



City of Los Altos

Clean Water and Sustainable Storm Drainage Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the issue?

A. The City's storm drainage system is one of the most important elements of our public infrastructure. While storm drainage projects and maintenance has relied on General Fund dollars in the past, over the past two decades the needs have grown considerably to meet environmental goals and keep our neighborhoods safe from flooding. The General Fund cannot keep pace with these growing needs without sacrificing other critical City services such as public safety, roads or parks. Los Altos residents deserve clean water in our creeks and the Bay and protection from local flooding. A dedicated and sustainable funding source will ensure this while preserving existing funding for other critical City services.

Q. What priorities have Los Altos homeowners identified related to this issue?

A. In a recent survey, respondents identified the following top priorities related to storm drain infrastructure needs:

- Clean Water in our local creeks and the Bay
- Sustainable infrastructure
- Protection of property

Q. How will additional funding sustain these priorities?

A. Funding will be used to enhance our existing Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program and start building identified High- and Moderate-priority capital projects aimed at reducing the risk of local flooding.

Q. Can't you use state funding for these needs?

A. No. There is no statewide funding for local storm drains, local flooding, or local pollution prevention. And while new state laws allow local jurisdictions to enact storm drain fees administratively, property owners have the right to vote on this issue.

Q. What is the Storm Drainage Fee Initiative?

A. The City of Los Altos Storm Drainage Fee Initiative is a mailed ballot measure for property owners that, if approved, will fund critical investments in the City's Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program.

Q. What is the Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program?

A. The City of Los Altos Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program focuses on clean water protection, operating and maintaining the citywide storm drain system, and implementing storm drain, trash removal and green infrastructure capital improvements to prevent pollution of local creeks and the Bay.

Q. Why is this new Storm Drainage Fee needed?

A. In order to make this critical investment into its storm drain system, the City is proposing a new storm drainage fee for properties contributing stormwater runoff to the City's storm drainage system. The fee will support clean water protection, operations and maintenance needs and address the Capital Improvement Program projects rated High- and Moderate-Priority. The costs translate to an annual need of approximately \$1.1 million. The challenge the City faces is that there is no dedicated or sustainable funding source to support the \$1.1 million needed annually to fund the Program.

Q. How will the revenues from the Storm Drainage Fee be spent?

A. If successful, the Storm Drainage Fee revenues would be used to fund critical projects and priority programs to meet current needs:

- Maintain and rehabilitate over 55 miles of pipes and 1,300 drain inlets to reduce the risk of local flooding and sink holes
- Improve watershed planning activities including plans for creek restoration projects and floodplain management activities
- Protect our creeks and the Bay from trash and pollution by installing and maintaining trash capture devices to cleanse the water before it enters local waterways
- Construct sustainable green infrastructure such as rain gardens to capture and treat polluted water from streets and parking lots

Q. What is the difference between the storm and sewer system?

A. The City's sewer system carries sanitary wastes from toilets, sinks, baths, showers, industrial processes, etc., to local facilities for treatment before being discharged to the Bay. Conversely, the storm drain system carries rainwater runoff from streets, roofs, sidewalks, etc. directly to our creeks and the San Francisco Bay. Along the way it picks up large amounts of pollutants that flow untreated to our waterways.

Q. I received a notice for stormwater. What is this for? I didn't get a ballot.

A. Because of how the State law is written, stormwater requires a public hearing on the proposed fees before property owners can vote. The public hearing for the stormwater process will be held on April 23, 2019 at 6:00pm in the Community Meeting Chambers at Los Altos City Hall. Up until the end of the public hearing, affected property owners can submit a written protest to the storm drainage fee by mail or in person. If the City receives written protests from more than 50% of the property owners, the City cannot impose the proposed fees and property owners will not receive a ballot. If there is not a majority protest, the approval process will move forward to property owners who will receive a ballot in the mail.

