

# Messaging & Public Relations: Addressing Local Concerns



---

**ENGINEERING - STORMWATER**  
CLEAN WATER | HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

---

# *Cities of Gallatin, TN & Portland, ME Perspective*

1. Introduction
2. It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case
3. Public Engagement Strategy
4. So... How did Gallatin & Portland begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?
5. After Stormwater Utility Implemented



# Introduction

The City of Gallatin was established in 1802

Located northeast of Nashville and is nestled on the banks of both Old Hickory Lake and the Cumberland River.

71 Stream Miles, 14 Miles of Old Hickory Lake Shoreline

Population: Approximately 40,000

The City is located at the bottom of several watersheds and often experiences flooding events



# Introduction

The City of Portland was settled in 1632

Roughly 40 percent of all Maine residents live in the greater Portland metropolitan area

Situated on the Portland peninsula near Maine's southernmost border

America's 20th-largest fishing port

Despite having a population of just 60,000, Portland boasts an impressive 17 microbreweries – clean water is imperative!





# Introduction

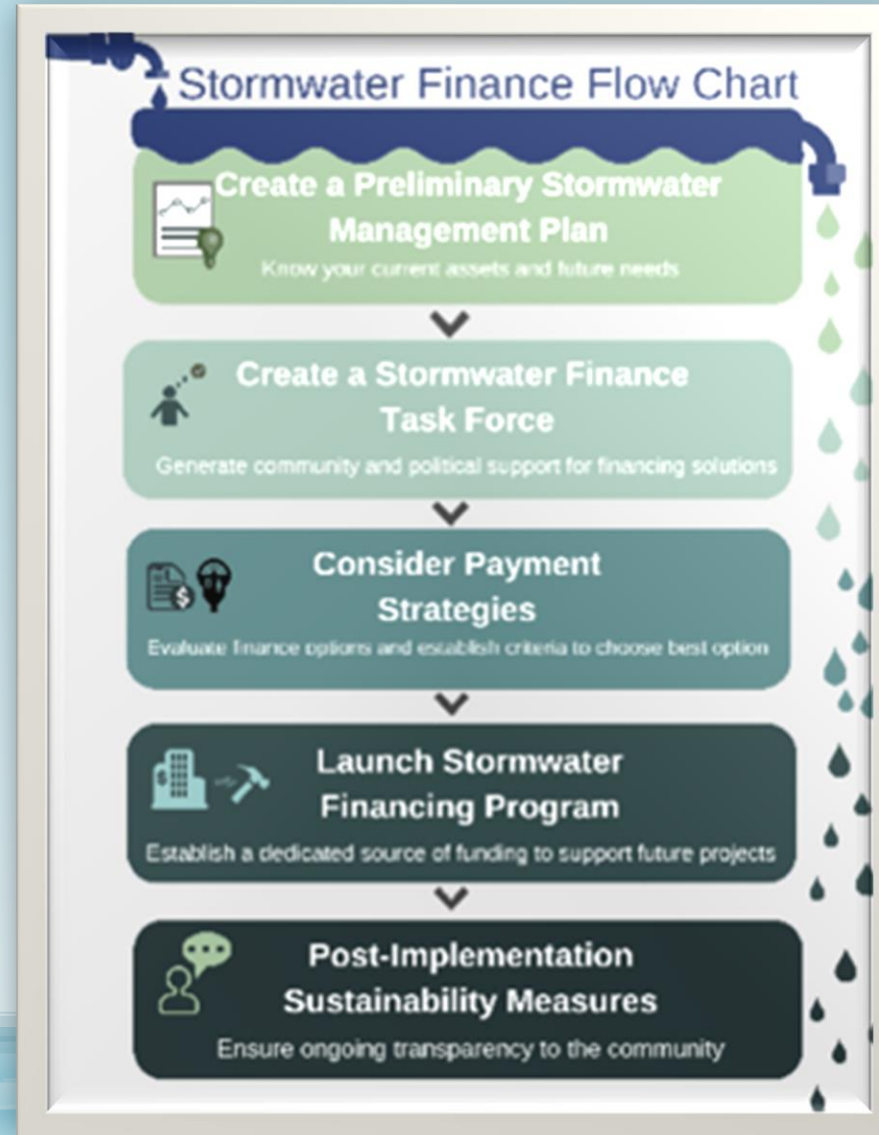
Recurrent issues highlighted a need for increased funding and a dedicated revenue source

Engineering Division realized it was time to begin planning for a Stormwater Utility Fee

Where and How to Start?



