

Storm Water Utility Fee benefits all. Why? In a word...campustown. When I was growing up in Champaign, the big joke was about canoeing down Green Street after a rain. The not-so-funny part was the flooded storefronts of businesses and basements along the Boneyard Creek. Depressed property values along Green Street prevented any sizeable upgrading or investment opportunities. It looked dilapidated and reflected poorly on the offerings of the University of Illinois and the city to parents, students, and faculty. Since the sizable investment in stormwater infrastructure, the Green Street corridor thrives. No more boats; cars don't drift downstream when it rains; basements and storefronts stay dry. Green Street looks nice and attracts (and continues to attract) new investments. Property taxes have risen and continue to remain at their level despite the economic downturn. The SWUF is a nominal, across-the-board fee to give the city funding needed to end the major flooding issues in Champaign. A fee offers incentives and credits to reduce the fee, rewarding efforts by the public to be more responsible toward its water runoff. The majority of property owners fall into the category of Tier 1, approximately 82%. The cost would be \$59.29 per year, or \$4.94 per month to each resident. That's about the cost of one Big Mac meal a month, and we all know we could use one less Big Mac a month.

The city brings in \$5.1 million that is used for storm water management; 40% of that goes straight to paying off debt from previous storm water projects like the Boneyard, Healey Street basin, John Street, and East Washington Street—projects that have brought great relief to hundreds of businesses and homeowners thus far. The storm water system below ground is an asset valued by the city at approximately \$325 million. They have \$3 million a year to use on repairs, maintenance, and replacement—that's less than 1%. Could you operate your home budget on repairs of less than 1% per year? Maybe, but not for 20 years, which is what the city is faced with until the debt is paid off. Approximately \$80 million is needed for a project that continues to be put off because of a lack of funds. These projects are not "dream projects" but are necessary repairs or replacement projects. The infrastructure installed in old Champaign was funded during a growth period by federal and state assistance that no longer exists.

My neighborhood is hit particularly hard when it rains. We sacrifice time and dollars to clean our flooded basements. Flooding weakens our foundations, our property values, and eventually our spirits with each occurrence. These basements do not flood because we have failed to protect our properties as homeowners. These areas flood because of undersized and broken storm pipes, some as old as 100 years. Great focus has been placed on businesses and homeowners, but another aspect of these flooded streets deals with public safety. Some blocks become islands during flooding, preventing any emergency vehicle from reaching homes while water blocks entire streets with three or more feet of water. The city is faced with millions in repairs/improvements and not enough money to keep up; this situation will only get worse and more expensive with neglect. The EPA will soon release new mandates for municipalities to implement and they will add an additional burden to an already "taxed" budget. There are three

watershed committees that have suggested and endorsed the formation of SWUF and numerous other neighborhoods that will benefit from it. That's a representation of economically poor to rich and everyone in between. We number in the thousands. We have been working on this problem for years with the city and have offered solutions and remedies. I'd like everyone to pause for a moment and consider if you have ever thought where the water goes as it is running down your driveway while it's raining. We don't. We want our drains to work all the time, every time, but as they get older, they won't, and that's when repairs/replacement are needed. The difference between a street and a storm pipe are obvious, but there are similarities as well. They both have specific duties. Both cost millions to install and repair or replace. The difference is, it's easier to fix a street.

James Creighton

I am a forty year resident of Champaign, the spokesman for the West Washington Watershed Steering Committee and I sat on the Mayor of Champaign's Stormwater Utility Fee Advisory Committee.