Q. Who gets to vote for this?

A. Property owners of parcels subject to the fee in the City of Los Altos will get to vote on the Storm Drainage Fee. There will be one vote per parcel.

Q. When do we vote?

A. Property owners will receive ballots in early-May and have until June 18, 2019 at 5:00pm to mail or bring their ballot to the City Clerk at City Hall. To be counted, ballots must be received by June 18. Ballots will be opened and counted after the close of the balloting period.

Q. How much will this cost me?

A. The fee for your property will be printed on the ballot you receive through the mail in early-May. Impervious surfaces, such as driveways, patios and buildings, cover the soil and do not allow rainwater to soak into the ground. Stormwater fees are based on approximations of the amount of impervious surface on your property. The single-family home stormwater fees will range from \$72.00 to \$117.59 per single-family home per year depending on the size of the parcel. The amount for multi-family and non-residential properties will vary by size. The exact amount of the fee for each property will be specified on the ballot. A schedule of proposed rates was included in the Notice of Public Hearing that was mailed to property owners in March 2019.

Q. Why aren't you using the General Fund?

A. The Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program has historically been funded with a limited allocation from the General Fund. Because of the many other demands on the General Fund, the City would need to severely cut other critical services to support the \$1.1 million needed annually to fund the needs of the Program. With a dedicated, reliable and sustainable funding source, the Program can become self-reliant and deal with stormwater management challenges before they become emergencies and cost much more to address.

Q. Will this have an escalator?

A. Yes, the fee can be increased by the Consumer Price Index, but no more than 3% per year. This is to keep up with the cost of inflation.

Q. How was the Fee determined?

A. The method used for apportioning the Storm Drainage Fee is based upon the proportional amount of stormwater runoff produced by the properties in the Fee area, which is calculated by determining the amount of impervious surface (such as rooftops, buildings or structures, sidewalks, walkways, patio areas, driveways, etc.) on the parcel. Residential properties were grouped into four size categories having similar proportionate amounts of impervious surfaces and are charged a flat rate per parcel for each category. Non-residential parcels were grouped into six categories based on similar imperviousness characteristics and are charged based on the acreage of the parcel.

The Stormwater Fee Report describing the proposed Storm Drainage System improvements and services, the method of calculating the Fee, the Storm Drain System budget, and the proposed Fee for each parcel is available on the City's website at www.losaltosca.gov/cleanwater or by calling the City of Los Altos, Engineering Services Department at (650) 947-2780.

Q. Will any of this money go to the County or State to be used for other purposes?

A. No. All money collected from the proposed Stormwater Fee Initiative must be used for approved Storm Drain System activities within Los Altos.

Q. What happens if the 2018 Clean Stormwater Fee does not pass?

A. If the City is unable to secure a dedicated local revenue source to support the Clean Water/Storm Drainage Program, it will severely limit the City's ability to complete priority projects identified in the Stormwater Master Plan and will hamper our Clean Water Protection efforts. It will also force the Program to continue to compete and draw funds from the General Fund making the City's decisions about where to use limited resources even more difficult, and potentially pulling money from other community priorities like parks, roads or emergency services.

Q. Are there any exemptions from the Storm Drainage Fee?

A. No. Under state law, schools and other public entities are not exempt from stormwater fees and the fees must be proportioned so that the public entities are allocated their fair share. As such, under the Stormwater Fee Initiative, schools and other public entities must pay their proportional share of the stormwater costs just like they pay their water, sewer and garbage bills.

Q. Is there a discount available from the Storm Drainage Fee?

A. In its effort to encourage local environmental stewardship, the City encourages property owners to implement best practices and improvements to help keep our waterways safe, clean and healthy. In many instances, efforts on individual properties can lessen the overall burden on the City's storm drainage system. In recognition of that, the City may consider a fee reduction program for properties that implement certain measures. Stay tuned for more on the fee reduction program.

Stay informed or provide your input: www.losaltosca.gov/cleanwater.