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5th Time Could Be Charm for Stormwater Fee

The Powder Springs City Council is set to vote on the measure at Tuesday's meeting.

By [Michael Stone](#) | [Email the author](#) | December 30, 2011

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After delaying setting the city's stormwater fee [four times](#), the Powder Springs City Council is again scheduled to vote on it at Tuesday's 7 p.m. meeting at the [Community Development](#) building.

"If we keep postponing it and we keep postponing it, we're going to be in trouble. We're already way behind," Mayor Pat Vaughn said at Wednesday's work session of the increasing environmental regulations related to stormwater the fee is supposed to fund.

At the previous work session, Community Development Director Pam Conner recommended not immediately enacting the fee when the council votes on it, instead pushing the first bills to next fall. She suggested starting the fee at \$3 monthly for residences instead of the [previously agreed upon \\$2](#).

Either way, the fee is expected to be raised in 50-cent increments until reaching \$4. Conner said starting it at \$3 next fall instead of \$2 upon the vote would prevent an almost immediate 50-cent increase in March and another in September.

The fee would be consistent for each household. For larger structures, like businesses and churches, a higher fee would be charged depending on the amount of impenetrable surface that rain could hit and must "run off."

The monthly fees would be combined into one amount and be mailed with the property tax bills that go out at the end of September.

David Braswell, program manager with the Southeast Stormwater Association, gave the council examples on Wednesday of what the fee money will go to: inventory of the city's storm drain system, inspecting 20 percent of those drains each year, inspecting creeks and outfalls, keeping records of illicit discharges in water, and educating the public.

Work done in all those areas and more must then be turned into the Georgia Environmental Protection Division in an annual report, he said.

In recent years, environmental officials haven't been very strict in monitoring compliance, Braswell said.

"(The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) and EPD have been like everyone else—short of money and short of people, and so there's not been a lot of enforcement in the last few years," he said. "It's been more education (and) more trying to get communities to comply."

But, Braswell said, officials have said they're going to crack down more in 2012, and in the next few years, regulations, like those pertaining to water quality, are going to become stricter.

"There's a continuing number of things you have to do each year and reporting each year to show them compliance," he said.

Public Works Director Greg Ramsey said an estimated \$385,000 will be needed every fiscal year to comply with the regulations and includes the hiring of a permanent city staff member. The \$3 fee will fall just short of the amount at \$354,000.

"This is just our best estimate to come up with an annual budget," he said. "It's just showing that there is a great need in our opinion, there's a great need in staff's opinion, there's a great need in (Braswell's) opinion. So the money is necessary and useful, if a fee is to be set."

As they have at previous meetings, Councilwomen Rosalyn Neal and Nancy Hudson were hesitant toward a \$3 fee and said they'd prefer starting at \$2.

"We're wanting to have businesses stay and be here, but if you start charging them out the wazoo" they won't want to stay, Hudson said.

Ramsey said a \$2 fee would result in only \$236,000 annually—about \$150,000 short of the estimated amount needed. He explained that buildings will be offered discounts through the city's stormwater credit manual, which includes ways to be more environmentally friendly.

The estimated collections for the city are dependent on 100 percent payments from all houses, businesses and other buildings, which is "optimistic at best," Ramsey said.

Vaughn asked about the fines that could be handed to the city if its not in compliance.

Ramsey said there is a fine schedule associated with different violations and that the amounts are "significant."

How the Fee Is Calculated

The fee is what will be applied to homeowners and stays consistent regardless of the size of the home. For other properties like businesses and churches, the fee would go up depending on each one's square footage of impervious surface, which is basically areas like asphalted ground that water can't penetrate and must "run off."

The average runoff contribution of Powder Springs households—called one ERU or Equivalent Residential Unit—is 2,840 square feet.

That average is what will be used to figure what other properties must pay monthly. For example, if a business has 5,680 square feet of impervious surface, it must pay twice the monthly rate a homeowner would pay. So if the rate was \$3 for homeowners, the business would have to pay \$6 a month.

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