ERU is \$6.50 per month, so for the example above, the monthly stormwater fee (which will be on the water and sewer bill) would be \$71.50
- M. For comparison, this fee for stormwater is about the middle of our peers, at less than Austin and San Marcos, but higher than New Braunfels and Round Rock.

If approved by Council, the stormwater fee will go into effect in late 2023.

- A. The new fee will be billed monthly with water and sewer.
- B. Properties with significant amounts of hard surfaces will experience a larger bill related to stormwater.

A credit program is being considered to give property owners a chance to receive financial credits for taking actions on their property that reduces the demand on the stormwater system.

- A. Once developed, the City will post credit information at its website and notify property owners through the billing and on social media.

The funding provided by this new fee will enable the City to make the investments needed to help ensure our properties are protected against major weather events and we do our part to protect our local streams.

- A. This fee will fund projects that will ease the impacts that impervious surfaces have on the City's stormwater infrastructure. Projects will be identified and prioritized through a master planning effort anticipated in 2024.
- B. These projects will have direct benefit to City residents because they will protect properties from flooding, reduce the risk of wet basements and flooded yards, reduce traffic delays during storms, enhance safety for cars and pedestrians and restore streams and the walking trails along them.

Communication Channels

For this plan, the City is encouraged to use all available communication channels it has and supplementing them with some active outreach to key stakeholders to improve the chances of broad community awareness of the Stormwater Fee and attaining the goals of this public engagement strategy.

Direct Mail Postcard/Bill Insert

It is recommended the City create a colorful piece describing the purpose of the fee, the benefits to the City and the timing of decisions and implementation. This direct mail piece should be sent to all residents and businesses in advance of the decision.

Website

The City has a section on its website devoted to stormwater service. This serves as the primary destination for stormwater information that is promoted through the City's various channels. The website will need to be updated to include details about the new fee and the credit program once available. It is recommended the City add some imagery to enhance the visual experience for the reader.

Presentations

Certain stakeholder audiences have been identified as having the potential for a high level of interest in the

fee, while others may have a lower interest level, but be in positions where they are influential in the community. A presentation should be developed that is geared for these stakeholders and focuses on clear messages about why the stormwater fee is being implemented and the need to invest in infrastructure.

Social Media

Social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Linked In) provides a great opportunity to reach a diverse array of stakeholders with stormwater messages and receive their input and questions. If the City isn't already using these tools, it might be worth exploring. If it is using these platforms, it is recommended that stormwater messaging be incorporated into the content calendar.

QR Codes

Utilizing the City's existing Quick Response (QR) code technology, the City can deploy information to residents about the implementation of stormwater measures. The codes could be applied along waterways in public spaces, included in storm drain

medallions, or messaging on existing code stations could be updated to announce new stormwater initiatives. Using this technology, messaging can be updated as frequently as necessary.

Surrogates

Surrogates are people or organizations of people, either loosely or formally assembled, who will support this shift in funding and the concept of a stormwater

fee. They value clean water and/or the protection and enhancement of property values and see this as a key opportunity to secure both. Surrogates will be identified by the City and provided with a fact sheet, social media posts, and talking points, and encouraged to share the information with the people who follow them.

Communications Materials

Communications materials provide a home for the messages and content and are delivered through appropriate communication channels. The following is an outline of communication materials that can be developed for this plan:

Material	Description	Channels
FAQs	Q&A that describes what the Stormwater Fee is, why it's needed, what it pays for and how different properties will be impacted.	Website Presentations Internal communicators Social Media
Infographics	Graphic representation of how the rate is developed; Graphic representation of what the Fee covers; Graphic of how bills impacted	Website Presentations Social Media Direct Mail Newsletter
Fact Sheet	Full-color explanation of what the new fee is for, why it's needed, what it pays for, and how properties will be affected.	Surrogates Presentations
Postcard	To announce the proposed fee and encourage people to attend presentations or review the website for more info	Mailed directly to all residents
PowerPoint Slide Decks	Short, 15 to 20-minute presentation showing the City's infrastructure investment needs and providing context for new fee.	Presentations to different groups
Staff/Council/Customer Service Talking Points	For use by all as needed	Internal communicators
Video(s)	To explain what stormwater is, how it impacts the community, how the fee works	Social media Presentations Website



Implementation Schedule

TASK	RESPONSIBLE	July	August	September	October
Review, approve Plan	City	X			
Develop PPT Deck	Raftelis and City	X			
Develop and mail postcard	Raftelis and City	X			
Create Infographics	Raftelis and City	X			
Revise website					
Create Video(s)	Raftelis		X		
Provide materials to Surrogates for sharing	City		X		
Meet with Commercial Prop Managers	City		X		
Meet with Big Box/Dealers	City		X		
Meet with Office Building Owner	City		X		
Meet with HOAs	City		X		
Meet with Faith-Nonprofits	City		X		
Summarize Comments/Findings	Raftelis			X	
Incorporate Feedback into Recommendation to Council	City			X	
Recommendation presented to Council for vote	City			X	
Continue communications about program	City				Post Vote