



## Stormwater utility costs dominate Peoria council meeting

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted Nov 28, 2017 at 8:26 PM

PEORIA — Costs associated with the city's stormwater utility tax that goes into effect next June started to come into focus at Tuesday's Peoria City Council meeting.

Jim Montelongo, the 4th District Councilman, said that businesses in his district like Westlake Shopping Center and Weaver Ridge Golf Course questioned what kind of utility charges that will be assessed.

Westlake wanted to know what kind of credit the center would receive for brick pavers installed in its parking lot, he said.

City Engineer Bill Lewis said that the pavers would need to be evaluated along with the rock they put under it. "It depends on how much water will be retained," he said.

Montelongo said that Weaver Ridge feared spending \$10,000 on stormwater retention efforts at a time when golf activities are declining.

The 4th District councilman said that businesses and developers need to know what they have to do in order to receive credits to defer some of the costs to be assessed when the utility goes into operation next summer.

City Manager Patrick Urich said the city would try to provide "guidance and counsel" when it came to helping homeowners and businesses find ways to control stormwater and curb costs.

The rate for the stormwater utility will be set at the Dec. 5 council meeting set for 5 p.m. when the 2018-2019 budget will be finally approved.

“This is happening. This is your wake-up call,” said 3rd District Councilman Tim Riggerbach, referring to public understanding of the costs involved with solving the city’s stormwater problem.

“This (utility) won’t exempt anybody,” he said, referring to charges that will be assessed on every parcel of land in the city.

In an answer to At Large Councilwoman Beth Jensen’s question, Urich said the stormwater utility tax alone will not pay for what the city expects to be a \$200 plus million tab to fix the problem. “We’ll need a combination of both: utility charges and higher sewer rates,” he said.

Some members of the council expressed growing impatience with the pace of negotiations between the city and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on approving a plan keeping sewage out of the Illinois River that would meet federal guidelines.

“Maybe some of us will be here when a settlement is reached,” said Grayeb of negotiations that started in the 1980s.

Other council issues such as the adoption of a new city signage policy, approval of the city’s strategic plan through 2032 and a request to raise the Special Service Area sales tax rate at Westlake were all deferred to future meetings.

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## Peoria council to hear more about stormwater utility tax

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted Mar 12, 2018 at 8:13 PM

Updated Mar 12, 2018 at 8:26 PM

PEORIA — Tuesday's Peoria City Council meeting is expected to cover a lot of ground — from approving the demolition of the Riverfront Village platform and acknowledging a report on city garbage service to offering a presentation on Peoria's newest tax, the stormwater utility.

“We plan to let council members know what our plans are moving forward,” said Public Works Director Scott Reeise, referring to a stormwater fee that will be assessed homeowners and businesses starting in June designed to fund a backlog of stormwater projects with an estimated cost of \$17 million.

A city resident with an average-sized home can expect to pay \$8 a month, he said. The utility tax will also lay the groundwork for financing the Combined Sewer Overflow project. The CSO project is Peoria's proposed response to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that has charged the city with keeping sewage out of the Illinois River. During periods of heavy rainfall, overloaded sewer lines empty directly into the river instead of going to the sewage treatment plant.

Reeise said on Tuesday he will lay out his department's outreach plans to inform the public about the utility tax. At the March 27 council meeting, Reeise said he hopes to alleviate business concerns by detailing how credits could be earned that could reduce the monthly fee.

Also on the council agenda is the approval of a committee report on waste collection services. Garbage collection represents the largest single contract for the city at over \$6 million a year. The current contract with PDC expires June 30, 2019.

Council members received information regarding that contract at a policy session held last month. City Manager Patrick Urich noted that submitting proposals for next year’s garbage contract are Advanced Disposal, the city’s public works department, PDC Services and Waste Management.

A number of area restaurants look to get city approval Tuesday on upcoming moves. Rumberger’s Wings & More seeks to open its third Peoria outlet at 500 Main St., a site at the corner of Main and Madison Avenue that’s seen plenty of turnover in recent years. Among the corner’s last tenants was Club Purple, a nightclub that’s been closed about a year. Before that it was home to Shifters Pub, the Whammy Bar, Babe’s, Eurojack’s and the Fifth Amendment.

