

New Utility Charges Fund Env

Homeowners Will See Utility Bill Increase

Beginning in January, people may see two new charges on their utility bills. One will be a fee to purchase sensitive property in the Lake Whatcom watershed. The other will fund a storm- and surface-water utility.

When fully implemented, the two new charges may add up to about \$12 a month for most single-family homes. Because city utility bills are issued every other month, most people will see a \$24 increase in their bills. Although the new fees may appear at the same time, they are very different from each other.

Property Acquisition Surcharge

Earlier this year, the City Council passed an ordinance that required the city to charge unmetered single-family water users an additional \$5 a month to pay for watershed land purchases and other preservation measures. Metered single-family water users outside the city will be charged \$7.50 a month and larger water users will be charged a proportionate amount.

The new charge is expected to generate about \$1.6 million in 2001. Although the City Council has not publicly identified any specific properties that will be purchased, it did authorize a Watershed Advisory Board be created to develop proposals. This new board will include residents from the city, county and Water District 10. Board members will serve three-year terms.

The board will make recommendations about what criteria should be used to decide which land is purchased and will make recommendations about certain parcels. The City Council must approve the criteria and any purchases.

The city will use the \$1.6 million for more than purchasing property. It will be able to accomplish more by also being used to buy land development rights, which will ensure that property remains undeveloped. Similarly, the city plans to protect some land through conservation easements and access agreements. This means that some of the watershed property may become available for light public recreational use, such as hiking, while some land will remain private with permanent development restrictions in place.

◆ For more information on this program, contact Joe Rutan, superintendent of services for Public Works, at 360-676-6850.

How does the Proposed Monthly Storm- and Surface-Water Fee Compare With Other Cities' Fees?

Bothell	\$5.56
Olympia	\$6.00
Bellingham	\$5.00/7.00
Puyallup	\$7.07
Bellevue	\$8.86
Redmond	\$11.50

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— Assistant Public Works Director Tom Rosenberg

Storm- and Surface-Water Utility

When people think of utilities, they often think of their electric utility or their natural gas utility. They pay a bill and the service is delivered to their homes. The city's storm- and surface-water utility delivers service in a less obvious manner. The service is in the form of programs to improve water quality, reduce flooding, provide for ongoing operation and maintenance and bring the city into regulatory compliance.

At the time this newsletter was going to press, the City Council was considering whether to approve the fee before the end of 2000, with charges beginning in January 2001.

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The new fee is being considered to fund and manage projects needed to prevent flooding and erosion and to protect water quality and fish habitat in local streams and Bellingham Bay. These projects would help the city comply with state and federal regulations.

State and federal laws are requiring improved storm- and surface-water management. These laws include the Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan and the federal Clean Water Act. The programs of the utility will also be responsive to the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The recent listing of some area salmon runs as endangered has added significant and expensive environmental requirements.

