**STORMWATER UTILITY COMMUNICATIONS TEMPLATES**

**Download these Word Document files from** www.americanrivers.org/stormwaterutility **for a jumpstart on creating your own community’s outreach materials. Use the language and photos that work for your community, add new language and specifics wherever needed.**

**Sample Letter to Residents Announcing Stormwater Utility**

INSERT CITY LOGO/LETTERHEAD

DATE

Dear [RESIDENT],

These days, it seems like every time it rains, it pours. And, since more of our land is covered in concrete—parking lots, buildings, patios, driveways—all this extra water can’t soak into the ground. Instead, the water enters our sewer system, costing our community money. [For the past XX years,] [TOWN] has been experiencing more stormwater runoff than ever before – definitely more than our ancient sewer system can handle.

Stormwater infrastructure repairs are no longer a luxury; they are a necessity to reduce chronic flooding and improve impaired rivers and streams. Unfortunately, [TOWN] has no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or even basic maintenance. We pay to use sewer and water lines; we also need to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding.

Starting in [MONTH/YEAR,] [TOWN] will pay for stormwater management services through a paid utility. A stormwater utility is a fee that is charged to property owners in order to ensure continued use and upkeep of the stormwater management system. The amount of the fee is determined for each property-owner based on the actual amount of their land that is covered by buildings, concrete or other surfaces that prevent water from soaking into the ground.

**The fee will be set at $XX.XX per XX square feet of impervious land.**

Property owners with XX or more acres of land can take actions to reduce their stormwater bill. You can offset the amount of stormwater runoff from your property by adding green stormwater infrastructure solutions. To learn more about the green stormwater infrastructure credit system, visit [WEBSITE].

For too long, [TOWN] residents have been held hostage during rain storms thanks to antiquated infrastructure and no way to pay to fix it. This stormwater utility will help us reduce flooding, improve our water quality and prevent major problems from occurring. The stormwater utility is an investment in our town—and our residents.

If you have any questions concerning [TOWN]’s new stormwater utility, please contact XXXX.

Sincerely,

NAME, TITLE

**Water Bill Insert Announcing Stormwater Utility**

**[TOWN]’s New Stormwater Utility**

[For the past XX years,] [TOWN] has been experiencing more stormwater runoff than ever before, and definitely more than our ancient sewer system can handle. It’s time for [TOWN] to repair our old system and build new, modern components that embrace the technological advances from the last 100 years. But, [TOWN] currently has no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or even basic maintenance. We pay to use sewer and water lines; we also need to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding.

Starting in [MONTH/YEAR,] [TOWN] will pay for stormwater management services through a paid utility. A stormwater utility is a fee that is charged to property owners in order to ensure continued use and upkeep of the stormwater management system. The amount of the fee is determined for each property-owner based on the actual amount of their land that is covered by buildings, parking lots, driveways, patios or other surfaces that prevent water from soaking into the ground. The fee will be set at $XX.XX per XX square feet of impervious land.

Property owners with XX or more acres of land can take actions to reduce their stormwater bill. You can offset the amount of stormwater runoff from your property by adding green stormwater infrastructure solutions. Green stormwater infrastructure includes rain gardens, green roofs, permeable pavers, and rainwater harvesting devices.

To learn more about our new stormwater utility and the green stormwater infrastructure credit system, visit [WEBSITE].

**Sample Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE

Contact: [NAME], [POSITION TITLE], [ORGANIZATION]

Phone: PHONE

Email: EMAIL

**[TOWN] Ready to Implement Stormwater Utility**

**New funding source will reduce flooding, protect local rivers**

LOCATION – Starting in [MONTH/YEAR,] [TOWN] will pay for stormwater management services through a paid utility. According to city officials, the stormwater utility is an equitable way for communities to raise some of the money needed to fix the most immediate stormwater problems. Currently, [TOWN] has no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or basic maintenance.

A stormwater utility is a fee that is charged to property owners in order to ensure continued use and upkeep of the stormwater management system. The amount of the fee will be determined for each property-owner based on the actual amount of their land that is covered by buildings, parking lots, driveways, patios or other surfaces that prevent water from soaking into the ground. Property owners will only have to pay for the amount of stormwater they contribute to the system.

“[For the past XX years,] [TOWN] has been experiencing more stormwater runoff than ever before, and definitely more than our ancient sewer system can handle,” said [NAME], [POSITION]. “It’s time for us to repair our old system and build new, modern components that embrace the technological advances from the last 100 years. But, we need money to do it.”

The fee will be set at $XX.XX per XX square feet of impervious land—land that is built on or covered in concrete so rain and snow melt cannot soak into the ground. When water can’t soak into the ground, it instead flows into the sewer system.

[All large] property owners with XX or more acres of land are encouraged to apply for a green stormwater infrastructure credit that will help reduce their bill. By adding green stormwater infrastructure solutions, property owners offset the amount of stormwater runoff from their property. Green stormwater infrastructure includes any project that mimics natural ways to get stormwater to soak into the ground, keeping it out of the sewer system. Examples of this include rain barrels, rain gardens, permeable pavers and bio-swales.

