

City of Allentown Stormwater Utility

Community Engagement Program



*Your guide to resources available to help you protect
Allentown's water resources.*



City of Allentown, Pennsylvania

Department of Public Works

641 South 10th Street

Allentown, Pennsylvania 18103

www.allentownpa.gov/public-works/stormwater

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Why manage stormwater?

Stormwater affects everyone in Allentown! Hard surfaces (also known as impervious surfaces) such as streets, parking lots, driveways, and rooftops prevent rain from naturally soaking into the ground. As a result, it flows into the City's storm drains – carrying with it oil, grease, metals, pesticides, fertilizers, sediment, trash, debris, and pet waste. All of this stormwater, and everything mixed with it, then flows untreated directly into our local streams and the Lehigh River.

Allentown is legally responsible for the quality of water that flows from its storm pipes. The City is subject to a permit under the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law and the federal Clean Water Act that regulates Allentown's storm drainage system. This permit, known as a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit, imposes specific mandates on the City for preventing new pollution and reducing pollution from existing sources.

Excess stormwater also causes flooding if not properly managed. Flooding can threaten public safety, damage property, and further degrade our streams and aquatic habitats. Today, the City manages over 200 miles of stormwater pipe, 8,700 inlets, and 300 storm drain outfalls designed to protect the residents of Allentown.

However, much of this infrastructure is older and in need of maintenance, rehabilitation, or reconstruction. **When it comes to stormwater, being proactive is smart business.** It is nearly three times more expensive to conduct an emergency repair after a storm drain pipe has failed than to prevent failure through pipe rehabilitation.



Stormwater Utility Fee Program

The City of Allentown has been working diligently to develop solutions to our water quality and flood control challenges. A key question for the City is “How do we fund a program that meets regulatory requirements and the City's long-term needs in a way that is fair, sustainable, and transparent?” After considering different options, the City has implemented a stormwater utility fee. A stormwater utility fee is a charge based on the amount of impervious area on a property.

This approach has several advantages. First, it fairly distributes the cost of the City’s stormwater services since the amount of impervious area is directly related to the amount of stormwater that must be managed. This concept is similar to measuring usage and calculating fees for drinking water and sanitary sewer services. Second, the amount of the fee must be linked to demonstrated need and deposited into a special fund that can only be used for stormwater management. Finally, the approach allows the City to provide “credits” to property owners who have implemented practices that reduce the impact of stormwater on the publicly-managed system.

For more information about how the fee is calculated, see the City of Allentown Stormwater Utility Credit Program.

How can I be part of the solution?

There are many ways you can make your property part of the solution to cleaner water! This guide provides information about how Allentown residents and businesses can apply for funding to implement projects that will reduce pollution flowing to our streams and rivers. Read on for more information!



Community Engagement Program

The Community Engagement Program was established by the City as an incentive for property owners to voluntarily implement stormwater stewardship practices that will help the City meet long-term water quality targets. Under the program, the City will pay a portion (and sometimes all) of the cost for a property owner to install approved practices that reduce pollution and flooding.

In addition to knowing that you are helping to improve Allentown's water resources, **some of these practices can reduce your stormwater utility bill if designed and maintained to meet certain standards.** Information about how to apply for this credit program is provided at the end of this guidebook

What projects are eligible for funding assistance?

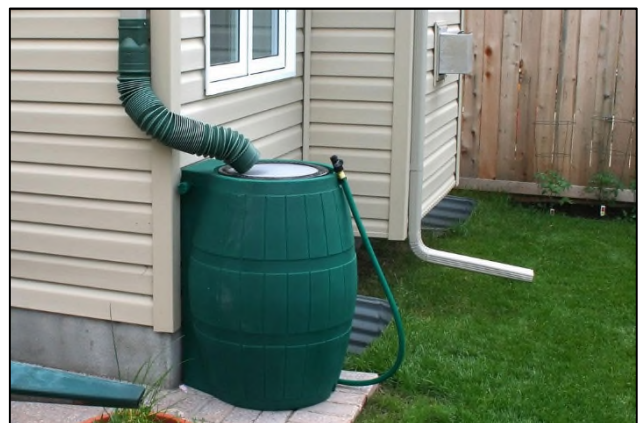
To be eligible for the Community Engagement Program, the project must improve water quality from existing development. The project may not be used to meet regulatory requirements associated with new development or redevelopment.

The following is an overview of typical projects that may be considered for funding. The City will consider other projects on a case-by-case basis. Funding decisions will be made at the discretion of the City based on available funding and the practices needed for the City to meet water quality targets.

