You Might Want to Consider a Stormwater Utility

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As of July 2021, all Connecticut municipalities are able to establish Stormwater Utilities to fund stormwater management. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of rainfall, these utilities can fund critical mitigation and resiliency strategies. With support from CT Sea Grant, UConn CLEAR is providing support to communities as they consider establishing stormwater utilities.

What are Stormwater Utilities?

Stormwater utilities are entities, similar to water and sewer utilities, that oversee maintaining, managing, and improving a local stormwater system. They are funded by user fees that are equitably based on contribution of stormwater runoff to the system (typically based on a property’s amount of impervious cover).

The greatest benefit of a utility is that they provide an equitable, stable funding source to establish a resilient stormwater management system responsive to emerging and increasing water quantity and quality challenges.

Where have they been implemented?

- Over 2,000 stormwater utilities in 41 states
- Not dependent on location or population
  - Largest: Los Angeles, CA (pop. 4 million)
  - Smallest: Indian Creek Village, FL (pop. 88)
- Average single-family fee: $6.01
- 2 in CT: New London & New Britain

Fee Systems

There are various types of fee systems a stormwater utility can employ. However, not all fee systems are equal in fairness/equity. Currently, the most equitable system is the ERU (Equivalent Residential Unit).

- Most equitable
  - Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU):
    - Most common (80%) system
    - Based on a single-family residential footprint
    - Fee is proportional to the impervious area on a parcel, regardless of the total area

Credits

- 50% of stormwater utilities currently offer fee reductions or ‘credits’
- Incentivizes stormwater retention, infiltration, and/or treatment using various Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as green stormwater infrastructure (GSI)/LID
- Rain gardens, rain barrels, pervious pavement, etc.
- CT law requires credits be made available but leaves it to communities to determine eligibility

Stormwater Utilities and Resilience

Climate Change to Increase Precipitation: 71% increase in rainfall from 1958 to 2012

Stormwater utilities can provide direct funding to implement climate resiliency and mitigation practices against flooding and stormwater pollution, such as green stormwater infrastructure, stormwater infrastructure repair, and riparian buffer implementation.

Example: Augusta, Georgia

- Estimated $240 million backlog of stormwater infrastructure repairs
- Funding previously from general fund and Special Purpose Local Options Sales Tax
- Implementation of stormwater utility in 2016:
  - Doubled stormwater crew
  - 13 new priority projects addressing drainage improvements and flood hazard mitigation

Example: Fort Collins, CO

- 2007 to 2012: city addressed detention basin conditions and improved local street drainage in areas with flooding
- Project completed under budget using stormwater utility funds
- Awarded the American Public Works Association Colorado Chapter annual award as the top Drainage and Flood Control Project in a Large Community

Resources

UConn CLEAR, in collaboration with CT Sea Grant, is helping communities explore what utilities are, how they are set up, and how it can be used for climate resilience. This has included an educational webinar series, fact sheets, and resource rich website (see QR code below). In the spring, a soup to nuts workshop is planned to help walk communities through how to set one up that works for their area.

Overview of stormwater utilities and a breakdown of the legislative language.

In-depth explanations of fee and credit systems and how they can be incorporated into a utility.

A factsheet of examples of how stormwater utilities have funded MS4 compliance.

https://nemo.uconn.edu/stormwater-utilities

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UConn CLEAR, Middlesex Extension Office, SEAS Faculty Publications. 2021.

Figure 1: Stormwater Utilities across the United States

Figure 2: Hierarchy of fee systems

Figure 3: Change in precipitation levels in the U.S. from 1958-2012

Figure 4: Funding blend plan for stormwater utility in Augusta, GA

Figure 5: Rain garden at the UConn

Figure 6: Rehabilitation of West Vine Basin in Fort Collins, CO

Figure 7: Stormwater Utilities and Resilience

Figure 8: Example: Augusta, Georgia

Figure 9: Example: Fort Collins, CO