Also looking for class B license (50 percent food) is the Double A sports bar that looks to relocate from its location off Willow Knolls Drive to the building on Illinois Route 91 that formerly housed the Titled Kilt and First & Home. Also seeking a class B license is Cyd’s Gourmet Kitchen, a longtime fixture at the Junction City shopping center, that’s relocating to the clubhouse in Donovan Park.

All three outlets had applications approved by the Peoria Liquor Commission.

If U-Haul receives council approval to make a storage facility out of the Travelodge Hotel, 4400 N. Brandywine Drive, it will mark the end of a longtime hotel site in Peoria. Construction of a Holiday Inn at the location across from Northwoods Mall was expected to begin in 1974 but a lack of financing delayed the hotel’s opening until 1980.

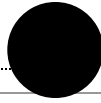
With its 260 rooms, the Holiday Inn Holidome later became Peoria’s third largest hotel and one of its most popular in the 1980s with heated pool, sauna and game room. When Holiday Inn later discarded the Holidome concept, the hotel became the Brandywine Inn & Conference Center. In 2004, it became a Ramada Inn property and in 2009 it was rechristened the Grand Hotel. The hotel closed last year bearing the Travelodge flag.

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## Peoria council members relate business complaints over stormwater utility tax

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted Mar 13, 2018 at 10:00 PM

Updated Mar 13, 2018 at 10:07 PM

PEORIA — Bills for the city's newly formed stormwater utility won't go out until June, but Peoria City Council members said Tuesday they're already getting complaints from the business community.

"Most business owners I have spoken with didn't know the amounts they would be paying," 4th District Councilman Jim Montelongo said at the Tuesday night council meeting. He added that some of the area's car dealers and other businesses with large parking lots have expressed surprise over the size of the utility bill.

At a council meeting last year, Montelongo had raised concern over what businesses would pay for the new tax, noting that Weaver Ridge Golf Course feared an annual bill of an estimated \$10,000 at a time when golf revenue is declining.

Public Works Director Scott Reeise said the utility rate was \$3 per 1,000 square feet of impervious space — space that deflects water such as a roof, driveway or parking lot. "We wanted (the rate) to be equitable for everyone in the city," he said, adding that the rate applies equally to homeowners and businesses.

"We also want to encourage behavioral change," said Reeise. He was referring to encouraging taxpayers to make changes on their property that would allow for the infiltration of stormwater. He plans to display a credit manual that details what residents can do to reduce their utility tax at the March 27 council meeting.

Reeise said the city plans to put up a website by May 1 that would allow residents to put in their address to find out what their stormwater utility bill will be.

Denis Cyr, the 5th District Councilman, questioned city plans to increase the utility rate to \$4 per 1,000 square feet in 2020 and to \$5 per 1,000 square feet in 2021. "I know we already voted on it, but that's a 66 percent increase in the rate in just four years. I think we need to talk further about that," he said.

"A lot of people are complaining right now. We need to do a better job of getting the word out about important projects like this," Cyr said.

In other business, council members selected N.E. Finch Co. to demolish the Riverfront Village platform on the Peoria riverfront. Finch had a low bid of \$1.5 million to raze the 20-year-old structure. Denise Moore, the 1st District councilwoman, credited Reese and city staff for working with members of the Riverfront Association and the Spirit of Peoria riverboat to retain additional parking spaces during the demolition. Moore said the association-sponsored Riverfront Market and riverboat provide two of the biggest attractions that bring people Downtown.

The council also approved an intergovernmental agreement with Peoria County that will allow for a new intersection at Allen and Willow Knolls roads. Resurfacing could start as soon as April, said Reese. Peoria County Board Chairman Andrew Rand credited Cyr and Reese for their help in allowing roadwork to advance three years ahead of schedule.

