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## Peoria website lets you know your stormwater utility bill

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PEORIA — Area residents and businesses bracing for the impact of funding the stormwater utility the city puts in operation June 1 now have a website to turn to to find out what they'll be charged.

PeoriaStormwater.com explains the purpose of the stormwater utility — to fund city efforts to handle stormwater runoff — as well as allowing residents to put in their address and discover what the city will be charging — at \$3 per square foot per 1,000 square feet of impervious surface area (rooftop, driveway, etc.).

The website also provides the opportunity to download the city's credit and grant manual for ways to capture stormwater and reduce their bill. Some of the measures residents can take is to use rain barrels, construct a rain garden or retention basin or use pervious pavers.

After an application fee of \$5, the city will reimburse homeowners for up to two rain barrels (up to \$50 each).

Stormwater utility billing will start June 1 with three-month bills going out this summer. Bills will be staggered, going out in July, August and September. "People have until Sept. 1 to implement changes on their property to earn credits and that will be applied retroactively back to June 1," said Public Works Director Scott Reise.

With the date drawing near for the start of Peoria's newest utility, Reeise said his department knows people will have questions. "We're preparing for a number of calls. After talking about Combined Sewer Overflow for 12 years, the public became numb," he said.

But bills — especially those for large businesses with expansive parking lots and a lot of impervious space — are likely to wake people up.

Reeise said that a communication was recently received from area car dealers who went through the city's credit manual, suggesting specific changes. "We're going over those changes now. Some we may incorporate, others we need to see what it means on the revenue side," he said.

"It won't be the last time we'll make changes to the credit manual. I'm sure there will be changes ahead," said Reeise who's heard the criticism that stormwater utility bills could push businesses out of Peoria.

"We're not out dreaming up ways to hurt business in Peoria. We're under an unfunded mandate from the U.S. government. This is the biggest public works project the city's ever undertaken," he said.

The project has been ordered in order to come up with a fix to stop sewage flowing into the Illinois River. The CSO problem occurs when rains overwhelm city sewers that normally channel sewage to the treatment plant. The city has proposed using green infrastructure to fix the problem but it's an expensive fix, estimated to cost between \$200 million and \$250 million.

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has yet to approve the city plan, Peoria's green approach got a big thumbs-up from Chuck Marohn, president of Strong Towns, a Minnesota-based not-for-profit involved in urban planning. Marohn spoke at a transportation seminar held at the Gateway Building last week.

"Peoria is doing it right. They could have done what Akron, Ohio did — put in a big pipe — at a cost of over a billion dollars," said Marohn.

Andrea Klopfenstein, a project engineer with the city who took part in several public meetings designed to explain the utility credit system, said the one gap in the city's data involves condominium units. "We'd like to get feedback from the condo associations in order to set up bills," she said.

Reeise said that the city was still mulling over plans to send out sample bills to residents in advance. "The last time we did sample bills for the sewer district, some people paid them," he said.

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