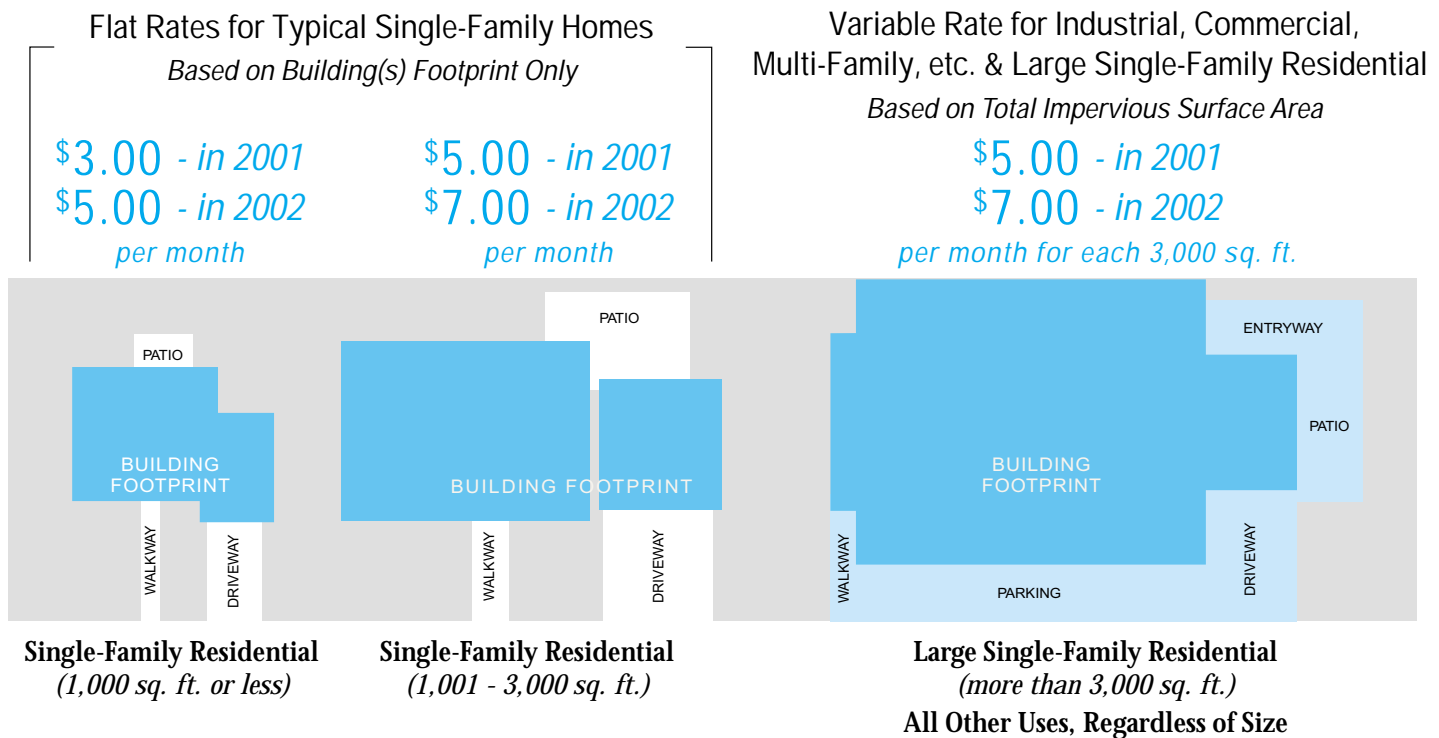
If approved by the City Council, the storm-water utility rate will be charged to all developed properties within the city limits. The charges would be based upon the amount of land that is covered by either buildings or pavement. Owners of very small homes could pay just \$5 a month when the fee is fully implemented, while owners of very large homes may pay \$7 a month for every 3,000 square feet of surface covered with pavement or buildings. Most single-family homes will be charged \$7 a month.

The charges would be added as a separate item on the city utility bill. Owners of properties such as parking lots, who do not receive a utility bill now, would receive a utility billing for the storm- and surface-water utility. Likewise, city residents who are on wells or have septic systems would receive a storm- and surface-water utility bill.

When fully implemented the annual expense of operating the storm- and surface-water utility is estimated at approximately \$4.5 million.

◆ For more about the storm- and surface-water utility, contact Utility Engineer Bill Reilly at 360-676-6961.

Proposed Rates are Based on Building Size and Type



The rates for Single-Family Residential buildings, under 3,000 square feet, is based on the combined area of the first floor of the home and the garage (whether part of the main dwelling or detached). This data is obtained from Whatcom County Assessor's Office records. The rates for larger buildings is calculated from aerial photos, building permit information, or contact with the property owner.

Storm- and Surface Water Fee Questions and

How much is the fee?

The basic storm- and surface-water utility is phased in over two years. For most single-family homes, the fee is \$3 per month in 2001, increasing to \$7 and \$5 in 2002. Other types of land use, such as parking lots, where much of the property is covered by impervious surfaces like asphalt, concrete, roofs, and compacted gravel (see chart on page 6).

What will the fee do?