In response to a question by 2nd District Councilman Chuck Grayeb, Reese said that MacArthur Highway between Moss Avenue and West Romeo B. Garrett Avenue would be closed for the next two weeks while Illinois American Water relocates a water main in advance of the upcoming bridge replacement.

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## Will Peoria be known as the rain barrel city?

By Steve Tarter

**Journal Star city of Peoria reporter**

Posted Mar 25, 2018 at 6:33 PM

Updated Mar 25, 2018 at 8:32 PM

**PEORIA** — Maybe Peoria will become known as the rain barrel city. Peoria City Council members will hear about rain barrels along with other ways to manage water when they get their first look at the credit manual for the city's stormwater utility tax at Tuesday's council meeting.

The use of a rain barrel to collect water is just one of the ways that residents and businesses can save money on monthly stormwater utility bills that are due to go out this June.

Public Works Director Scott Reise will unveil various things residents can do to capture rainfall that will qualify for credits and grants.

The city established the stormwater utility in December to raise funds to handle a backlog of \$17.5 million in stormwater projects as well as laying the groundwork for a fix to the city Combined Sewers Overflow problem.

The CSO project is Peoria's proposed response to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the federal department that has charged the city with keeping sewage out of the Illinois River. During periods of heavy rainfall, overloaded sewer lines empty directly into the river instead of going to the sewage treatment plant.

The utility tax is based on a charge of \$3 for 1,000 square feet of impervious area such as a roof or driveway. A city resident with an average-sized home can expect to pay \$8 a month, said Reise.

A number of area companies have complained to council members that the new tax targets businesses, especially those with extensive parking lots. Jimmy Scherer, who owns Scherer Mazda, 2300 W. Pioneer Parkway, is one of the area



business people who's raised the issue. He said he faces an annual bill of \$4,400 minus credits that could save from \$500 to \$1,000. An adjoining new car lot faces an annual \$5,000 tab, said Scherer.

Those credits and grants along with application fees will be spelled out by Reise on Tuesday. The city plans to cover the cost of two rain barrels, up to \$50 each, while rain gardens, detention basins and the installation of permeable pavers also will qualify for discounts on stormwater utility fees.

Council members also will hear about an increase in sewer rates. Residents living south of War Memorial Drive will see a quarterly bill of \$58.41 rise to \$60.17, a 3 percent increase, while those living north of War Memorial will see a quarterly bill of \$64.45 go to \$65.36, a 1.4 percent hike.

Also on Tuesday's agenda: an ordinance regarding signage, the first reading of an ordinance that would raise the age to buy tobacco in Peoria from 18 to 21 and the approval of a policy session on the need for more affordable housing in Peoria. At that policy session, held March 10, Community Development Director Ross Black noted that 62 percent of households in Peoria County spend more than a third of their income on housing.

In what is probably the final formality before its grand opening in April, the Portillo's restaurant under construction on Rockwood Drive seeks city approval Tuesday to sell beer and wine along with the hot dogs and Italian beef sandwiches.

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## Peoria council hears ways to offset upcoming stormwater fees

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted Mar 27, 2018 at 10:46 PM

Updated Mar 27, 2018 at 11:54 PM

PEORIA — Pavement was in the spotlight at Tuesday's Peoria City Council meeting.

Public Works Director Scott Reeise outlined some of the programs residents and businesses can take advantage of to offset stormwater utility fees the city will start charging in June.

Among the ways to save money include using rain barrels, putting in detention basins or replacing concrete parking lots and driveways with permeable pavers, he said.

The city will have programs that will fund up to 75 percent of a \$10,000 construction job or, on large-scale projects, up to 75 percent of professionally run efforts up to \$100,000, said Reeise, adding that public meetings on the credit program would be held in the next several weeks.

At Large Councilman Sid Ruckriegel asked if the city could help provide information on what taxpayers might pay before May 1, when the city plans to launch a website providing specific information on stormwater utility costs.

Reeise said the city is busy digitizing the entire city but could provide help if the public would recognize that initial figures provided would be estimates.