# Stormwater Finance Flow Chart



# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

## Track and Compile Any and All Pertinent Information

Drainage Complaint Records & Resolutions

*Calls to staff*

*Calls to elected officials*

*Photographic and Video Evidence*

Engineering and Maintenance Staff Knowledge

History of Flood/Extreme Rain Events – rainfall data amounts

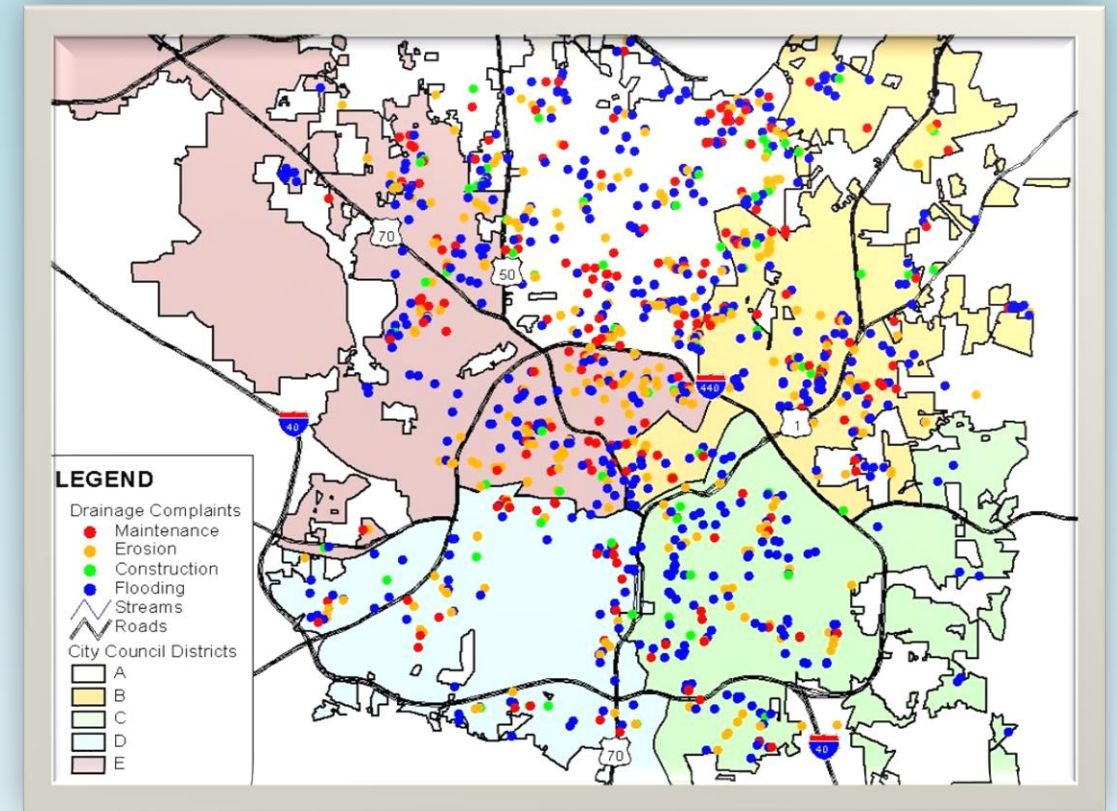
Economic Impacts - \$ Damages

Flood Insurance Repetitive Loss \$ Amounts

Any Master and Watershed Basin Plans

Completed Projects List

Future Projects List





# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

## The Benefits for Enacting a Sustainable Financing Plan

***Always keep these at the front of your mind!***

You are promoting a stormwater utility because your community benefits from:

Taking Public Safety Seriously

Clean Water

Pro-actively Addressing Drainage Problems

Maintaining and Improving Aging Stormwater Infrastructure

Better Economic Development

More Attractive Neighborhoods and Downtowns

Dedicated Revenue for Scheduling Capital Improvement Projects





# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

## The Benefits for Enacting a Sustainable Financing Plan

***Always keep these at the front of your mind!***

Neutralize negative political comments

Clearly addressing facts and benefits

Remaining calm and professional

Listen to critics, allow them to voice their opinions

Empathy and understanding

Calmly explain the benefits and why a fee may be a better way to manage local infrastructure concerns

Embrace your advocates – encourage them to help educate and promote benefits



# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

Concurrently, compile a list of available resources to guide you:

No need to re-invent the wheel!