- Allow the city to facilitate programs needed to meet regulatory requirements.
- Allow the city to undertake new projects and a number of high-priority capital projects to improve water quality and enhance fish habitat.
- Help the city meet new environmental regulations set by state and federal agencies. These regulations set high standards for the quality of runoff to protect the environment and to obtain federal permits for all storm-water management systems in place.
- Provide relief for street funding currently provided for storm-water system program is paid for through services through the Storm- and Surface-Water Utility. The fee is equitable, but it will free up the Street Fund for resurfacing streets and pothole repairs.

Will properties that are outside the city limits be charged?

No. The Storm- and Surface-Water Utility is only for properties inside city limits.

Will properties that don't have water service be charged?

Yes. It will be charged to all properties with water service (including buildings) inside the city, regardless of whether they have water service. This means that owners of paved parking areas will pay upon the size of those paved areas.

Is the new fee the only revenue source for the Storm- and Surface-Water Utility?

No. Although the new fee will be a key revenue source, it is not the only revenue source. Other sources include:

- Permit fees and system development charges paid at the time of property development. These fees are used to fund growth.
- The city's Street Fund will be charged for the maintenance of the surface of city streets. The Washington State Department of Transportation will be charged an ongoing fee based upon the use of the city, including Interstate 5, within the city.
- Grant and loan funding will be pursued through various sources and low-interest loans.

Water/Sewer Discount Available for Seniors and Disabled

Low-income seniors and disabled citizens may apply for a reduced rate for their water and sewer bills. The City Council is considering also including the reduced-rate option for the proposed storm- and surface-water bills.

Disabled people must be receiving permanent Social Security Disability payments to qualify.

The city decides if someone qualifies by reviewing annual income levels and comparing them with an income level that is determined by the city. The city has offered reduced rates on water and sewer bills since 1982.

People who meet the requirements can have their bills reduced by the following amounts:

- 0-50 percent of qualifying income: 75 percent fee reduction.
- 51-75 percent of qualifying income: 50 percent fee reduction.
- 76-100 percent of qualifying income: 25 percent fee reduction.

The qualifying income varies depending upon the total household income.

If low-income seniors or low-income disabled people are renting, they must ask their landlord to apply for the discount. The landlord will be required to certify that the savings will be entirely passed on to the renter.

Environmental Protection

Surface-Water Utility and Answers

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...ded to comply with state and federal ...s and enhance existing programs. A ...have been identified to control flooding, ...habitat over the next five to 10 years. ...regulations. Today's state and federal ...dards for controlling the quantity and ...ment. By Jan. 1, 2003, the city must ...er discharge and must have a complete ...e.

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...for projects that are eligible for grants

Discounts for Seniors

People can apply for this assistance any time during the year. In addition to filling out a city form, they also must show income verification to qualify initially. Each May, renewal forms are sent out to currently enrolled participants in the Senior Discount Program and annual audits of household income on selected accounts are performed.

◆ Anyone interested in getting more information about this utility discount program, or receiving the application form, can call the Finance Department at 360-676-6900, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Want to find out about trail work parties?

You can do it on-line!