[City/Village] officials believe that the stormwater utility will be a worthy investment in the town’s future, especially if property owners take advantage of the green stormwater infrastructure credit.

“If stormwater can’t soak into the ground, it has to enter our sewer system, and once it enters our sewer system, it costs our community money,” said [NAME]. “We pay to use sewer and water lines. We also need to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding.”

If you are interested in learning more about [TOWN]’s new stormwater utility or have questions about it, please contact XXXXX or attend the public meeting at [LOCATION] on [DATE].

**Website Text**

[Photos: images of local floods, rivers, areas that look great after they’ve been restored]

Starting in [MONTH/YEAR,] [TOWN] will pay for stormwater management services through a paid utility. Our stormwater utility is designed to be a fair and equitable way to fund the necessary stormwater improvements that the residents and business owners of [TOWN] deserve.

**WHY DO WE NEED A STORMWATER UTILITY?**

[For the past XX years,] [TOWN] has been experiencing more stormwater runoff than ever before, and definitely more than our ancient sewer system can handle. Stormwater infrastructure repairs are no longer a luxury; they are a necessity to reduce chronic flooding and improve impaired rivers and streams.

It’s time for [TOWN] to repair our old system and build new, modern components that embrace the technological advances from the last 100 years. But, we need money to do it. Currently, [TOWN] has no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or even basic maintenance.

We pay to use sewer and water lines; we also need to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding.

**HOW DOES THE STORMWATER UTILITY WORK?**A stormwater utility is an equitable way for communities to raise some of the money we need to fix the most immediate stormwater problems.

A fee is charged to property owners in order to ensure continued use and upkeep of the stormwater management system. The amount of the fee is determined for each property-owner based on the actual amount of their land that is covered by buildings, parking lots, driveways, patios or other surfaces that prevent water from soaking into the ground. In other words, you will only have to pay for the amount of stormwater you contribute to the system.

The fee will be set at $XX.XX per XX square feet of impervious land.

**HOW DO I DETERMINE HOW MUCH I’ll HAVE TO PAY?**[INSERT RATE METHODOLOGY HERE.]

**HOW CAN I REDUCE MY STORMWATER UTILITY FEE?**To make this utility even *more* fair, [all large] property owners with XX or more acres of land can take actions to reduce your stormwater bill. You can offset the amount of stormwater runoff from your property by adding green stormwater infrastructure solutions. Green stormwater infrastructure includes any project that mimics natural ways to get stormwater to soak into the ground, keeping it out of the sewer system. The best news is, many new developments have *already* incorporated these practices! All you need to do is apply for green stormwater infrastructure credit to see an immediate reduction in your bill. [CLICK HERE FOR AN APPLICATION]

Examples of green stormwater infrastructure include:

1. Green roofs – a roof of a building that is covered with vegetation, planted over a waterproof layer. Stormwater soaks into the vegetation and soil and is absorbed by the plants, reducing the runoff that reaches the gutters.
2. Permeable pavers – Permeable pavers can be used as an alternative to traditional concrete or asphalt paving. The pavers decrease runoff by allowing water to percolate through the pavement’s surface. Permeable pavers and porous concrete also add character and beauty to paved areas.
3. Rain barrels and cisterns – These are large drums that can be connected to gutter downspouts, either above or below ground. They are an easy way to capture and store runoff falling from gutters. The stored water can later be used to water gardens and lawns.
4. Bio-swales and rain gardens – These beautiful and low-maintenance planted areas reduce stormwater flow by allowing water to soak into the ground. These are ideally situated near a major source of stormwater runoff, like parking lots or driveways. Swales and rain gardens add pleasing bits of nature to your landscape. And, since they are planted with native plants, they also can attract butterflies to your property!

**WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?**If you are interested in learning more about [TOWN]’s new stormwater utility or have questions about it, please attend one of the following public meetings:

LOCATION

DATE

TIME

LOCATION

DATE

TIME

You can also contact [NAME] at [EMAIL/PHONE].

**Social Media Posts**

**Hashtags**#ModernSewersModernCity

#CommonSense
#CITYNAMEdeservesCleanWater

**Facebook**
For too long, [TOWN] residents have been held hostage during rain storms thanks to antiquated infrastructure and no way to pay to fix it. A stormwater utility will change that. Join us on [DATE] at [LOCATION] to learn more about [TOWN]’s new stormwater utility proposal.

Our stormwater utility is designed to be a fair and equitable way to fund the necessary stormwater improvements that the residents and business owners of [TOWN] deserve. Learn more by visiting our website and joining us at [LOCATION] on [DATE] at [TIME].

We want to hear from you! [TOWN] will be hosting a public meeting on [DATE] at [LOCATION] at [TIME] to talk about our new stormwater utility, an equitable solution to [TOWN]’s stormwater problems.

Did you know: [TOWN] has no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or even basic maintenance? We pay to use sewer and water lines; we need a way to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding. Attend our public meeting on [DATE] at [LOCATION] and find out how [TOWN] is working to solve this problem.

