



We Are Columbia

To: Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin and Council
From: Teresa Wilson, City Manager
Date: May 13, 2016
RE: Storm Water Project List / Options for Discussion

Staff has been asked to review the storm water Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) list for purposes of considering options for advancing storm water projects more aggressively via the issuance of a storm water bond. As part of the review, staff was asked to consider a \$2.00 increase per equivalent residential unit to the storm water fee, which will result in an estimated \$2M in additional storm water revenues. The current fee is \$6.80 per equivalent residential unit.

There are many factors that must be considered when evaluating the benefits of a storm water bond. Staff has determined that a bond is likely feasible based on the stability of the storm water fund and history associated with the revenues/expenses. The City implemented a storm water utility in 2001, after a citizen committee worked alongside City staff to evaluate the possibility. The storm water utility fee is charged to every property inside the City limits and is billed through the City's water/sewer billing process. Prior to the implementation of a storm water fee, the City utilized General Fund money to cover storm water related expenses. Since its implementation, the City has had a dedicated funding source for storm water activities and has elected to move projects forward with cash on hand.

Current revenues from the storm water fund generate approximately \$7.1M annually. Those revenues are used to address storm water needs throughout the City by designing and constructing storm water improvements, maintaining the City's existing storm water system and supporting City operations involved in those activities. The City has utilized Storm Water fund balance over the past two years to fund storm water CIP projects in excess of what the annual revenues support.

The October floods resulted in significant damage within portions of the City as well as excessive debris in waterways throughout the flood impacted areas. The City is working with multiple agencies to identify funding to use alongside City resources to help address the drainage needs within the right of way, on City easements or along public waterways. Such agencies include South Carolina Emergency Management Division, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Natural Resources, and the Corps of Engineers. Those efforts are moving forward and staff anticipates an agreement will be executed with Natural Resources Conservation Service in the near future for purposes of addressing water way debris in several locations along Penn Branch, Wildcat Creek, Smith Branch and Rocky Branch. Many of those areas (Penn Branch and Wildcat Creek) are tributaries along Gills Creek; however, Natural Resources Conservation Service funds cannot be used on Gills Creek itself. The City is seeking other funding options for Gills Creek. The city is also using storm water fund balance to cover repairs to drainage



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system required as a result of damage caused by the flood. The Federal Emergency Management Agency should provide reimbursement for 75% of those expenses.

Staff uses the following prioritization list as a guide when identifying storm water projects to recommend for consideration in the CIP list. In addition to this list, staff must consider the amount of available funding that can be dedicated to each year's CIP when making recommendations.

1. Danger to human life and otherwise hazardous to public health
2. Flooding which causes damage or negatively impacts transportation system and/or public utilities
3. Flood elevations where water depth exceeds first floor elevation
4. Flood elevations where water depth causes some structural damage but does not exceed first floor elevation
5. Flooding or Runoff which causes Significant Sedimentation Problems
6. Major Yard and Lot Flooding which causes significant erosion and sedimentation problems
7. Minor Yard and Lot Flooding with erosion problems
8. Major Yard and Lot Flooding
9. Minor Yard and Lot Flooding

This year has been unusually challenging to our city in many ways, to include the ability of staff to move drainage projects forward to design / construction. City staff has been focused on responding to an increased level of citizen calls and a different type of work load demands as a result of the flood. It is important to continue to focus efforts on recovery while at the same time, move projects forward. Staffing levels are such that an immediate and significant increase in resources that result in additional drainage projects will be difficult to manage without additional staffing focused on contracting and project management, obtaining necessary permits, easement acquisition, procurement/bidding activities, and inspection/construction management activities etc.

Rather than rush through this discussion, staff requests ample time be allowed to evaluate the option of a storm water utility rate increase as well as the issuance of a storm water bond. There are several factors that lead to that recommendation:

- the need to establish a project list for consideration of a bond using the already identified prioritization but also considering
 - the results of past studies (Rocky Branch Watershed Urban Study by AMEC dated June 2012, Rocky Branch Watershed Study by PB America's Inc. dated October 2007, Gregg Street Basin Master Plan by Woolpert dated January 2005, Penn Branch Bank Stabilization Summary Report by Brown and Caldwell dated June 2014, Penn Branch



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- Rehabilitation and Restoration Project by Florence and Hutcheson dated 2012, Mapping and Analysis of the Shandon-Rosewood Watershed and Associated Storm Drainage Collection System Network by Cox and Dinkins dated May 2011, Drainage Pilot Study for Shandon Neighborhood by Fuss & O'Neill dated January 2012, and Drainage Study and Analysis Shandon/Rosewood Drainage Area by Cox and Dinkins dated October 2014);
- the results of studies currently being conducted (Harlem Heights Drainage Study and Martin Luther King Study);
 - the result of the master plans for Gills Creek Watershed, Rocky Branch Watershed and Smith Branch Watershed; and
 - past CIP lists to determine if there are any large projects identified but not currently on the five year CIP list that would be pulled forward on the priority list if ample funding were made available.
- The challenges associated with moving this effort forward within a short window to meet budget hearings is difficult at best. Work associated with this effort will be more comprehensive if ample time is allotted to the evaluation of a rate increase and/or bond.
 - The current staffing levels and workload demands are not conducive to an increased workload. Staff needs time to evaluate the internal demands associated with a heightened level of drainage projects to properly plan for such to ensure success of the effort.
 - Staff is aggressively seeking funding from external agencies to address needs related to the flood which will address many of the current priority areas. Ample time should be allowed for the fruits of that effort to be recognized.