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City Continues Work to Address Polluted Runoff

Harrisonburg, VA – The City of Harrisonburg continues working to educate and inform its citizens and business community about polluted runoff, stormwater management, regulations, and the responsibility that is shared by the entire community.

In November 2013, City Council adopted the bylaws and approved the creation of the Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC). The committee's eight citizen members have been meeting once per month since February 2014 to provide guidance, oversight, and recommendations to staff and City Council.

"The city has been proactive in our efforts to provide water quality protection for our local streams and rivers," says Thanh Dang, Transportation and Environmental Planning Manager. "Although our stream restoration project along 4,700 linear feet of Blacks Run in Purcell Park may be our largest and most visible project, we continue to do tree plantings at various city owned properties, often in partnership with local businesses, host build your own rain barrel workshops for our residents, and partner with Harrisonburg City Public Schools on educational activities for our students."

The city's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit requires the city to prevent and control polluted runoff through implementing best management practices, which include public education and water quality activities, installing stormwater management practices like bioretention, pervious pavers, rain barrels or cisterns, preserving green space, street sweeping, and properly storing chemicals to prevent spills.

With these new initiatives and requirements come added expenses to the City of Harrisonburg. The SWAC has spent time researching best practices and funding sources from other localities to determine the most efficient model for Harrisonburg. On September 23, the SWAC and city staff presented a draft stormwater utility ordinance to City Council, which can be found at www.HarrisonburgVa.gov/agendas.

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At the November 11 City Council meeting, staff and members of the SWAC will present the proposed fee structure for the stormwater utility fee.

Before the fee is determined and finalized by City Council, the public is invited to learn more about this topic and provide feedback to city staff and City Council.

Two public input meetings will be held in the coming months to continue educating and communicating with our residents regarding this topic.

November 12 from 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. at Thomas Harrison Middle School

December 2 from 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. at Spotswood Elementary School

A public discussion has also been posted to www.BeHeardHarrisonburg.org, where citizens can comment and provide ideas related to Harrisonburg's stormwater utility fee and Stormwater Improvement Plan. The Stormwater Improvement Plan will be a comprehensive plan that identifies drainage areas within the city and prioritizes stormwater projects to correct drainage issues. This will also provide planning for the required Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) pollutant reductions.

It is anticipated that City Council will make a final determination on the proposed ordinance and fee structure in early 2015 and it would become effective at the start of the next fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2015. Development of the Stormwater Improvement Plan is not anticipated to begin until 2015 and will include a separate opportunity for input from the public.

What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff is everywhere and is found on every piece of property in the city. It is the water that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rain events and snow melt. The runoff that is not absorbed into the ground flows into ditches, culverts, catch basins, and storm sewers and typically does not receive any treatment to remove pollutants before entering our local creeks and streams.

Why is stormwater runoff a problem?

As precipitation falls on agricultural and forested land, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into bodies of water. Any type of development creates rooftops and paved areas, also known as impermeable surfaces. When land is developed, vegetation is removed. Without vegetation there is no groundcover or roots to hold the soil in place, help filter pollutants and runoff, or protect the stream during times of flooding.

How is the city going to manage this?

- Administration of the MS4 Permit Program;
- Maintenance and operation of city-owned stormwater drainage and stormwater management facilities;
- Development of a city-wide Stormwater Improvement Plan; and
- Design and construction of stormwater capital projects to meet Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements.

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How can I make a difference and reduce my utility fee?

Unlike other utilities or fees, residents could have the opportunity to receive credits or reductions in the proposed stormwater utility fee. Some things residents could do would be to install a green roof, rain garden or permeable pavement. Residents can also plant trees, use rain barrels, and conserve natural space on their property. A document to guide residents through this process of earning stormwater utility fee credits is being developed and a draft will be available during the public input sessions on **November 12 and December 2**. The city will also consider pre-existing stormwater management practices.

Additional information is available at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/stormwater-utility and www.CleanStream.org.

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