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Powder Springs Approves \$3 Stormwater Fee

On its fifth time coming before members, the rate was passed Monday and will be sent out with property tax bills in the fall.

By [Michael Stone](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 4, 2012

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Paulding County Commissioner [Tommie Graham](#), a Powder Springs business owner, voiced his objections to the City Council Monday night before members approved a \$3 monthly stormwater fee.

“When you establish this fee, you are affecting the businesses that are located, and any businesses that will want to be located, in Powder Springs, because it is another cost that they’re going to have to pay, and it is a cost that they will pass on ... to customers,” said Graham, who runs [Alpha Omega Stor-All](#) on Oglesby Road.

Graham said he understands that the fee structure is set up in the fairest way, and, referencing being a business owner and legislator, can “see what you’re facing from both sides.”

But he noted that he has had to build two retention ponds, one of which required a \$25,000 device that filters water runoff.

“So for a business that’s had to do all that, and then on top of that, I’m going to be charged \$1,980 a year (for stormwater)—at some point, there’s only so much a business can pay.”

He said the fee isn’t a utility because utilities, like water and electric, can be turned on and off. He instead called it a “26 percent tax increase” on top of his roughly \$7,300 in property taxes.

He acknowledged that the city is offering up to 40 percent off in credits for all homeowners, businesses and other structures. But to obtain that, he said he’d have to hire an engineer, as well as have hydrology studies redone and submitted.

Monday’s meeting was [the fifth time the fee has come before the council](#) since the ordinance behind the fee [was approved in June](#). Mayor Pat Vaughn said city officials have carried out “due diligence” in tabling and researching the fee, which will help cover needed projects and “unfunded mandates” from the state related to stormwater.

“No one ever wants to raise a fee,” she said, “but when you’re faced with having to pay for these unfunded mandates, the money has to come from

somewhere.”

Vaughn said that perhaps the only other option would be a millage rate increase. If the city doesn’t do anything, she said, fines will be handed out by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

The city needs an estimated \$385,000 annually, which includes the hiring of an additional staff member. The \$3 fee would fall short of that at \$354,000—a number city officials said is unlikely because its dependent on 100 percent collection and doesn’t include the up to 40 percent in credits.

Councilwoman Nancy Hudson, the dissenter in the 4-1 vote, said she’s been contacted by business owners and residents who oppose the fee. “I’ve got to vote what the people are asking me to vote.”

She said the [First Baptist Church of Powder Springs](#) will have to pay \$3,600 a year, the local Cobb schools \$9,800, and the city itself \$6,800. Noting that her mother in the bigger city of Smyrna pays \$2.36 monthly, Hudson said the fee should start off smaller than \$3.

One previous plan [the council had considered](#) was starting the fee at \$2 immediately upon the vote and periodically increasing it until it reached \$4.

City Manager Rick Eckert said the fee will instead be sent out with property tax bills at the end of September and will stay at \$3 for the time being.

Though the credits will mean less revenue for the city, [Public Works](#) Director Greg Ramsey noted the positive aspects. “We want people to utilize good stormwater techniques. We want people to improve the runoff situation. We want our water quality to improve.”

He explained the city will have [two major projects](#) to undertake once the revenue does start coming in: piping below Sailors Parkway and work on the creek that runs through [Powder Springs Park](#).

[Community Development](#) Director Pam Conner said moving forward, the city will look at other options like grants and loans to pay for stormwater projects.

Ramsey said the city will be in a better position to receive such grants once it builds up money devoted to stormwater that can be used as required matches for those grants.

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 will 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 with the rate at \$3 for homeowners, the business would have to pay \$6 a month. Multiply the monthly fee by 12, and you have what will be billed to you with your property taxes.

Also on Monday:

- New Councilman Chris Wizner joined the council for his first meeting, while Tom Bevirt said farewell after 12 years serving as the at-large Post 2 councilmember. “We sincerely appreciate the time, the hours, and all you have given,” Vaughn said to Bevirt. Later today, Patch will be bringing videos from the swearing-in ceremonies of Vaughn, Wizner, and Councilwoman Rosalyn Neal.
- [A \\$3,500 annual contract](#) with Universal Concepts was approved for care of the city’s town square Christmas tree.
- With four [police](#) cars in the shop, Eckert said he is looking into [Police Chief Charlie Sewell’s proposal](#) to lease fresh police vehicles.
- Neal was reappointed as mayor pro-tem, meaning she will serve as mayor if Vaughn is absent.
- The council went into executive session to discuss a personnel matter.

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9:46 am on Friday, January 6, 2012

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary a utility is: (1) : a service provided by a public utility. It mentions nothing about a requirement of it being turned on and off in order for it to be a utility. What service does better stormwater control offer? It reduces damage from flooding, erosion, and combined sewer overflows, and improve the quality of residents’ lives by way of water quality among other things. I’m certain Graham would agree those things are very important to him as they are to all of us. We should ask those who live close to his store-all business whether it has

increased stormwater run-off problems. Hopefully not but there is a strong possibility it has even with the installation of detention ponds. I have never been to his site but I would venture to say he doesn't have retention ponds as the article states...but rather detention. They work entirely different to control stormwater

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Tea Man

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10:03 am on Tuesday, June 19, 2012

Isn't it funny we have had storm water run off forever here and no taxes to manage it. All of a sudden it is mandated? Google "Agenda 21" and you'll discover the root cause. This stormwater control policy is one step in the "environmental tyranny" advocated by the "green" and "sustainable" crowd that eventually will take your property rights and property through EPA administrative controls and exhorbitant costs. The people must stand up in November and stop this governmental totalitarianism!

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Oldtimer

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12:19 pm on Tuesday, June 19, 2012

I think Cobb imposed this fee on everyone after the EPA decided it needed to be done...probably after all the flooding.

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