Visit www.cob.org and click on the Parks Department page and go to Greenways

—Learn about upcoming volunteer events

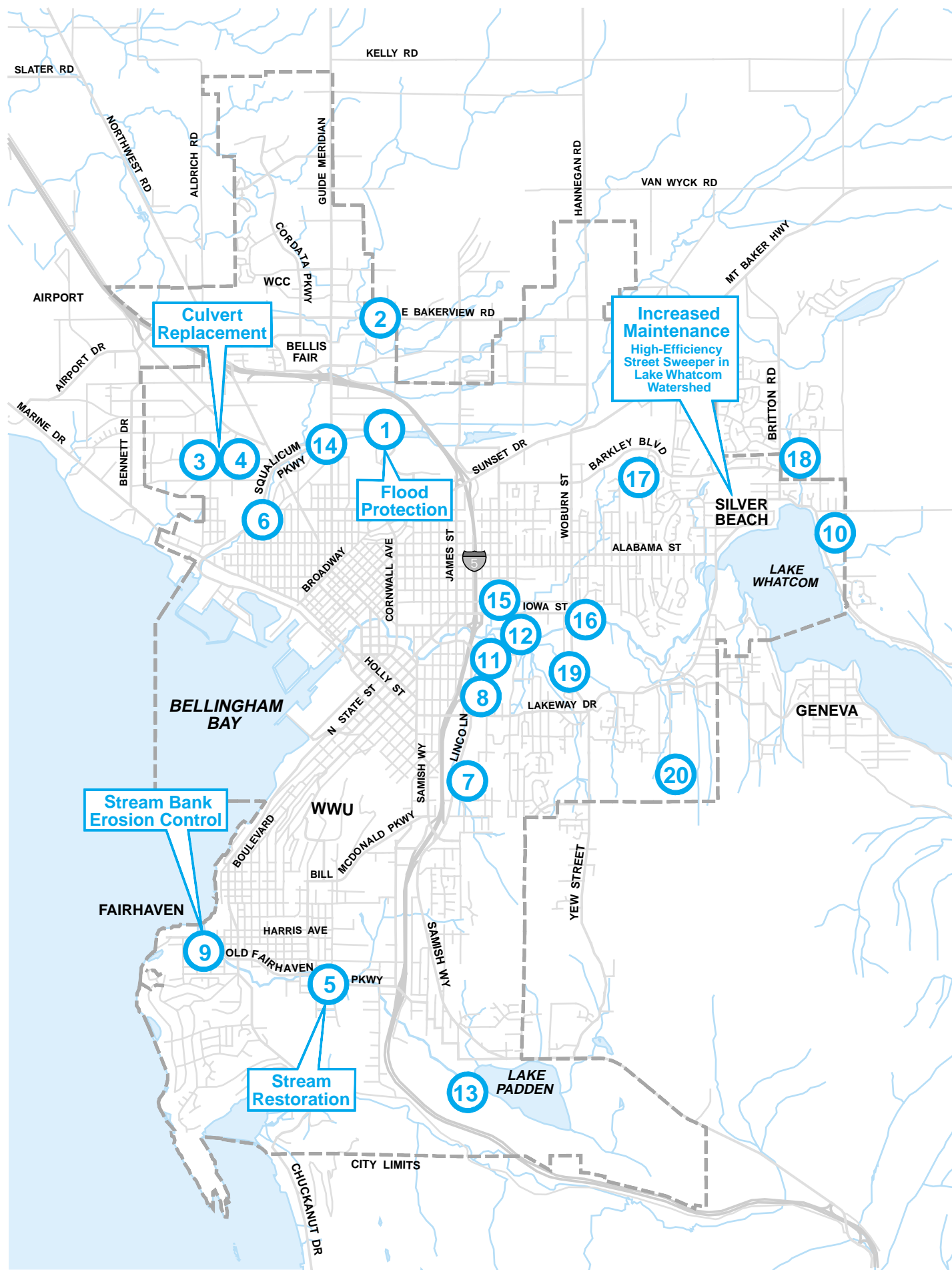
—Find out who helped out last month

—Discover how you can adopt a trail

www.cob.org

The City of Bellingham's Web Site

At Work in Our Watersheds



Projects to be Funded by the Storm- and Surface-Water Utility Fee

- | | |
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| 1. Squalicum Creek Flood-Control Berm | 12. Whatcom/Fever Creek Rearing Area (fish habitat) |
| 2. Deemer Road Drainage Improvements | 13. Padden Fish Ladders |
| 3. James Street/Squalicum Parkway Culvert Repair | 14. Squalicum Corridor Phase 1 (fish habitat) |
| 4. Squalicum Truck Route Culvert Repairs | 15. Nevada-Iowa Water-Quality Facility |
| 5. Padden Creek Tunnel Bypass | 16. Whatcom Corridor Acquisition |
| 6. Squalicum Creek Bank Stabilization | 17. Fever Creek (flood and erosion protection) |
| 7. South Lincoln Creek Detention Basin | 18. Silver Beach (flood protection) |
| 8. North Lincoln Creek Detention Basin | 19. Cemetery Creek (bank erosion control) |
| 9. Padden Creek Bank Stabilization | 20. Cemetery Creek (flood protection) |
| 10. Academy Road Water-Quality Facility | |
| 11. Whatcom Creek Side Channel (fish habitat) | |