Richard Helm of United Presbyterian Church, 2400 W. Northmoor Road, suggested increasing credit discounts while questioning city policy of requiring an application fee for information the city already had, noting that the church put in a detention basin in 2006. He also noted that water went directly into Big Hollow Creek, not using any city infrastructure.

While too much pavement is a problem for the city when it comes to stormwater runoff, there's not enough when it comes to Peoria roadways. Reise provided a pavement management update, noting that only 48 percent of city roads are considered good or satisfactory.

He reported that \$19.5 million will be expended in 2018 on the city's roads and bridges, \$15.6 million of that on arterial roads.

At Large Councilwoman Beth Akesson asked about the use of permeable pavers on city roads. At present, only 2 percent of the city's roads are brick, said Reise.

"If we see a residential street that needs reconstruction, my recommendation would be to go with permeable pavers if it's alright with residents," he said.

Council members also discussed the possibility of raising the minimum age to buy tobacco products in Peoria from 18 to 21. No vote was taken Tuesday. In cities such as Evanston and Chicago that adopted the higher age limit, teen smoking has been reduced by a third, said a representative of the American Heart Association who addressed the council.

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## Questions rain down on Peoria officials over stormwater utility tax

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted Apr 19, 2018 at 8:44 PM

Updated Apr 19, 2018 at 8:58 PM

PEORIA — It wasn't just the promise of spring that prompted so many questions on lawns and gardens from the 40 people that gathered at Illinois Central College Peoria Campus on Thursday evening.

Most were there to better understand the stormwater utility tax looming over homeowners, businesses, churches, schools and just about anyone with property that captures rainfall in Peoria.

That tax starts June 1, but homeowners may not see a bill until July or August, depending on what part of the city they live in, said Andrea Klopfenstein, a project engineer with the city. The city has stated that the average homeowner will pay about \$8 a month and be billed quarterly.

The reason for the new fee is to reduce water runoff while allowing Peoria to better manage stormwater issues across the city where some 400 projects that involve sinkholes, erosion problems and aging culverts are backlogged, she said.

Then there's the Combined Sewer Overflow issue, an ongoing matter of concern between the city and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said Klopfenstein. While the price tag to keep stormwater from overwhelming the city's sewers and dumping sewage into the Illinois River hasn't been finalized yet, the estimate is that it will cost the city between \$200 million and \$250 million, she said.

Public Works Director Scott Reeise was optimistic that negotiations between city and EPA officials could be completed in the near future. "We're hopeful that we can get a deal done with the Trump EPA that will stand for 18 years," he said, referring to the time estimated for the city to fund a CSO solution.

Klopfenstein said installation of environmental-friendly property features, such as permeable pavement or rain gardens, could reduce fees. She outlined ways that residents can reduce the utility fee through credits and grants. Measures range from the reimbursement for the purchase of two rain barrels to competitive grants for major engineering projects that the city will fund up to \$100,000.

To receive a credit or grant, residents must fill out a form and pay an application fee, she said. "We want the credits to be user friendly and easy to get. The idea is to promote change and improve the city," said Klopfenstein.

Residents can find out what their bill will be in advance in early May through a website, [OneWaterPeoria.com](http://OneWaterPeoria.com). Klopfenstein added that the city will hold another informational meeting at 11 a.m. April 27 at the Peoria Public Library at 107 NE Monroe St.

Audience questions included why the utility tax couldn't be added to the property tax bill. Klopfenstein said that was being looked into. The possibility of including it on a property owner's water bill is also being explored.

Peorian Robin Grantham asked if the utility fees would go toward paying the fine the EPA might levy. Klopfenstein said that was an issue that the Peoria City Council would have to determine. Peoria council members will take up approval of the credit manual at the group's May 8 meeting, the city's project engineer said.

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## Peoria residents: Ready for another utility bill?

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

Posted May 9, 2018 at 5:49 PM

Updated May 9, 2018 at 6:28 PM

PEORIA — If area homeowners plan to apply for credits to reduce their stormwater utility bill, there's good news: Application rates have been reduced.

