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# San Antonio City Council to vote on raising stormwater fees for roofs, asphalt, concrete

By **Brendan Gibbons** | September 13, 2017

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Photo: Marvin Pfeiffer /For The San Antonio Express-News

#### IMAGE 1 OF 12

Brian Zabcik with Environment Texas talks about rain gardens and bioswales, while standing in a bioswale bordering the parking lot at Mission Branch Library, 3134 Roosevelt Avenue, during a tour of several ... [more](#)

San Antonio residents could pay a little more next year in monthly fees that help fund the city's efforts to address drainage problems and flooding.

As part of a five-year plan set up in 2015 to slowly raise the so-called stormwater utility fee that affects homeowners and businesses, City Council will vote Thursday on whether to raise the fee by 4.2 percent.





The fee is essentially a tax on roofs, asphalt, concrete and other impervious surfaces that send rainwater rushing downhill instead of letting it infiltrate the soil. The city uses the monthly fees to maintain the existing stormwater system to reduce flooding, said city Transportation and Capital Improvements assistant director Nefi Garza, who leads TCI's stormwater program

"The main focus of the stormwater utility fee is to maintain that good quality of life and as much safety as we can," he said. "That includes things like sweeping the streets, maintaining our channels, maintaining our underground infrastructure like tunnels, inlets and manholes."

The San Antonio Water System collects the fees on the city's behalf.

Under the new fee structure, residential property owners would pay \$3.60 per month for 2,750 square feet of impervious cover or less, \$4.74 for 2,750 to 4,220 square feet, and \$10.02 for more than 4,220 square feet.

Nonresidential properties would be charged a base fee of \$64.53, plus an additional fee based on the percentage of a property covered by impervious surfaces.

The extra fee would be 29 cents per 1,000 square feet for those with 20 percent cover or less; 43 cents for those with 20 to 40 percent cover; 56 cents for those with 40 to 65 percent cover; and 71 cents for more than 65 percent.



San Antonians have paid stormwater fees since 1993 after federal regulations required cities to do more to clean up their drainage systems. The fee saw no changes from 2008 to 2015.

Currently, residential property owners are being charged monthly fees of \$3.45 for 2,750 square feet or less, \$4.55 for 2,750 to 4,220, and \$9.61 for more than 4,220.

For nonresidential properties, the base fee is \$61.92. Additional fees per 1,000 square feet of impervious cover are 1 to 3 cents lower than in the rates up for a vote Thursday.

The city expects the new rates to bring in \$49.4 million next fiscal year, about \$2 million more than last year. TCI spends the money as it comes in and expects to end this fiscal year with roughly \$80,000 left.

"This year, we actually ran this budget pretty low," Garza said. "Generally, we like to keep a good reserve for large flood events."



Though the plan was set in place two years ago, the fee increase comes at a time of increased attention on flooding issues in Texas after Hurricane Harvey dropped unprecedented amounts of rain on Houston.

At one point, forecasters were calling for 20 to 25 inches in parts of San Antonio, an amount that would have caused widespread flooding.

"We're going to talk about Hurricane Harvey for a long time in the future," said San Antonio Water System Chief Operating Officer Steve Clouse at the utility's board meeting Wednesday. "We're lucky it wasn't our storm."

Local authorities have also tied increases in flooding from smaller storms to **more impervious surfaces across the local watershed**. Decades of data from local creeks and the San Antonio River show peak flooding has grown more severe as rural areas have been converted to new neighborhoods, malls and office complexes.



City codes require developers to either build structures to manage their stormwater on-site, participate in funding larger-scale projects, or pay fees into a fund the city uses for its flood-control projects. The city, Bexar County and 20 suburban cities are also spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to address flooding.

Some are pointing to **green infrastructure as the best way to decrease runoff** from smaller storms while beautifying the city.

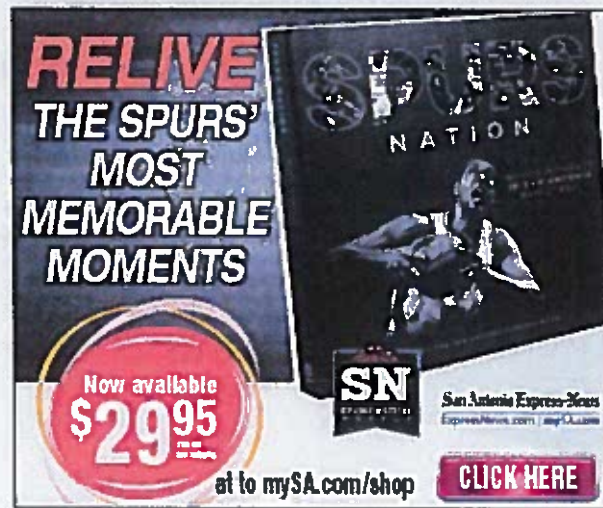
On Tuesday, environmental advocates with the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and Environment Texas gathered outside Mission County Library to promote low-impact development, a set of landscape practices that rely heavily on native plants and structures like permeable pavement and tanks that collect and store water from rooftops.

Brian Zabcik, clean air and water advocate for Environment Texas, pointed to porous asphalt used in the library's parking lot that also funnels rainwater into a bioswale full of grass, trees and shrubs.

"The idea is that all of this stuff together ... is going to be enable the water that goes off the parking lot to be absorbed into the ground at this spot," he said.

The groups gave San Antonio a scorecard of No. 2 of major cities in Texas, after Austin, for embracing these techniques. They complimented the city's voluntary low-impact development incentives, as well as the stricter stormwater requirements for properties that abut the San Antonio River.

Still, much of the city was built before modern flood regulations. Addressing those areas will take some time, said city Planning Commission member June Kachtik.



"It does have to grapple with all these old things, these old neighborhood plans and old arterials," she said. "We can't do it all at once."

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