

Stormwater Program

Frequently Asked Questions – Municipal Stormwater Program

September 2015

Managing stormwater is a core function of White Township's service to the community. By caring for water quality and preventing damages from floods, White Township works to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its residents. Over the past few years, the Township has taken a closer look at its stormwater program to see how to make it more efficient and more effective at achieving community goals. This Frequently Asked Questions documents is intended to provide background on White Township's current stormwater program, including a discussion on how it is funded and how it may need to change.

1. What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff is the rainwater and snowmelt that flows off of land and through a series of pipes and swales, finally flowing into local streams. Some stormwater runoff is absorbed into the ground and some of it evaporates; but much of it simply flows across the land. As stormwater flows across neighborhoods, parking lots, schools, and factories, it accelerates, picks up pollutants, and carries them to these streams.

2. What is impervious surface?

Impervious surfaces are hard surfaces that do not allow rain or snow to soak into the soil at the same rate as a forest floor or meadow. These surfaces include rooftops, driveways, patios, sidewalks, and parking lots. Even the soil under a heavily-used, compacted lawn can act like an impervious surface.

3. Why do we need to manage stormwater?

As the Township develops and landowners create more impervious surfaces, we change the way stormwater runoff flows. These hard surfaces prevent stormwater from soaking into the ground. So the more hard surfaces we create, the more we have stormwater flowing onto our streets, into our streams, and under our culverts and bridges. Runoff from impervious surface that is not controlled may cause more damage from floods. As more water flows to the streams and does not soak in, more pollutants enter our local water bodies.

White Township has a stormwater network that controls some of this runoff, and any new development is required to manage flows from its property. However, the Township must make sure that these structures are kept clean and function properly.

4. Is stormwater a problem in White Township?

Over the years, as White Township developed and neighborhoods were built, the Township has inherited or developed a network of curbs, gutters, swales, pipes, and detention ponds, to carry rain as it moves downhill. With time, pipes have rusted, swales have grown thick with weeds, and catch basins that collect water from the roads have collapsed. Township crews perform regular inspections and know the location of many of the problem areas that need replacement. However, funding is often only available to make the most critical repairs. When repairs are not made, pipes can become blocked and water can flow where it's not supposed to, causing flooding and stream pollution.

5. Are White Township's streams healthy?

Water flows out of White Township through two networks of streams that both eventually discharge to the Allegheny River. The Crooked Creek watershed (including Fulton Run and McKee Run) conveys water from the northern third of the Township. The Two Lick Creek watershed (including Whites Run, Cherry Run, Stoney Run, Marsh Run, and Ramsey Run) drains the southern two thirds of the Township from just north of Pike Road to the south towards Center Township.

Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) performs periodic water quality testing on these streams and has determined that only 56% of the 90 stream miles in White Township are in good health; 44% of White Township's streams are impaired by nutrients, sediment, and pathogens. PADEP states that urban runoff, agriculture, and abandoned mine drainage are the sources of these pollutants.

6. Does flooding occur in White Township?

White Township's Road Department monitors specific street intersections and low-lying areas during storms where flooding is known to occur. Prior to significant rainfall events, the Township dispatches crews to clear stormwater inlets and make sure pipes are open and can receive rainwater. Some storms move so much water that sediment, trees, and debris block stream channels. When this happens, the Township hires dredging contractors to remove sand and other material near culverts and bridges. This helps to prevent stormwater from backing up onto streets and private property during the next storm.

7. Who decides the Township's stormwater management priorities?

The Township Board of Supervisors, supported by staff, keeps a list of the most important stormwater activities. Every year, the Supervisors consider these priorities when creating the annual budget. The Supervisors make decisions on purchasing new equipment, funding large pipe replacement projects, and directing the Road Department to perform services. When new needs are identified, staff present recommendations for project funding priorities to the Supervisors, who can approve the spending plan. As the Township continues to study how to expand the stormwater program, new priorities may arise that will require additional funding. This funding must come from higher taxes, a new funding source, or through cuts to other Township programs. Grant funding from the State for these services is limited and highly competitive.

8. What services does White Township provide?

To meet its responsibility to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, the Township provides stormwater services in four key areas. The cost of providing these basic services during a typical year exceeds \$335,000. This cost includes materials, staff time, equipment maintenance, and contracted engineering and dredging services.

- **System Operations & Maintenance** – Road Department crews regularly clean and repair the swales, gutters, pipes, and inlets that move rainwater safely through the Township. These activities include bridge and culvert maintenance, cleaning and repairs of inlet grates, leaf collection, street sweeping, and removal of storm debris. The Township maintains a fleet of vehicles and equipment to perform these services, including dump trucks, a vacuum truck, and excavation equipment.
- **Mapping & Plan Review** – The Township is in the process of completing a map of its stormwater pipes and inlets. Once complete, the map will enable the Township to efficiently and systematically inspect each feature, track maintenance activities, and plan pipe replacement projects. The Township also reviews land development proposals to enforce land use regulations and ensure that new projects do not have a negative impact on water quality or downstream flooding.
- **Major Replacement Projects** – Road Department crews have the equipment and time to replace only small sections of failing storm sewer pipe. However, there are some neighborhoods in White Township that need major system replacement. The Township's last significant storm sewer

replacement project occurred in 2008. Since then, the need to take on major replacement projects has grown. Several large scale capital improvement projects are needed in the next five years to address large areas of the rusted pipes that lead to sink holes in roadways (i.e. Chevy Chase, Oak Hill, Overlook).

- **Program Administration** - The Township Manager and Assistant Manager coordinate stormwater management activities and capital improvements. They communicate priorities to the Road Foreman who directs crews on specific projects. The Secretary/ Treasurer and Clerk conduct the administrative activities associated with stormwater services (i.e. human resources, material purchasing, payroll).

9. How do federal and state water quality permits apply to White Township?

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) administers the federal permit program that allows developed communities to discharge stormwater into local streams. As White Township grows, PADEP may require the Township to perform more water quality tasks such as water quality planning and reporting, storm sewer mapping and assessment, site inspections, and public education.

10. Who benefits from stormwater services?

Everyone benefits. By managing stormwater, the Township keeps roads clear, reduces property damage from flooding, protects public culverts and bridges, and reduces pollutants from entering local streams.

11. How do we currently pay for these services?

Currently, the Township pays for the stormwater management program via the Township's general fund. This fund gets almost half of its funding from earned income taxes. With the general fund as the source, stormwater management activities pull resources from the same bucket of funds as many other Township activities. The result is that funding for stormwater management is unstable from year to year and generally unable to keep pace with the Township's growing needs. The general fund has a limited amount of revenue, and boosting the stormwater funding through the general fund alone could mean cuts to other Township services, or implementation of a new property tax.

12. What other sources of revenue fund stormwater management?

The Township charges fees for review of permits and land development proposals. These fees pay a portion of the cost for reviewing new development and redevelopment. However, these fees do not help to pay to fix existing problems.

As the Township expands its stormwater program, it is studying a method to equitably distribute the cost of stormwater management across all Township landowners. Such a fee would enable a consistent level of funding and allow the Township to develop a long-range plan to sustainably meet local stormwater priorities.

13. If I have a question about stormwater management in the Township, who should I contact?

You can contact the White Township Stormwater Program by either calling or mailing your questions to:

White Township
950 Indian Springs Road
Indiana, PA 15701
(724) 463-8585
stormwater@whitetownship.org