

Surface Water Management in Pinellas County

This spring, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners will consider a stormwater utility fee to support surface water management activities in the unincorporated area.

If approved, the fee will fund the following areas of concern:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The state of Florida and the federal Environmental Protection Agency have assigned numeric water quality standards limiting the amount of nitrogen and phosphorous in lakes, streams and bays. Nearly 74 per cent of waterways in Pinellas County exceed water quality standards.

With additional funding, Pinellas County will be able to 1) prioritize the waters that do not meet standards, 2) monitor, study, and analyze the water systems in question to determine the sources of the pollution and 3) determine and implement the most cost effective means to remedy the pollution problem.

Excess nitrogen and phosphorous degrades water quality, which in turn impacts our region's economy and our quality of life. Failure to bring the nitrogen and phosphorous levels to within state/federal limits could result in significant fines and penalties.

AVOIDING COLLAPSE AND CATASTROPHE

Most of the corrugated metal stormwater pipes in unincorporated Pinellas County were installed prior to 1976 and have reached the end of their useful life. More than 24 miles of this pipe, in large sections and small, are dangerously near the point of failure. Catastrophic collapse of any section of the stormwater drainage system can impact drinking water pipes, sanitary sewer pipes, roadways, electrical and communications cables as well as private property.

With additional funding, Pinellas County can reline and otherwise repair and refurbish older sections of pipe to extend the life of the entire stormwater drainage system in 10-years.

STAYING DRY

Pinellas County's open drainage network of ditches and drainage canals is currently on a 22-year maintenance cycle. As a result, many of the waterways are so clogged up and filled with debris that water cannot flow. A clogged open ditch or canal can back up water into the community it's

servicing. With additional funding, Pinellas County can establish a 10-year maintenance cycle for the open drainage network to keep those ditches clear and allow for more flood protection for affected neighborhoods and improved water quality downstream.

SITE PLAN COMPLIANCE PROGRAM--Within unincorporated Pinellas County, there are dozens and dozens of residential developments and business complexes which maintain their own, private stormwater drainage systems. With additional funding, Pinellas County will be able to inspect these systems to ensure that they are functioning as intended when Pinellas County first approved the original site plans. Private developers would be required to maintain the stormwater drainage systems to ensure optimal flow and water quality treatment from private systems to reduce flooding and improve water quality from these private service areas and surrounding public lands.

WHY A STORMWATER FEE

Many municipalities within Pinellas County already charge their residents some sort of stormwater utility fee, usually as part of the water and sewer bill. Pinellas County has been relying on a combination of the Penny for Pinellas, local gas taxes, federal grants, and general fund revenues to fund surface water program activities. But needs exceed resources and additional funding is required to effectively manage the stormwater conveyance system, to make the necessary improvements to our aquatic resources, and to comply with state and federal mandates.

The Pinellas County General Fund continues to show a deficit--\$24.1 million for FY2013 alone. The Penny for Pinellas can only be used to fund capital improvement projects, not operational or maintenance jobs, environmental studies, or public education. The Transportation Trust Fund, comprising monies from gas taxes and transportation fees, is showing a deficit also and is projected to go below zero in FY2018 given the present rate of revenues vs. expenses.

The proposed stormwater utility fee is an equitable way to fund surface water improvement activities that would reduce flooding in our community, enhance the quality of Pinellas County's open waters, and extend the life of our stormwater infrastructure.

In survey after survey, Pinellas County residents have said that quality of life is important, the natural environment is important, stormwater drainage is important, and the cleanliness of Pinellas County's open waters is important.

Pinellas County's stormwater management fee will be dedicated to addressing these issues, working with the municipalities to improve the

environment, and improving the Pinellas County experience for residents everywhere.