

**Stormwater Fee Guidance Manual**  
**City of Hamilton**  
**April 2025**

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# 1. Introduction

This Stormwater Fee Guidance Manual is intended to provide general information and assistance associated with the stormwater charge, credit application process, and reassessment process. This manual is not intended to be all-inclusive, and refinements are anticipated as the program matures.

The City of Hamilton will implement a stormwater fee starting in April 2026. This fee will be a more fair and equitable way for property owners to pay for stormwater services in Hamilton compared to the current approach. With the stormwater fee, property owners will be charged based on the load (or use) they place on the stormwater system. When this new fee is implemented, the stormwater fee will be broken out as a separate line item on utility bills.

This new stormwater fee will:

- Ensure the City adheres to Ontario Regulation 588/17: Asset Management Planning for Municipal Infrastructure, which requires municipalities to have sustainable funding mechanisms for key assets.
- Be a dedicated funding source for projects to reduce flooding, remove stormwater from the combined sewer system, improve the quality of natural water bodies that receive stormwater runoff, and adapt to a changing climate.
- Support projects within the City of Hamilton's Watershed Action Plan to improve our watersheds and the Hamilton Harbour conditions.

Stormwater is water that comes from rain and melted snow that flows over land and into storm drains, ditches, creeks and lakes. In natural landscapes, stormwater is soaked up like a sponge, which then nourishes plants and slowly replenishes creeks, lakes, wetlands and aquifers.

Hard (or impervious) surfaces such as asphalt, concrete and rooftops prevent stormwater from naturally soaking into the ground. Instead, the water runs quickly into storm drains, ditches, and sewer systems, and then ultimately to our creeks and lakes. These hard surface areas create more stormwater runoff, and carry more pollutants, such as oil, sediment, and garbage into creeks and lakes.

## Stormwater Incentive Program

Like other municipalities that have implemented similar stormwater fees the City will also introduce a stormwater incentive program. Hamilton's Stormwater Incentive Program encourages responsible stormwater management while considering different property types and their impact on the environment and the City's stormwater system. Our 'made in Hamilton' Stormwater Incentive Program includes a multi-stream credit program for industrial, commercial, institutional, agricultural and multi-residential properties with seven or more:

- **Stormwater Infrastructure Credit:** Property owners can get up to a 50% credit off their stormwater fee if they reduce the amount or improve the quality of stormwater that runs off their property. Owners must show that they have installed and maintained these measures.
- **Harbourfront Credit:** Properties using private pipes to send stormwater directly to Lake Ontario can get up to a 90% credit. These properties must meet Provincial regulations related to discharging to the natural environment, and they need to prove that the discharge does not enter the City's stormwater system.

- **Green Space Credit:** Farms, parks, and similar properties without a direct connection to the City's stormwater system can qualify if their stormwater runoff goes to large green spaces. This credit will be automatically applied to the stormwater fee, and the amount of the credit will be based on the ratio of hard (or impervious) surfaces to green space (permeable).

The Green Space Credit will be applied automatically to eligible properties. The application process for the Stormwater Management Infrastructure Credit and the Hamilton Harbour Discharge Credit are described in this manual.

### **Residential Incentive Program:**

Single-family residential and multi-residential properties with six or less units will have access to the Rain Ready Hamilton Program. The program provides a rebate for installation of landscape features that address stormwater management. The program includes educational and advisory services for implementing stormwater management measures that support the natural water balance and natural environment. This Rain Ready program will be administered by Green Venture, an environmental education not-for-profit organization in Hamilton, and funded by the City of Hamilton. Visit [www.greenventure.ca/rain\\_ready\\_rebate](http://www.greenventure.ca/rain_ready_rebate) to learn more about the program and sign up for upcoming Rain Ready events.

## 2. Stormwater Fee

A property's stormwater fee is determined according to the formula outlined below.

**Stormwater fee = # billing units x rate per billing unit x credit reduction (where applicable)**

The calculation for billing units for each property type is described in Section 2.1 of this Guide. For reference, each house (i.e. single-family detached residence) is charged one billing unit. The determination of a billing unit was based on the average impervious area of a single family detached residence, which is 291 m<sup>2</sup>.

The rate is determined annually by Council. Credits, which provide a reduction in a property's stormwater fee, are described in Sections 3 and 4.

### 2.1 Determining the Number of Billing Units

#### Residential Properties ≤ 6 Units

The following table describes how billing units are assigned to different residential types with six or fewer dwelling units.