Websites dedicated to New Jersey Stormwater Utility Implementation Assistance

Consider Hiring an Experienced Consultant



ENGINEERING - STORMWATER  
CLEAN WATER | HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**CDM  
Smith**

**RUTGERS** New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Home About Cooperative Extension Research Topics County Offices Services Giving Contact Us

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS PUBLICATIONS  
Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet F51367

## Stormwater Utilities in New Jersey – Frequently Asked Questions

Salvatore S. Mangiafico, County Agent II, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Cumberland and Salem Counties  
Amy Rowe, County Agent II, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Essex and Passaic Counties  
Steve Vergeau, County Agent III, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ocean and Atlantic Counties

### What Is Stormwater?

Stormwater is any form of water that begins as precipitation. This includes rain, sleet, snow, and the water from melting snow, even if the melting occurs long after the snowstorm has passed (Figure 1).

There are a few general outcomes for precipitation:

- It can be absorbed into the ground. A large proportion of rain that falls on vegetated areas such as natural forests, farm fields, or home lawns is likely to percolate into the ground. Likewise, snow that melts on vegetated areas is likely to percolate into the ground if the soil beneath it is not frozen. The plants in these vegetated areas can take up a portion of the water for growth. Some non-vegetated areas are able to absorb precipitation. These include areas landscaped with rock or covered with permeable pavement. A portion of this water is captured by plant roots and eventually is released to



Figure 1. Snowmelt is also stormwater. As



ENGINEERING - STORMWATER  
CLEAN WATER | HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**EPA** **Funding Stormwater Programs** April 2009

EPA 901-F-09-004

### Executive Summary

This document is intended to assist local stormwater managers to alleviate the significant expense of construction, operation and maintenance of a municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4). The costs of stormwater programs, increased by regulatory requirements (stormwater Phase I or Phase II), flooding concerns, water quality issues (including total maximum daily loads, or TMDLs) and population growth, may be subsidized through a stormwater utility or various other methods detailed in this document.

Stormwater management can be costly, but it is a good investment. There are new stormwater management techniques, referred to as low impact development (LID), that infiltrate, evaporate and reuse stormwater, thereby, preventing polluted runoff from happening. This helps to reduce the high costs of cleaning up the water quality impairments from the polluted runoff. Additional benefits from these techniques include increased ground water recharge, flood control, and healthy aquatic ecosystems through maintenance of base flow for streams. LID techniques need to be sited and designed carefully, and used in conjunction with traditional stormwater management techniques.

This fact sheet includes information on various stormwater funding mechanisms and types of stormwater utilities, it also describes how to create a stormwater utility and provides a list of resources.

### New England Case Studies

More than 800 communities or districts across the country have adopted a stormwater utility to help fund the costs of stormwater programs, including the costs of regulatory compliance, planning, maintenance, capital improvements and repair or replacement of infrastructure. Examples of utilities from two New England cities are discussed below.

**South Burlington, Vermont**  
<http://www.sburstormwater.com>


The South Burlington Stormwater Utility is the first of its kind in Vermont. Six streams in and around South Burlington are impaired from stormwater, resulting in water pollution, erosion, flooding, and unstable streambanks. The utility was established in 2006 to help mitigate the increasingly complex issues associated with stormwater management, including failing septic systems in older developments and phosphorus runoff polluting Lake Champlain, which is the primary source of drinking water for the Burlington area.

### Cities in New England with Stormwater Utilities

- Chicopee, Massachusetts
- Lewiston, Maine
- Newton, Massachusetts
- Reading, Massachusetts
- South Burlington, Vermont

(as of December 2008)

An example of a capital project construction (a gravel wetland) that was paid for by the stormwater utility in South Burlington, Vermont.



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**  
**NJ STORMWATER.ORG**  
*Stormwater in New Jersey*



# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

**Concurrently, compile a list of available resources to guide you:**

State and National Stormwater Associations

[Tennessee Stormwater Association](#)

[National Municipal Stormwater Alliance](#)



## Motivation for Formation



- To represent MS4 permittees at the national level by providing a **unified voice**
- To lead changes in regulation both **proactively and reactively**
- To **connect and unite** MS4 programs
- To promote stormwater as a **resource**
- To improve the **public image of stormwater**
- To create opportunities for **multi-benefit and multi-use stormwater projects**



