



STORMWATER ASSESSMENT FEES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Town of Needham Department of Public Works



Q: What is an impervious surface?

A:

An impervious surface is an area within a parcel which prevents or significantly impedes the infiltration of stormwater into the soil. Common impervious areas include, but are not limited to, buildings, driveways (including paving, concrete, stone, gravel and dirt), parking lots, paved walkways, pools, patios, tennis and basketball courts, and other similar non-porous areas.

Q: Why is Needham implementing a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment?

A:

The Department of Public Works (DPW) manages and improves the Town's drainage system, which includes pipelines, catch basins, manholes, and water quality practices. A functioning drainage system keeps roads safe and protects public health and property. Over the last 20 years, the stormwater program has expanded to address water quality under the Clean Water Act.

Previously funded solely by the General Fund (tax revenue), the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment offers an equitable way to supplement this work. Based on a property's impervious area (IA), the Enterprise Fund collects fees from all properties, including tax-exempt ones, to cover stormwater-specific costs.



Q: Under what authority is a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment able to be established?

A:

Massachusetts municipalities are authorized under Massachusetts General Laws to establish a stormwater management authority, empowering them to charge fees to property owners, just as traditional utilities are allowed to charge fees for electricity, drinking water, and sewer services (MGL Chapter 40 Section 1A, Chapter 40A Section 5, Chapter 44 Section 53F-1/2, and Chapter 83 Section 16).

Q: Is a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment another tax on properties?

A:

The Stormwater Mitigation Assessment is a user fee, not a tax. Like water or sewer fees, it funds system maintenance and capital improvements, with charges based on impervious area. Stormwater runoff from developed property uses an extensive and costly infrastructure of pipes and devices to safely discharge water into local rivers, streams, and lakes. Since runoff isn't linked to property value, using property taxes to fund stormwater services is less equitable.



Q: How does pollution from stormwater runoff affect our natural resources?

A:

All stormwater runoff in Needham eventually flows to the Charles River, passing through brooks, streams, wetlands, groundwater, and ponds along the way. Pollution in the runoff contaminates these waterbodies, harming human, pet, and wildlife health, while degrading recreation and the environment. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's biennial Integrated List of Waters identifies waterbodies failing to meet state water quality standards, with stormwater pollutants as the leading cause.

Q: How is the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment calculated?

A:

The Stormwater Mitigation Assessment calculates a property's impervious area using Needham's digital mapping system (GIS). A tiered system is used, based on impervious cover rather than overall property size. Structures and compacted soil reduce absorption, creating impervious surfaces that generate runoff, even with stormwater capture systems, particularly during heavy or prolonged rain.

While the fee may not perfectly reflect runoff from a single storm, impervious cover reliably correlates with long-term runoff, making it a fair metric. The assessment funds improvements to the storm drain system and supports the federally mandated MS4 Permit. All properties within Needham's limits are subject to the fee to ensure town-wide stormwater management.



Q: How is the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment Applied?

Case 1: Single Property/Individual Account

- Impervious Area: 2,600 sq ft

In this scenario, the property falls under the Tier 2 category. It would be assessed \$9.55 quarterly or \$3.18 monthly based on the Water/Sewer billing account type.

Case 2: Single Property/Multiple Accounts

- Impervious Area: 6,200 sq ft

This scenario typically applies to rented or leased properties with separate water and sewer bills for tenants. If the property has 4 accounts, the total impervious area (6,200 sq ft) is divided by the number of accounts, resulting in 1,300 sq ft per account. Each account will then be assessed \$9.55 quarterly or \$3.18 monthly, based on the Water/Sewer billing account type.

Q: Will the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment change from year to year?

A: To meet funding needs for stormwater projects in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), future rate adjustments may be required. Residential and non-residential properties in Needham with 201 or more square feet of impervious surface will see a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment included in their monthly or quarterly Water/Sewer bill.



Q: All the impervious surfaces are graded to keep stormwater on my property. Why do I pay a fee if stormwater doesn't leave my property?



A: All property owners pay a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment based on their impervious area because everyone benefits from a well-maintained stormwater management system. Key benefits include reduced flooding, minimized property damage, protection of critical infrastructure (e.g., electrical, water, wastewater), safer transportation, improved quality of life, cleaner streams, restored habitats, and compliance with Federal and State water quality regulations.

Stormwater management impacts the entire community, providing benefits where people live, work, and play. To meet the obligations of the MS4 permit, funding must come from all property owners. This fee is an investment in Needham's natural resources, supporting water quality improvements that protect public health, wildlife, aquatic life, and the environment.

Q: I have a gravel driveway. Does that count as impervious area?

A: Gravel driveways are considered impervious because the compaction required for usability limits infiltration, causing stormwater to flow off at higher rates than pervious surfaces. The Town follows nationally accepted standards in classifying gravel as impervious, a practice common in many Stormwater Mitigation Assessments and supported by state and federal guidelines.



Q: My property has a swimming pool. Does that count as impervious area?

A: A swimming pool is considered an impervious surface because its structure prevents water from seeping through its walls or bottom. Rainwater remains on the pool's surface rather than absorbing into the ground like pervious surfaces.

Q: Why do I have to pay the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment if we have a detention/retention pond?

A: While the fee based on impervious area may not reflect exact runoff from a single storm, it generally correlates with long-term stormwater runoff and is considered an equitable approach. The Stormwater Mitigation Assessment funds town-wide improvements to the storm drain system and supports the federally mandated MS4 Permit. All properties within Needham town limits are subject to this fee to support stormwater management.



Q: I was required to add stormwater infiltration to my property through the building permit process. Why am I still being charged a Stormwater Mitigation Assessment?

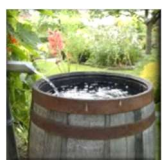
A: The stormwater infiltration required during the building permit process helps mitigate stormwater and reduce phosphorus in runoff through infiltration on private property. Dry wells and infiltration trenches decrease runoff volume, particularly during small, frequent storms. However, properties still produce runoff, especially during heavy rain or extended wet weather. Infiltration systems installed during construction are part of broader stormwater management efforts and are separate from the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment.

Q: How does the Stormwater Utility fee affect non-profit and faith-based organizations?

A: The fee is applicable to all developed parcel owners in Needham including residential, commercial, nonprofit, and tax-exempt properties.



Q: How does green infrastructure such as rain gardens and rain barrels affect my Stormwater Utility Fee?



A: Green infrastructure, like rain gardens and rain barrels, supports stormwater management and promotes environmental sustainability. These tools are part of broader stormwater efforts but separate from the Stormwater Mitigation Assessment. However, land-disturbing structures create impervious areas due to soil compaction, reducing absorption compared to undisturbed soil. Properties with impervious surfaces, even those with stormwater systems, still produce runoff, especially during heavy rain or prolonged wet weather.