



**CITY OF FAIRFAX  
STORMWATER  
MANAGEMENT**

Stormwater Utility Frequently Asked Questions  
(FAQs)

City of Fairfax, Virginia  
10455 Armstrong Street  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(703) 385-2578

**Website:** [www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility)

**Email:** [stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov](mailto:stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov)

**Phone:** 703-385-2578

**What is a Stormwater Utility?**

Like utilities for water and sanitary sewer, a Stormwater Utility (SWU) is a fee-for-service approach to providing stormwater management services in the City of Fairfax. Ratepayers are charged a fee based on the stormwater runoff impact their respective properties generate. Runoff impact is based on the amount of impervious surface present on a parcel.

**What are impervious areas?**

Impervious areas are surfaces composed of any material that significantly impedes or prevents the natural infiltration of water into the soil. Impervious surfaces include but are not limited to roofs, buildings, streets, parking areas, driveways, and any concrete, asphalt, or gravel surface.

**Why should I pay for the Stormwater Utility Fee?**

Under a SWU, property owners will be charged a SWU fee to fund the necessary city operation and maintenance of its public stormwater system. With a SWU, property owners are charged a fee for the amount of impervious surface on their property. The SWU fee is not based on rainfall frequency or volume and impervious surface is the only metric used to calculate the fee. Property owners can control the level of development on their properties, which directly impacts the runoff characteristics of each parcel.

**Why is a SWU a more equitable way to pay for stormwater management service?**

Rather than basing stormwater management funding on the value of a property, which does not have a relationship to its stormwater management needs, the SWU bases the fees on the amount of impervious cover on a parcel, which represents a consistent relationship to a property's stormwater runoff impact.

In addition, all properties\*, including untaxed properties, are assessed a SWU fee, which ensures that all properties that contribute to stormwater runoff impacts are paying their fair share toward the stormwater program.

\*A small number of property types are exempted by Virginia law, such as public rights-of-way, government-owned properties, and properties covered by their own MS4 permit.

**How can I see what the City's impervious cover measurement is for my property?**

The City has developed an online property lookup tool ([www.fairfaxva.gov/swulookup](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/swulookup)) that allows a property owner to view the subject property's impervious surface.

**What is the difference between a SWU and a tax?**

The Stormwater Utility Fee is not a tax. The amount of revenue collected must be related to the cost of services it funds and may only be used for stormwater management. Revenue from property taxes, for example, is tied to the assessed value of the property and funds general government services.

---

**Are there any other municipalities that charge a SWU Fee?**

Yes. There are currently more than 1,500 fee-based programs in the country and over 30 fee-based Stormwater Management programs in Virginia. In the surrounding area, D.C., Prince George's County, the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park all have SWU fees in place.

**Who has to pay the SWU fee?**

All properties, both residential and non-residential, with at least 500 square feet of impervious cover, are assessed a SWU fee. The City's SWU fee is assessed to both taxed and untaxed properties, unless the property is specifically exempted by Virginia law.

**Which properties are exempt from SWU fees by Virginia law?**

City properties and streets, and properties that have obtained separate coverage under an MS4 permit (such as Fairfax County properties within city limits).

**How is the SWU fee calculated?**

Every 500 square feet of impervious cover a property contains equals one SWU Billing Unit (BU). Each property's impervious cover has been evaluated using the City's most recent geographic information system (GIS) data for impervious cover on each parcel to establish how many BUs to assign to each property.

The total number of BUs for each property assessed has been **rounded down** to the nearest whole BU to accommodate potential data resolution issues. The fee per BU is set each year by the City Council as part of the annual budget development process. All properties in the City are assessed using the same methodology and at the same rate.

**How does the city bill the SWU fee?**

The SWU fee will appear on property owners' real estate tax bills as a separate line item. Real estate taxes are due in June and December of each year.

**Can I appeal the SWU fee?**

Any owner of a parcel subject to the SWU fee may request an adjustment to the fee by submitting an appeal application within 30 calendar days after the date the bill is mailed or otherwise issued to the owner.

Grounds for adjustment of the fee are limited and are listed in the SWU ordinance which is available online at [www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility).

**Is there any way for me to reduce the SWU fee for my property?**

Yes, the city developed a SWU credit program, whereby property owners may be eligible to reduce their SWU fee by implementing one or more creditable activities or practices from the SWU Credit Manual.

More information about the Stormwater Utility Credit Program and the Credit Manual is online at [www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility).

**Is there a limit on how much SWU Credit I can apply for/earn for my property?**

Property owners and organizations may apply for multiple credits for their respective properties from the menu of available SWU Credits available, and SWU Credits may be earned cumulatively, with no set maximum percentage, except that regardless of how many credits a property earns per year, each property will be charged at least one billing unit per year.

**How do I apply for SWU Credits?**

Property owners can apply for SWU Credits by completing the online non-structural or structural credit applications available at [www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility).

Property owners can also print, scan, and email applications to the City at [stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov](mailto:stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov) or drop off a hard copy at the Public Works office.

**When are SWU Credit applications due?**

All SWU Credit Application materials must be completed and submitted to the Department of Public Works no later than October 1 each year for evaluation and calculation in the coming year's SWU Fee assessment.

**Who do I contact with questions about my SWU fee?**

Contact the City of Fairfax Department of Public Works by phone at (703) 385-2578 or email [stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov](mailto:stormwaterutility@fairfaxva.gov). Additional information on the SWU is also available on the City's SWU website [www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/stormwaterutility).