Rain Barrels

Rain barrels capture stormwater from roof-tops, which can then be used for outdoor lawn and garden watering.

The City will provide a rain barrel, free of charge, to any property owner. Additional rain barrels may be purchased from the City at-cost. To obtain the rain barrel, the property owner must attend an installation and maintenance workshop. Visit www.allentownpa.gov/public-works/stormwater for the dates and locations of upcoming workshops.



Other Projects

The following projects may be eligible for funding assistance. **Projects selected for funding will receive cost-share from 50% to 100%, depending on the nature of the project and the City's priorities.** Any individual or group may apply, including residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional property owners. Many of the projects are well suited to schools, religious institutions, non-profits, fraternal orders, and community associations. The descriptions below include various limitations on the use of each of these projects. Additional limitations other than those noted may apply.

Rain Gardens/Bioretention

A rain garden (also known as bioretention) involves excavating a portion of the landscape, improving the soil, and creating a temporary ponding area that allows stormwater to soak into the ground. The garden accepts stormwater from a roof, driveway, or parking lot. The garden is planted with native plants that filter out pollutants.

The practice can be installed on residential and non-residential properties provided that adequate space is available. The underlying soil must be tested to ensure that the water will properly soak into the ground.



Cisterns

A cistern is a tank that collects rainwater from a roof in order to keep it from entering the storm drain system. The water can then be used for irrigation purposes. It is similar to a rain barrel, except larger.

Cisterns are most appropriate when the property has significant outdoor watering needs (such as a multi-family residential complex, office complex, or school with playing fields). The practice can be above ground or buried underground.



Permeable Pavers

Permeable pavers allow rainfall to pass through the paver and into an underlying stone reservoir. The water is then allowed to soak slowly into the ground.

The City will consider this practice only in non-residential areas. The practice is only appropriate where traffic is light, such as an overflow parking area. Permeable pavers require an experienced designer and pavement installation contractor and will be subject to specific maintenance requirements.



Photo from Chesapeake Stormwater Network

Conservation Landscaping

Creating mulched beds that are planted with native, perennial plants, shrubs and/or small trees will retain rainfall and adsorb runoff from adjacent turf or paved surfaces.

The practice can be applied to residential and non-residential properties, although the City will set a minimum area for the practice to be eligible for cost-share. A landscape architect or other expert must be consulted to check drainage and choose plants.



Tree Planting

Trees in the urban landscape reduce the amount of stormwater by intercept rainfall, where it is allowed to evaporate back into the atmosphere. Trees also help to moderate stormwater temperature. Native tree species must be used.

The practice can be applied to both residential and non-residential properties. However, professional consultation is required to ensure that chosen species are well adapted to the soil and exposure conditions of the site.



Photo from Ohio Kentucky Indiana Council of Governments

Flow-Through Planters

Flow-through planters are designed for areas with little or no opportunity for stormwater to be infiltrated into the ground. They are filled with gravel, soil, and vegetation. Stormwater is directed into the planter, where it slowly infiltrates. Excess water that cannot be used by the plants is drained to the storm drain system.

The property owner must attend an installation and maintenance workshop prior to approval.



Photo from Philadelphia Water

Pet Waste Stations

Pet waste stations can help to prevent harmful bacteria pollution in our streams by making it convenient for dog walkers to properly dispose of pet waste. Stations can be installed anywhere that people walk their dogs or where pet waste is a problem.



Impervious Surface Removal

Removing impervious surfaces means that more stormwater infiltrates into the ground. Areas to consider for impervious surface removal may include unused or under-used patios, walkways, driveways, or parking areas. If enough impervious area is removed, it may also reduce your stormwater fee.

A minimum amount of impervious surface area must be removed to be eligible for cost-share and the area must be replaced with a surface that will encourage water to soak into the ground.



How does the cost-share program work?

All projects, except for rain barrels, will be installed by City staff or a City-authorized contractor. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the City. The City maintains an approved list of contractors and negotiate rates for the installation of practices. If your project is selected for funding, you may choose an authorized contractor or let the City choose for you.

Applying for the Community Engagement Program is simple! Just following the following three step process.

[1] Fill out a Project Application Form.

The first step is to fill out the Project Application Form. This form is your opportunity to let the City know what you are interested in doing on your property. The City will use this information to assess the feasibility of the project and to conduct a preliminary ranking based on whether the project can be used to meet state and federally mandated water quality requirements, among other considerations. Projects that are determined to be feasible and meet the initial prioritization criteria, will move to the next step.

[2] Meet with City staff to discuss your project.

