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When it rains ...

Star-Telegram

Few Arlington residents or business operators are aware that a modest fee for surface water runoff management is levied on every water bill.

They also probably don't know that this fee doesn't raise nearly enough money to take care of some of the city's more severe water-related problems, such as periodic Rush Creek floods.

The city is proposing to switch from the current \$1.30 a month for residences and up to \$390 a month for businesses to a formula: about \$4.25 a month for every 2,800 square feet of impervious surface. The impervious area of a house would be calculated at the foundation area.

Impervious means that rainwater runs off instead of soaking in -- for example, a rooftop or paved parking lot.

Though no one likes higher fees, this proposal incorporates four important considerations.

First, it bases the fee on the amount of runoff produced at specific properties rather than impose a one-size-fits-all formula. A big house produces more runoff, as does a big business or a big parking lot.

Second, as new development occurs, the fee generates revenue to plan and adjust for more runoff problems.

Third, it makes the primary individuals responsible for growing runoff -- homeowners and businesses -- financially accountable. It's a true economic impact fee.

And finally, it generates a more realistic cash flow to handle runoff problems, such as those occurring in heavy April rains in which more than 100 Arlington households reported flooding. This is not acceptable.

The higher fees would raise about \$22 million every three years to be used to either solve flooding problems or to buy housing in flood-prone areas.

An important question that must be answered as the city conducts hearings this summer on the fee change is whether this proposal is enough to get the job done.