On the other hand, bills for the city's newest fee, a charge to reduce the amount of runoff water going into the city sewer system, will be sent out next month. Due to a staggered billing cycle, some residents may not see a bill for a month or two, but the billing date for all starts June 1. Bills will be sent out quarterly.

The stormwater utility operates like those for electricity, sewage and water with fees (since the city is running it, you can say taxes) based on the amount of stormwater runoff properties contribute.

Public Works Director Scott Reeise updated Peoria City Council members at Tuesday's meeting on changes made to the credit manual that lists what residents and businesses can do to reduce their monthly utility bill.

Peoria residents will be charged \$3 per 1,000 square feet of impervious space on their property. Impervious surface areas include rooftops, walkways, patio areas, driveways, parking lots and structures like sheds that prevent stormwater from soaking into the ground.

The average homeowner will pay about \$8 per month, said Reeise, adding that the city anticipates \$4 million in revenue from six months of utility fees this year.

Residents can save by planting rain gardens, constructing infiltration basins or use pervious pavers, to cite some of the practices outlined in the city's credit manual available at [OneWaterPeoria.com](http://OneWaterPeoria.com). Larger projects will require that management plans be submitted to the city.

To qualify for discounts, residents must file applications and pay application fees with the city, said Reeise, adding that, following up on feedback received after a round of public meetings, the city reduced the cost of a number of those application fees.

Denis Cyr, the 5th District councilman, noted at Tuesday's council meeting that only 95 people turned up at two recent public meetings to learn more about the stormwater utility. "I don't know why we're not reaching more people," he said by telephone Wednesday.

Cyr's concern is that his 5th District includes many of the city's businesses that will be especially hard-hit by utility fees, including Pioneer Park. "There's not a lot of green space in an industrial park," he said.

Cyr, who just completed his first year on the council, admitted that, before being elected to office, he was a good example of someone "the city was trying to reach."

"Up to 16 months ago, I'd never been on the city's website," said Cyr, who believes a lot of residents are unaware of the stormwater costs that lie ahead. "There are still a lot of people I talk with that have no idea about the whole stormwater issue."

The councilman is bracing for the reaction from businesses and residents after stormwater utility bills go out this summer. "I'm going to get hit by a train in July," he said.

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## Peoria website lets you know your stormwater utility bill

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

@SteveTarter

Posted May 14, 2018 at 8:31 PM

Updated May 14, 2018 at 8:55 PM

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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Opinion

## **Editorial: Peoria between rock and hard ... er, wet place on stormwater tax**

Posted May 25, 2018 at 12:48 PM

As Peoria implements its new stormwater utility tax June 1, we imagine there will be some sticker shock when the quarterly bills start coming in. This is before the big bang hits; Peorians probably ain't seen nothin' yet.

Commercial and residential customers alike — 48,500 properties — will be paying \$3 per 1,000 square feet of impervious area (roofs, driveways, etc.) to cover this very cement city's costs of managing its stormwater runoff unless they take other measures to keep as much water on their own properties as possible.

The tax comes in advance of a whopper of an expected bill — upwards of \$230 million — once the city reaches its long-in-the-making deal with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to fix the problem of sewage going into the Illinois River when heavy rains or snow melt overwhelm the combined sewer/stormwater pipes in the older city, mostly Downtown. It absolutely fits the definition of an “unfunded mandate” from Uncle Sam (even from Scott Pruitt's EPA, evidently). In fact the city has been in non-compliance since 1972's Clean Water Act.

If the expected cost now for the average residential lot with 2,600 square feet of hard surface is \$94 annually — businesses with typically larger facilities and parking lots will get hit harder, some in the tens of thousands of dollars, topping \$60,000 in one case — that could double or triple once the EPA bring down its hammer, unless the city targets another revenue source not likely to be any more popular.

We're environmental sorts, and so we're all for keeping sewage out of the one river we have. The "green" solution the city proposes is creative, novel, potentially cheaper than the alternative. Rain barrels and gardens, bioswales and cisterns, detention basins and green roofs are all good stuff. Peoria is not alone in having a stormwater utility, joining Morton, Eureka, Bloomington, Normal, etc.

