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Stormwater fee nears fruition

Stayton residents could soon see a \$5 fee on utility bill

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By Denise Ruttan • The Stayton Mail • November 17, 2010

Stayton residents could be seeing another new fee, this time for stormwater.

The city's stormwater master plan is moving forward after Oregon's Land Use Board of Appeals supported the city of Stayton last month.

The plan, which Stayton City Council adopted in the spring of 2009, had been appealed to LUBA by the Santiam Water Control District.

The council would have to pass an ordinance for a new fee — \$5 a month for single-family homes — to go forward. It already is wrestling with whether to add another line item to utility bills, a proposed transportation maintenance fee.

"This is a 20-year (stormwater) plan, and at the end of 20 years there will be more to do. It should have been done 20 years ago," said Dan Fleishman, Stayton planning and development director. "If we had established a transportation maintenance fee 20 years ago, our streets would not be in the condition they are in today."

Santiam Water Control District manager Brent Stevenson said the water district thought the city's plan "would not do enough to improve water quality, jeopardizing over 17,000 acres of irrigated agriculture" within the district.

"From the district's standpoint, as we read the plan as submitted, as the city grows it means that the district will have additional stormwater that comes into our system," Stevenson said. "The existing amount of stormwater is causing issues for the functions of our district, and we're concerned with that."

The appeal process took a year and a half; the city had entered into mediated negotiations for a time with the water control district. Legal bills for the case cost the city \$15,000, Fleishman said.

The OK'd stormwater master plan outlines management policies for stormwater, or rainwater that flows off properties. It also adds water quality standards.

"In an urban area, stormwater typically runs off your property and into the street," Fleishman said. "Then it goes down catch basins and through a pipe. For most of the developed part of the city, that ends up in the Salem Ditch or the Stayton Ditch."

Both ditches are owned by Santiam Water Control District. Fleishman said the current plan reduces the city's stormwater going into the ditches.

The stormwater plan calls for approximately \$26 million in improvements to the city's stormwater control system, Fleishman said. About \$7.5 million of that pays for projected growth. About \$18.3 million pays for current needs.

At a time when costs are rising and budgets are tighter every year, city officials say fees or taxes are their only recourse to pay for services like streets and stormwater.

"We can't make the improvements called for in the plan, because we don't have the funding to do it," Fleishman said.

The stormwater master plan suggests a flat \$5 per month fee for single-family homes. The fee for commercial/industrial users and multi-family residences is based on square footage of impervious surface, or areas such as pavement that water cannot soak into. The plan proposes \$2.90

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for every 1,000 square feet of impervious surface.

The city currently draws money for stormwater from its sewer budget, Fleishman said.

If Stayton City Council goes with the plan's recommendation, anybody who gets a utility bill could see a new utility, a third line item for stormwater.

The plan also recommends establishing a system development charge dedicated to stormwater, which would be paid by new development.

Residents can see the effects of the stretched stormwater system in flooded streets after a rainfall or catch basins backing up with water.

Santiam Water Control District did not file an appeal of LUBA's decision with the Oregon Court of Appeals, manager Stevenson said.

"We are continuing to have discussions with the city and are trying to explain and educate them as to our concerns and the implications their stormwater plans have on the district," Stevenson said.



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