

Stormwater plan to cost \$84 million

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A recent road collapse in Madison illustrates the growing need for a city commitment to stormwater management, Metro Council members say. *Josh Anderson/The City Paper*

Already caught in a tight budget cycle, Metro government is expected to get the expensive news today that the city's stormwater infrastructure needs about \$84 million worth of projects in the next five years.

Metro residents and businesses will not escape the stormwater crunch either. A Metro Water Services study is set for release today setting forth a new fee structure to fund a doubling of the annual stormwater management budget to about \$26 million.

The issue of stormwater has become an issue for cities across the country in the last decade as the federal Environmental Protection Agency has begun monitoring the adverse effects of stormwater displaced by both residential and commercial development on municipal sewer systems and the environment.

A draft copy of a Metro Water Services study obtained by *The City Paper* shows Metro will need to raise its stormwater operating budget from about \$12 million annually to \$25.8 million to meet what the document says are federal guidelines and thousands of backlogged service requests.

In addition, the draft report shows \$83.9 million to pay for 1,029 stormwater-related projects will be needed in the next five years, beginning with fiscal year 2009. Sources close to Metro Water Services say that amount may creep up over \$85 million by the time the final draft is delivered today.

It is unclear how the stormwater proposal will fit into an already tight Metro budget. The still relatively new administration of Mayor Karl Dean recently admitted the finances it inherited from former Mayor Bill Purcell's administration may see the city light on projected revenue and short on dollars from cost saving measures heading into the end of the present fiscal year.

Metro Council members who have pushed a commitment to stormwater management in the city said the

issue could no longer be ignored.

“I don’t think we can avoid it any longer,” said District 31 Councilman Parker Toler, a former 36-year veteran employee of the Metro Water Department. “We’ve put it off for probably 25 years. As the city has grown, the problem has grown.”

District 23 Councilwoman Emily Evans pointed to a recent road collapse in the Madison area on Rio Vista Drive, saying it was related to the rust and decay of corrugated metal storm drains under the road.

Evans pointed out the project was designated an “emergency” fix and that it cost Metro about \$650,000.

“There are 8,000 of those in the city,” Evans said. “You can’t ignore it.”

Metro residents and businesses also will be hit with what the report maintains is a modest fee structure for stormwater management compared to other cities in the region.

For example, residential properties with less than 2,000 square feet of “impervious areas” would pay only \$2.49 per month. Larger homes between 2,000 and 6,000 would pay \$4.98 per month. Non-residential areas would pay \$4.98 per month per 3,200 square feet of impervious area.