And to its credit the city is giving residents an opportunity to defray their costs, potentially up to 65 percent.

Unfortunately, our first-blush reaction to the 20-page manual outlining the options is that it will be too much effort for most, with too much paperwork and potentially too much up-front cost — including a fee just to access the incentives/credits, including in some cases the hiring of a professional engineer to sign off — to encourage much participation, which has been under 25 percent in other communities (and if it's higher, will Peoria's staff of three be enough to conduct inspections and enforcement?).

A sample: If you want to build a water quality detention basin to get a 10 percent credit, you'll need to follow the formula " $V_{ff} = 3,630 \times C \times A$  where  $V_{ff}$  = first flush volume, post development (in cubic feet),  $C$  = post-runoff coefficient,  $A$  = drainage area tributary to detention basin (in acres)."

Got that?

City Hall has been getting an earful from some neighborhoods, so some of this may change. What we don't expect to change is that everybody pays no matter their individual contribution to the problem. Just pragmatically, complying with this CSO mandate would be unaffordable with only a small percentage of Peorians footing the bill. Beyond that, arguably everybody benefits from having a decent Downtown, and from keeping raw sewage out of central Illinois' primary natural asset, the Illinois River. Older areas, those that came first in any community, will always have infrastructure that requires more attention. Newer neighborhoods will become old someday, too. It doesn't mean you abandon them.

The flip side is that this is a big cost, one more thing in a Peoria that leads the state's cities in population loss, as it is. This City Council has some very, very difficult decisions ahead.



## Homeowners raising storm over Peoria's stormwater tax

By Steve Tarter

Journal Star city of Peoria reporter

@SteveTarter

Posted Jun 8, 2018 at 5:08 PM

Updated Jun 8, 2018 at 5:29 PM

PEORIA — John Salch would like to think that the 7,000 bricks he's used in the driveway at the Moss Avenue home he's worked on for the past 30 years should be recognized by the city that wants property owners to do what they can to retain stormwater.

But Salch is one of a number of Peoria homeowners with questions about how city officials view their property now that Peoria's stormwater utility went into operation this month.

"The aerial view used by the city fails to see my 7,000 bricks installed to allow the rain to soak into the ground," said Salch, who has degrees in both chemistry and physics and is no stranger to the concept of what constitutes a permeable surface.

The many bricks were laid by hand by Salch, 76, over a 30-year period and invoke the area's brick history with names such as Purington, Poston and Barr at one's feet. There's even a brick pathway through the robust garden that he's put in. "Not one drop runs off this yard," he said.

"I have no complaint with the city calling for retaining stormwater or basing the assessment on property size. I'm just upset with their satellite picture of my property," said Salch.

The new tax assesses every property owner in the city at a rate of \$3 per 1,000 square feet of impermeable space. That's space like a roof or driveway where water can run off into the city sewer system.

The combined sewer overflow problem occurs when rains overwhelm city sewers that normally channel sewage to the treatment plant, dumping sewage into the Illinois River during heavy rains. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been after the city for decades to come up with a solution.

While awaiting EPA approval, Peoria has proposed using green infrastructure to fix the problem, encouraging citizens to use rain barrels, rain gardens and permeable pavers to retain stormwater. But it's an expensive fix, estimated to cost between \$200 million and \$250 million.

Which might explain the stormwater utility tax the city kicked off in June. Peoria expects the new utility to raise \$4 million for the period of June through December in 2018 and \$8 million for a full year in 2019.

The first bills are expected to go out in July, but citizens can get an idea of what they'll have to pay by going to the city website (PeoriaStormwater.com). When Salch did that, the retired Peoria Ag Lab scientist found that he wasn't getting any credit for all those bricks on his property.

The city website also offers residents the opportunity to download the city's credit and grant manual, listing ways to capture stormwater in order to reduce their bill.

Nikki Andrews is a Peoria homeowner who lives on Hanssler Avenue and has consulted that manual — with less than outstanding results. “I am currently reading the stormwater manual over and over to understand the language and requirements for my property and my church's property. I'm glad for what they're trying to do, but they're not being helpful,” she said.