# It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

**Concurrently, compile a list of available resources to guide you:**

## Water Environment Federation

Local Officials Toolkit - Draft

Initial Final Fact Sheets by December 2021

The following general topics:

Stormwater Management Fundamentals

Stormwater Treatment Types

Stormwater Treatment with Green Infrastructure

Incorporating Equity and Inclusion in Messaging

Resiliency





# Public Engagement Strategy

## Develop a Public Outreach Plan:

Prepare/Design Brochures

Billing Notices

Community Meetings

One-on-One Meetings with Large Fee Payers

Speakers Bureaus

Media Relations (Social Media, Public TV Channel, Radio, Website, Newsprint)

Educational Video

Meetings with Elected Officials



**CITY OF GALLATIN**

**Background:**

In July of 2018, the City Council approved an ordinance establishing a stormwater utility fee program to begin to address the long-standing flooding issues that are impacting our citizens and to comply with Federal and State Clean Water Act requirements to improve the quality of water in local streams. Based on drainage complaints received in the past, the City has conducted several small area drainage analyses to identify potential solutions to known drainage issues. In addition, the City also partners with state and federal agencies where applicable to attend to its larger flooding problems. However, sufficient funding is not in place to implement these proposed projects that would improve the quality of life for citizens in Gallatin. Also, Federal law requires that the City establish an appropriate level of funding for mandated water quality improvement programs. Many local governments in Middle Tennessee, including Goodlettsville, White House, Portland, Lebanon, Hendersonville and Nashville, have already implemented similar fee programs. Included in this flyer are answers to some frequently asked questions about the approved stormwater utility fee.

*A community that embraces growth, while maintaining its heritage, character, charm and vitality, must develop and maintain infrastructure that promotes a high quality of life and protects the safety, health and well-being of all its citizens.*

**Contact:**

City of Gallatin | Engineering Department  
122 West Main Street, Gallatin, TN 37066  
Stormwater Coordinator: Jennifer Watson | 615-435-5965 | jennifer.watson@gallatin.tn.gov  
Stormwater Utility Manager: Lance Wagner | 615-435-5965 | lance.wagner@gallatin.tn.gov

**CDM Smith**

**Stormwater Utility Frequently Asked Questions:**

**Q. What is stormwater runoff?**

**A.** Stormwater runoff is the water that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rain storms. The runoff that is not absorbed into the ground pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins and storm sewers. It does not receive any treatment before entering the streams and lakes.

**Q. Why is stormwater runoff a problem?**

**A.** As precipitation falls on undeveloped areas, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into streams, rivers or other water bodies. However, development resulting in rooftops and paved areas prevent water from being absorbed and creates a faster rate and cumulative amount of runoff. This development often causes localized flooding or water quality issues.

**Q. Why has the City chosen to implement a separate fee for stormwater management?**

**A.** By establishing a dedicated funding source through stormwater fees, the City can ensure that the revenue required to manage and to maintain this important system is available. The dedicated funds will be used to increase the level and frequency of repairs and improvements necessary to support the aging infrastructure in Gallatin, as well as to meet increasing Federal and State mandated stormwater quality improvement requirements.

**Q. What is the basis for the fee that is charged?**

**A.** The stormwater utility fee is based on the square footage of impervious surface area (i.e. hard surfaces that generate stormwater runoff) on your lot. In essence, customers pay a fee related to the amount of runoff generated from their site, which is directly related to the amount of impervious surface on the site.

**Q. When will the stormwater fee take effect?**

**A.** The stormwater charge will appear on your monthly Gallatin Public Utility bill starting in January 2019.

**Q. What will it cost me?**

Impervious Area	Monthly Fee
< 2,114 sq. ft.	\$3.00
2,115 to 6,560 sq. ft.	\$5.00
> 6,561 sq. ft.	\$9.00

**Q. How are non-residential property fees determined and billed?**

**A.** All non-residential properties will be billed at a rate based on their impervious area as well. To determine the monthly fee, divide the total impervious area of your property by 3,650 square feet (for one Single Family Unit) to obtain the number of SFUs and multiply by the base single family rate (\$3.00 per month per SFU).

