

**Second Edition  
For the Week of February 3rd, 2025**

## **Stormwater FAQs**

### **What is stormwater?**

Stormwater is rain or melted snow/ice that doesn't get absorbed by the surface it lands on and proceeds to run off streets, rooftops, compacted ground, and other impervious surfaces. Managing stormwater can help prevent flooded yards and standing water on roads. Unable to be absorbed into the ground, stormwater flows over natural and human-made structures and into streams, rivers, and eventually into Malletts Bay and Lake Champlain.

Stormwater sewers collect and transport stormwater runoff while sanitary sewers collect and transport human waste. In Colchester, these two systems are separate from one another and are not connected. Properties are either served by private septic systems or in a small portion of Colchester, fee-based municipal sanitary sewers.

### **Why is stormwater a problem?**

When stormwater flows over land, it picks up naturally occurring and human-made pollutants like automobile fluids, pesticides, fertilizers, pet waste, bacteria, and sediment. Many of these pollutants contain Phosphorus, which is one of the largest threats to water quality in our region. These pollutants can eventually contaminate our streams, rivers, and Lake Champlain. The State of Vermont and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have identified Lake Champlain, as well as two local streams (Sunderland Brook and Morehouse Brook), as impaired due to stormwater pollutants. Poorly managed stormwater can also lead to street flooding, insect infestations, standing water (which poses health risks), and property damage from basement flooding and erosion.

### **How is stormwater managed by the Town?**

There are two aspects to the Town's stormwater management efforts: a) maintenance and repairs of existing stormwater systems, which were historically designed to merely convey stormwater, and; b) increased stormwater treatment efforts to comply with substantially improved state and federal regulations, which require selective treatment of stormwater to improve water quality.

Maintenance includes the regular upkeep, preservation and repairs of the existing public stormwater system, at a cost of about \$500,000 annually. The system consists of approximately 2,500 stormwater structures, as well as many miles of pipe and culverts. Routine maintenance includes ditching of roadways; street sweeping; cleaning out culverts; gravel road maintenance;

removing debris from stormwater catch basins and treatment structures; and water quality monitoring. Repairs to the existing system include repair and replacement of: catch basins, stormwater outfalls, treatment structures, culverts, lining of pipes, and more extensive work on ditches. Other ongoing efforts include: illicit discharge detection and elimination; public education and outreach; catch basin stenciling; pollution prevention and housekeeping for Town-owned facilities; keeping track of efforts; and the ongoing re-permitting of existing systems.

Increased efforts to comply with improved federal and state stormwater regulations include planning, permitting, design and construction of additional stormwater systems. These efforts include but are not limited to: a) development of the Integrated Water Resources Management Plan, a four-year, \$2 million water quality study funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; b) development of a Phosphorus Control Plan to significantly reduce the amount of phosphorus draining into Malletts Bay and Lake Champlain; c) development of Flow Restoration Plans to address impaired streams in Colchester; d) completion of a Stormwater System Condition Assessment; e) development of a Stormwater Management Plan as required by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, and the U.S. Clean Water Act; f) provision of Landowner Technical Assistance to develop the property in ways that protect natural resources, conform to Town zoning regulations, and best achieve the landowner's development goals; g) protection and regulation of development in stream corridors; h) erosion control, including two large river bank stabilization projects on the lower Winooski River located at the Heineberg Access, off Heineberg Drive, and along River Road in Colchester; i) eight stormwater outfall upgrade projects located in the Indian Brook, Colchester Pond Brook, Winooski River, Inner Malletts Bay, and Sunderland Brook watershed; j) riparian buffers, including the Shoreland Overlay District which restricts development and removal of trees; k) impervious surface minimization in roadway and zoning standards, and; l) chloride response plan.

### **Are we succeeding in our stormwater efforts?**

The Town has a comprehensive phosphorus control plan as required under our federal permits. Our permit requires the Town to reduce its annual phosphorus discharge to Lake Champlain by approximately 172 lbs. per year. This target must be met by 2036. Less than half way into the compliance schedule, the Town is on track to reduce total annual phosphorus discharge by approximately 108 lbs., or 63% through the completion of multiple projects.

### **How is stormwater management paid for?**

The Town of Colchester has been managing stormwater since the first road was built. Our

first town meeting was in 1793 and conveyance of stormwater would have been related to transportation at that time.

In 2005, Stormwater was separated from the Public Works Highway Division as a separate budget item in recognition of the special work and increasing resources required to address increasing state and federal stormwater treatment requirements. After 2010, it became clear that a lot more funding was going to be required for stormwater management, in order to comply with increased state and federal regulations.