“For my house, I would like to put in a rain garden and rain barrels, but, like I said, I am currently reading the manual a couple times to figure out how I go about doing that economically when my bill will be close to \$8 per month,” said Andrews, who plans to call the city's public works department (494-8800) to get more information.

Per Ellingson, who lives in the Cottage District, has also checked out the city manual. “There's definitely a lot of information there, but I've only scratched the surface. A rain garden would make sense, but I haven't done a lot of gardening,” he said.

Ellingson suggested that the city add a little context on its site. "I think we need to see a little of the back story as to how this stormwater utility came about," he said.

Bill O'Brien, president of the Forrest Hill Homeowners Association, said he's awaiting more information from the city. "For most homeowners, it's an abstract issue, because people don't understand how they can be helpful in finding a solution. Lack of information is a major issue," he said.

Conrad Stinnett, president of the University East Neighborhood Association, said he was in favor of uncovering the brick streets in the University East neighborhood to help with stormwater retention.

"The (stormwater utility) tax, like any tax, is not sitting well. Federal and state representatives should be advocating for funds to fix the problem. Unfunded mandates are never popular. I do think previous City Councils should have dealt with this instead of kicking the can down the road," he said.

Rod Lorenz, another Moss Avenue resident, questions the city's method in calculating runoff costs. He thinks the system's emphasis on impermeable surfaces to determine the tax rate should be scrapped in favor of a method that bases the rate on the amount of permeable surfaces, instead.

"On most residential properties, downspouts direct all roof runoff onto soil surfaces, and it is easily observed that none of that water reaches the sewer during even the heaviest rainfall. Obviously, it is just as easy to determine permeable surface as impermeable surface, so a simple calculation could account more accurately for contribution to sewer flow with little difficulty," he said.

Lorenz also raised the issue of stormwater coming off paved surfaces, such as roadways. "It is difficult to understand why the cost of dealing with street runoff should be assigned to homeowners in relation to the size of their property. This is clearly irrational and unfair. It seems that a more fair way of distributing this cost is to relate it to the actual use of streets and roads through a small addition to taxes on motor fuels. Homeowners who don't use the streets, or use them little, should pay less," he said.



"I don't question the need for solving the CSO problem or pretend that the sewer utility rate calculation is a simple matter, but it seems there are more fair and rational means of distributing the costs than have been announced publicly so far," said Lorenz.

Peter Kobak, a member of the city's Innovation Team, a group that helped formulate innovative ways for the city to tackle its CSO challenge, plans to hold a rain-barrel painting party with friends later this month.

"No one likes an extra bill, but people can reduce it by trying something now," he said. After an application fee of \$5, the city will reimburse homeowners for up to two rain barrels for up to \$50 each.

As yet, the two of largest landscaping companies in the area haven't reported much interest, either from homeowners or the city. "There hasn't been a lot of proactive education about the problem," said Nate Hoerr, one of the owners of the Hoerr Nursery, 8020 N. Shade Tree Drive.

"We've had limited exposure to it. But we can rise to the occasion. We can order plants that serve as natural wetlands. We're willing to help, but there has to be a market," he said. Hoerr added it might take bills going out to stir more interest in the subject.

Ben Roberts, a division manager at Green View Nursery in Dunlap, also reported little activity from callers. "We do design rain gardens. We do a few every year," he said.

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## Peoria to mail out stormwater utility info

By Steve Tarter

**Journal Star city of Peoria reporter**

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PEORIA — An informational booklet will be mailed to all city homeowners this week that includes a sample of the property owner's stormwater utility bill.

The mailer will give property owners a chance to get the details they need — especially those without access to information online.

Homeowners with questions or concerns should call the city's public works department at 494-8800 or visit [www.peoriastormwater.com](http://www.peoriastormwater.com).

The city will mail out the first round of three-month bills in July. The utility went into operation June 1.

The utility seeks to raise \$4 million over the last half of 2018, money to be used to tackle a backlog of stormwater projects across the city.