**Twitter [Note: use a** [**short link**](https://bitly.com/) **to save characters!]**
Big storms and old sewers threaten TOWN’s homes and businesses. A stormwater utility can help reduce chronic flooding INSERT LINK

TOWNians deserve a sewer system that can protect homes and businesses from floods—a stormwater utility will get us there INSERT LINK

We want to hear from you! Attend [TOWN]’s public meeting on our new stormwater utility: XX/XX at [LOCATION] at XPM INSERT LINK

Did you know [TOWN] has no designated way to pay for sewers or maintenance? It’s time for a utility. Learn more at INSERT LINK

Stormwater utilities are a fair and equitable, common-sense way to fund necessary stormwater improvements. Learn more at INSERT LINK

Every TOWN resident contributes to our stormwater issues; we all have to contribute to the solution. INSERT LINK

Stormwater pollution damages TOWNS rivers and lakes. A stormwater utility can protect our water for future generations INSERT LINK

**Public Meeting Talking Points**

**The Problem**

* Every time it rains, it pours.
* More of our land is covered in concrete.
	+ Parking lots, buildings, patios, driveways
	+ Extra water can’t soak into the ground.
* If stormwater can’t soak into the ground, it has to enter our sewer system.
	+ Once it enters our sewer system, it costs our community money.

 **Where We Are Now**

* We have been experiencing more stormwater runoff than ever before.
	+ Definitely more than our ancient sewer system can handle.
* Stormwater infrastructure repairs are a necessity to reduce chronic flooding and improve impaired rivers and streams.
	+ It’s time for us to repair our old system but we need money to do it.
* We have no designated way to pay for stormwater sewers, flood-reduction efforts or basic maintenance.

 **The Solution**

* We pay to use sewer and water lines; we also need to pay for the infrastructure that keeps our homes from flooding.
* Starting in [MONTH/YEAR,] [TOWN] will pay for stormwater management services through a paid utility.
* A **stormwater utility** is an equitable way for communities to raise some of the money we need to fix the most immediate stormwater problems.

 **The Stormwater Utility**

* A stormwater utility is a fee that is charged to property owners in order to ensure continued use and upkeep of the stormwater management system.
* The amount of the fee is determined for each property-owner based on the actual amount of their land that is covered by impervious surfaces.
* The fee will be set at $XX.XX per XX square feet of impervious land.

 **Green Stormwater Infrastructure Credit**

* Property owners with XX or more acres of land can take actions to reduce their stormwater bill.
	+ Offset the amount of stormwater runoff from your property by adding green stormwater infrastructure solutions.
	+ How to apply
* Examples of green stormwater infrastructure.

**Eight Steps to Plan a Successful Public Meeting**

1. **Determine a Mission**

Decide exactly what you want to get out of this meeting. Do you want public input? Do you want to simply educate the public about the utility? Do you want to push for green stormwater infrastructure? A mission will decide all aspects of the meeting. Sit down with your team and come together on what this meeting will achieve.

1. **Plan Ahead – Set Dates and Location Early**

The earlier you set your date and location, the earlier you can promote the meeting. Public schools, libraries, community centers and park district buildings make great locations for public meetings and can be reserved for a small fee.

1. **Craft an Outreach Timeline**

If you want to run a successful public meeting, you’ll need good neighborhood turnout. An outreach timeline will ensure that residents, business owners, decision-makers and any other relevant audiences are aware of the public meeting. An outreach timeline should include tactics such as submitting a press release and emailing constituents, which are explained in the **communications strategy**. An outreach timeline can look something like this:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | Week of: May 2 | May 9 | May 16 | May 23 |
| **1** | Press Release |  |  |  |  |
| **2** | Newsletter Articles |  |  |  |  |
| **3** | Email blast |  |  |  |  |
| 3a | To community leaders/decision-makers |  |  |  |  |
| 3b | To constituents |  |  |  |  |
| **4** | Online Outreach |  |  |  |  |
| 4a | Webpage |  |  |  |  |
| 4b | Social media posts |  |   |  |  |

Once an outreach timeline is crafted, you should immediately get started on executing the timeline. Ask any community leaders, decision-makers or partner groups to share your message with their contact lists.

1. **Create an Agenda That Will Be Engaging for All Participants**

Public meetings are not only an opportunity to gather important input but also a way to make the general public feel involved in their community’s decision-making process. A short introduction of your agency, department or council and the stormwater utility proposal should be followed by a segment that divides participants into groups. Groups allow all participants to have an equal voice in the process. Within these small groups, your team can gather input in an organized and personal manner.

1. **Prepare Materials**

After you have created an agenda, your team should run through the entire meeting and determine what materials will be needed. Once decided, begin prepping it all.

1. **Check In**

A few days prior to the meeting, check in with community leaders and any decision-makers that you previously reached out to and remind them about the upcoming meeting. A friendly reminder will go a long way towards ensuring sufficient turnout.

1. **Go Time**

If everything is well-prepared, the meeting itself should be the easiest part!

1. **Follow-Up**

Participants will probably be curious about how the meeting went. Whether through an email or a short report released on your website, make sure your participants feel understood. Not only does follow-up help the community be more accepting of your proposal but it will also increase the likelihood of community participation in future public meetings!