By 2018, we were paying \$541,844 annually for stormwater—all in the municipal services property tax-based budget. This included \$210,123 in the stormwater budget, \$110,246 for DPW capital project management, public education, permitting, overhead costs, and \$214,485 in capital costs in the capital transportation plan and the capital equipment plan for construction and sweeper replacement.

To comply with state and federal regulations focused on treatment, and to meet specified goals, we needed \$332,893 or 61% more annually. The Town could have included this funding in the FY 18 municipal services budget. This would have changed the FY 18 municipal services budget from an increase of 2.4% to over 5%. Instead, the Town moved to a fee concept whereby all property owners, including state and federal property owners who contribute to the increased stormwater treatment needs, pay the fee. This not only generated the extra \$332,892 needed, but also reduced the municipal property tax rate by 3% that year.

Beginning July 1, 2017, funding for stormwater was moved from our property tax-based municipal services- budget, to an annual fee.

### **Why do I receive a stormwater bill in addition to my taxes?**

The Town generates fees to cover the costs of town-wide stormwater services based on impervious surface area. These fees are assessed to all properties, regardless of tax status, and the funds are used for stormwater services. The fee concept benefits taxpayers who would otherwise pay more for stormwater services if it was billed through property taxes.

### **Can the Town eliminate the stormwater fee?**

Sort of. The fee was enacted by the Colchester Selectboard after years of studies, reports, and a committee of local interested citizens, as well as public hearings held at Selectboard meetings. The Selectboard could choose to hold another set of hearings and eliminate the stormwater fee. However, the Selectboard could not eliminate the responsibility to maintain stormwater conveyance which protects transportation assets, or the substantially increased stormwater treatment required by the state and federal governments. If the stormwater fee was eliminated, it would simply shift to

our municipal services property taxes. This would increase the municipal services budget by \$810,704 or 5.8% based on FY 25 municipal and stormwater budgets. This would also shift more of the financial responsibility for stormwater to private property owners due to the inability to collect stormwater fees from the federal and state governments which are legally required to pay stormwater fees but not municipal service taxes.

### **Do my stormwater fees increase?**

Yes. Due to increased costs of compliance with state and federal regulations, increased engineering, permitting, construction, materials and labor costs, your fees do increase. Here is a comparison of the fee increases since the inception of the stormwater fee vs. the Consumer Price index for the northeast.

**Colchester Stormwater Fee vs. Consumer Price Index**

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>% Incr.</b>
Stormwater Fee	\$ 52.39	\$ 61.00	\$ 8.61	16%
Consumer Price Index	260.79	327.24	66.45	25%

### **How is my stormwater fee calculated?**

Stormwater fees are based on the amount of impervious surface for each property. Impervious surfaces are areas that cover the natural ground and do not allow for easy infiltration of rainfall; they include any paved areas (driveways, sidewalks, parking areas, roads, buildings) and dirt, gravel, or other compacted areas (parking areas, roads). The Town has data indicating the amount of impervious area on each property.

In 2025, commercial, educational, institutional, industrial, or other developed properties pay \$61.00 per one tenth of an acre of impervious surface.

Single condominium, single-family, duplex, and triplex properties, as well as vacant or undeveloped sites, pay the minimum fee of \$61.00. The minimum fee is based on the average impervious area for a residential property which was determined to be one tenth of an acre, or 0.1 acres. This average impervious area of 0.1 acres is equal to one equivalent residential unit or ERU.

### **What do businesses pay?**

When new development--residential or commercial--occurs, the developer is required to build stormwater facilities that meet modern treatment standards at their sole cost. In some cases, whereby the developer dedes a street to the Town, the street must meet all Town standards before the Town will consider taking ownership of the street, and responsibility for the stormwater treatment. This does not happen in commercial areas such as Severance Corners where all the streets, sanitary sewers, and storm sewers are privately

owned and maintained. Similarly, on lower Mountain View Drive and Upper Mountain View Drive, the retail, office, entertainment and other private entities own some interior roads and respective parking lots. These sites are required to pay for their own stormwater treatment.

Of the entire FY 25 Stormwater budget of \$1,120,204, single-family properties fund 32%, or \$358,079. There are 18 private entities that receive partial credits totaling \$6,436 annually. These credits total approximately 0.6% of the \$1,069,405 annual FY 24 stormwater budget. Credits are extremely limited and will not be considered unless on site stormwater upgrades are designed by a licensed engineer that comply with a stormwater manual and are constructed to these standards. The costs for the design and construction of these upgrades are at the expense of the applicant. These upgrades must “reduce the impact of stormwater runoff into the public stormwater system, or provide an ongoing public benefit related to stormwater management.”

For more information, please contact the Stormwater Hotline at 802-264-5628 or contact Department of Public Works: 802-264-5620, [DPW@colchestervt.gov](mailto:DPW@colchestervt.gov).

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