*For more information, visit the City's stormwater utility information website at <https://www.gallatin.gov/1655/Stormwater-Utility>*



# Public Engagement Strategy

**Consider forming a stakeholder group with various interested parties:**

## Advantages

- Message tested in small group before distribution at large
- Feed-back is immediate
- Once consensus reached, stakeholder committee members become advocates/champions

## Disadvantages

- It takes time to do correctly
- Each stakeholder must agree with the process and have sufficient responsibility
- The facilitator is the key to success



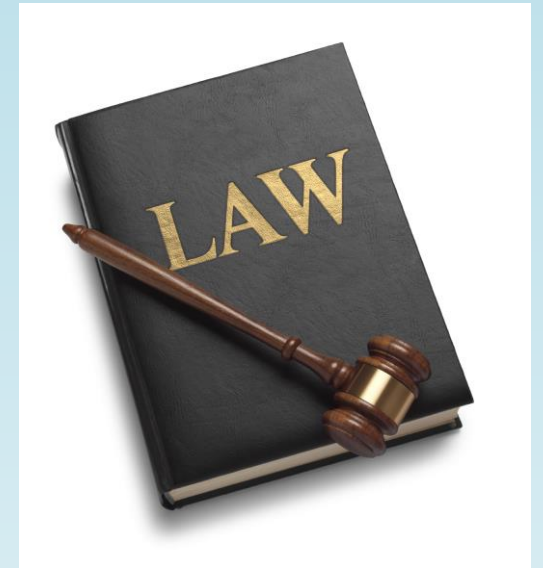
# Public Engagement Strategy

## Don't Get Sued! Know New Jersey 's Enabling Legislation

“...any county or municipality may... establish a stormwater utility for the purposes of acquiring, constructing, improving, maintaining, and operating stormwater management systems...

“A stormwater utility ... shall be considered a **separate** operation of the authority **to be budgeted and accounted for separately**”

“Any fee or other charge ... **shall be based on a fair and equitable approximation of the proportionate contribution of stormwater runoff from a real property...**



## *So... How did Gallatin begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?*

### **Biggest hurdles in concept:**

*Idea that this is a Rain TAX*

*Decision maker turnover - Elections*

*Were we doing a “good enough” job?*

### **Positive Considerations**

*When we seriously began pursuing the Utility, 2017 was not an Election year!*

*Chose to initially present multiple short 20 minute presentations to City Council*

*Then present to local Civic groups*

*By this time, several Middle Tennessee communities had implemented a Stormwater Utility*





***So... How did Gallatin begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?***

***What did we present on?***

***Three City Council Presentations***

*Overview on Stormwater Basics & Requirements of the MS4 Permit*

*Stormwater Challenges & Existing Stormwater Level of Service*

*Stormwater Utility – A Sustainable Solution*

***Points that were Highlighted & Reiterated***

*Aging infrastructure*

*Increase in drainage complaints; City was reactive and not pro-active*

*No routine infrastructure maintenance or rehabilitation*

*Safety concerns*

*Have to request and compete for \$ from general fund, no dedicated funding source*



Messaging & Public Relations: Addressing Local Concerns: *Gallatin & Portland Perspective*

*So... How did Gallatin begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?*

## *Who did we present to?*

### *Community Presentations*

*Presented on Stormwater Basics, MS4 permit, Level of Service and Stormwater Utility as a Solution*

### *Who to Present to?*

*Civic Groups: Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Sertoma Clubs*

*Home Owner Associations*

*Chambers of Commerce*

*Industrial Boards*

*Economic & Development Agencies*



*After successfully receiving Community Support...*



*So... How did Gallatin begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?*

*Whoaaaaa - Wait one second...*



Who Knew? City Council Approval – That May Not Be A Problem!

Next Hurdle: Make sure to communicate with, and bring City Departments on board...

Know your Critics and spend time to educate those Departments:

Economic Development Agencies

Public Utilities

Public Works



## *After the Stormwater Utility ...*

After the Utility is passed, billing is put into place and the fee collection begins...

Public Education Continues!

Initially there will be a flurry of phone calls and complaints

Continue to promote the benefits messaging

Remind the caller that potential credits may be available

My main message: A fee is always a better choice over a tax. It is a dedicated and transparent revenue source that is fair and equitable across the city – everyone who lives on or leases real property contributes to stormwater runoff and utilizes city infrastructure and thus pays into this fund that is solely used for stormwater management.

# *You Will Be Successful!*





# Questions?

***Jennifer Watson, Stormwater Coordinator***

*City of Gallatin, TN*

*[Jennifer.watson@gallatintn.gov](mailto:Jennifer.watson@gallatintn.gov)*

***Ed Suslovic, Former Mayor***

*City of Portland, ME*

*[esuslovic@gmail.com](mailto:esuslovic@gmail.com)*