The second step is to work with City staff to develop a project plan. This will include an on-site visit with City staff to further evaluate the proposal. The City may request additional information from you or bring in an outside consultant. At this time, the City will make a final

determination as to the feasibility of the project and whether it will be eligible for cost-share funding.

[3] Enter into a formal agreement with the City to implement the project.

The third step is to enter into a formal agreement with the City. This agreement will spell out the terms for the City or a City-approved contractor to install the project. The agreement will include items such as the cost-share amount and future maintenance responsibilities.

Maintaining your project.

A property owner must sign a maintenance agreement with the City to move ahead with final project approval. Agreements will differ depending on the specific project. If a project will not be used to meet specific pollutant reduction targets, a typical maintenance agreement will typically be between 5 and 10 years. A practice that is designed for the City to receive pollutant removal credit (and therefore provide against the property owner's stormwater utility fee) will be subject to a 20 year maintenance agreement.

Each property owner must provide an email address and will be reminded about maintenance responsibilities on an annual basis. All practices are also subject to periodic inspections by City staff in accordance with the maintenance agreement. Failure to maintain the practice for the specified lifespan will result in the participant being required to refund all or part of the cost-share amount. The required repayment is based on the amount of funding provided to the participant pro-rated to the remaining lifespan. In the case of the death of the participant, this requirement will be waived. In the case that the property is sold or transferred, it is the responsibility of the person subject to the maintenance agreement to alert the new property owner about the maintenance agreement.

How and when do I apply?

Property owners and groups are encouraged to submit requests by July 31st of each year for consideration in the budget process; however, submissions will be accepted throughout the year. Apply by completing and submitting the Project Application Form found at the back of this guidebook. Projects approved for funding will commence the following fiscal year. If a project is determined to be feasible but is not prioritized for funding, it may be carried over to the next year. The project will be ranked again against the next year's applicants.

Credit Program

Some projects may be eligible for a credit against the stormwater utility fee charged on the specific property conditions. These facilities must document that they achieve a reduction in sediment pollution to be eligible, or other criteria based on current credit policies. A project that is built with Community Engagement Program funding will receive the percent credit that the property owner put into the facility. For example, if the property owner paid 50% of the project, they would be eligible for 50% of the credit. Visit www.allentownpa.gov/public-works/stormwater for the City of Allentown current Stormwater Utility Credit Program manual for additional information.

Project Resources

The following publications provide information about stormwater management project design or things you can do around your home or business to reduce pollution and flooding.

- The Homeowners Guide to Stormwater – How to Develop and Implement a Stormwater Plan for Your Property
www.allentownpa.gov/Portals/0/files/PublicWorks/Compliance/Homeowner's%20Guide%20to%20Stormwater.pdf
- Stormwater Management in Lehigh County
www.allentownpa.gov/Portals/0/files/PublicWorks/Compliance/Stormwater%20Management%20in%20Lehigh%20County.pdf
- Downspout Disconnection
www.allentownpa.gov/Portals/0/files/PublicWorks/Compliance/Downspout%20disconnection%20brochure.pdf

In addition, the following organizations can be contacted to assist you with project ideas.

- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (Stormwater Web Page)
www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Water/CleanWater/StormwaterMgmt/Pages/default.aspx
- Lehigh County Conservation District
<http://www.lehighconservation.org/>

Community Engagement Program Application Form

Applicant Name:

Date:

Property Information:

Owner

Street

City, State, ZIP Code

Property Type

Residential

Mailing Address: (if different from property address)

Street

City, State, ZIP Code

Email Address:

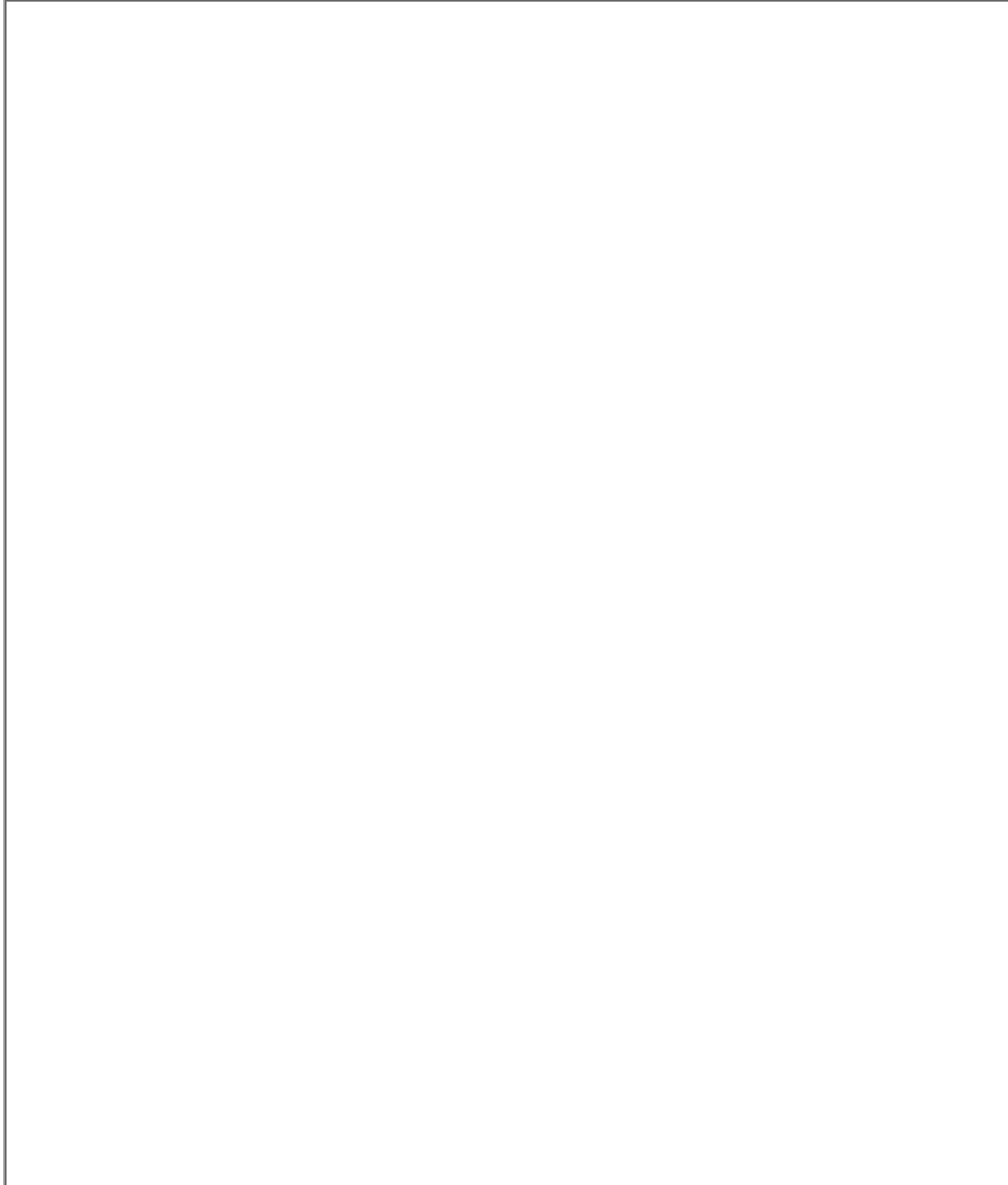
Phone Number:

Project Type: Rain Garden

Provide a general description of your proposed project. What are your goals? Are there specific things about your property that make this a good site for a project?

Project Map:

Draw a sketch of your project. Show the location of the proposed project in relation to buildings (both yours and neighboring properties), impervious areas (such as sidewalks, driveways, patios, etc.), existing vegetation (trees, planting beds, etc.), roads, and any utilities (electrical wire, sanitary sewer, etc.). Indicate general drainage patterns and topography. The sketch does not have to be precise – just enough for City staff to evaluate the potential feasibility of the project.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a hand-drawn sketch of a project map. The box is oriented vertically and occupies the central portion of the page below the instructions.

Are you be willing to design your project in a way that meets the City's pollutant reduction requirements? This may make you eligible for a reduction in your stormwater utility fee but will require a longer-term maintenance agreement (typically 20 years):

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **Maybe**
- ☐ **No**

Applicant Acknowledgement

- ☐ I am the property owner or I am duly authorized to act on behalf of the property owner, I have reviewed the information contained in this application and the supporting documentation, and to the best of my knowledge believe that it is true and accurate.
- ☐ I understand that project selection is solely at the discretion of the City based on the assessed feasibility of the project, City water quality priorities, and the available budget.
- ☐ If selected, I understand that I will be required to enter into a binding agreement with the City that will include a maintenance agreement and that failure to maintain the facility will require me to reimburse the City for all or part of the cost of installation.
- ☐ If selected, I understand that the City may periodically conduct inspections of the facility in accordance with the maintenance agreement.

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Name/Title _____

Return this form and all supporting documentation to:

City of Allentown
Stormwater Utility Fee Credit Application
Department of Public Works
641 South 10th Street
Allentown, Pennsylvania 18103