**Table 1: Number of Billing Units per Residential Type**

Property Type	Billing Units per Dwelling Unit
Detached homes with or without additional dwelling unit	1
Semi-detached homes, townhomes, duplexes	0.5
Triplex to six-plex	0.3

#### Residential Properties (Seven or more units and Mixed-Use Properties)

Any structures with six or fewer dwelling units would be charged according to Table 1. Any buildings with seven or more units and/or non-residential use and private impervious area (e.g. roads, parking areas, common areas) would be charged 1 billing unit for every 291 m<sup>2</sup> of impervious area. The water surface associated with outdoor pools is not included as impervious area.

#### All Other Properties (Industrial, Commercial, Institutional, Agricultural)

Any buildings and private impervious area (e.g. roads, parking areas, walkways) would be charged 1 billing unit for every 291 m<sup>2</sup> of impervious area.



The adjacent figure shows a multi-residential property where the impervious area has been determined and measured as 1,470 m<sup>2</sup>. This equates to 5.1 billing units (1,470 m<sup>2</sup>/291m<sup>2</sup>). If the annual rate per billing unit (BU) is \$200.75 then the property's charge would be 5.1 x \$200.75 or \$1,024. If the property owner successfully applied for a Stormwater Infrastructure Credit, then that would reduce the proposed stormwater fee.

**Figure 1: Example Impervious Area Measurement**

### General Information for All Properties

The minimum charge for any property larger than 85 sq meters of impervious area is considered one billing unit. Any parcel with less than 85 sq metres of impervious area (e.g., 0.3 billing units) will not be charged a stormwater fee.

## 2.2 New Development

All new development will be required to submit a form with relevant information to determine its stormwater fee. The form will be sent to all building permit applicants and can be found on [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee).

The form can be submitted through the following channels:

- online at: [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee)
- by email to: [StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca](mailto:StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca) in digital (PDF) format
- by mail to:  
Project Manager, Stormwater Incentive Program  
700 Woodward Avenue  
Administration Building  
Hamilton, ON L8H 6B4

## 3. Stormwater Incentive Program Overview

### 3.1 Objective

The key objective of the Stormwater Incentive Program is to recognize and reward property owners who have implemented and maintained measures that reduce the quantity or improve the quality of stormwater that runs off their property. Credits are an on-going reduction in a property's stormwater fee for as long as the measure is in place and maintained, make up a major part of the City's Stormwater Incentive Program. All non-residential properties (including mixed-use properties) and multi-residential buildings/complexes with seven or more units are eligible for the credit program. There are three available credit streams:

1. Green Space Credit
2. Harbourfront Credit
3. Stormwater Infrastructure Credit

A property is only eligible for one credit stream.

Individual homes and other residential properties with six or less units are not eligible for the credit program, but the City has a subsidy program called Rain Ready Hamilton available for these properties. More information about these rebates can be found at [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee).

### 3.2 Green Space Credit

Eligible properties do not apply for the Green Space Credit. The credit be automatically applied to any property that meets all the following criteria:

- Any non-residential, mixed use and/or multi-residential property with seven or more units. This may include farms.
- Does not have a **direct** discharge connection to City's stormwater infrastructure, which includes sewers, ditches and watercourses.
- All runoff from impervious area drains to green space.
- There must be sufficient green space to absorb the run-off from the impervious area.
- More than 40% of the property must be covered by green space.

The following formula outlines how a fee is calculated with the Green Space Credit.

**Fee with Green Space Credit = # of base billing units x rate per billing unit x (% of property that is impervious x 28%)**

Note that even with the Green Space Credit, a property is charged one billing unit per single family detached dwelling.

#### Example 1:

A farm with a residence on a property of 20 hectares with 1.6 hectares (or 16,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of impervious area.

% of property that is impervious =  $1.6/20$  or 8%

# of base billing units =  $16,000\text{m}^2/291\text{m}^2 = 55$  billing units

Revised billing units with green space credit =  $55 \times 8\% \times 28\% = 1.23$

Assuming the rate per billing unit is \$200.75, the fee for this property with the green space credit is  $1 \times \$200.75 = \$246.92$ .

### 3.3 Harbourfront Credit

Any property that discharges a portion of its stormwater runoff directly to the harbour and not through City infrastructure (which includes ditches, sewers and watercourses) is eligible for the Harbourfront Credit.

The credit formula is outlined below.

**Credit (%) = 90% x % of property run-off that drains to the harbour directly or through private pipes**

Property owners must apply for the Harbourfront Credit. Stormwater credits are effective for a maximum term of five (5) years from the date of approval, subject to compliance with terms and conditions, and may be renewed for subsequent five (5)-year terms.

The application form for the Harbourfront Credit can be found on the City's website at [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee). The form outlines the information that must be provided to apply for the credit which includes:

- Property owner/credit applicant contact information
- Property address
- Percentage of on-site stormwater runoff that is conveyed directly to Lake Ontario without the utilization of municipal infrastructure
- Supporting drawings and calculations
- Confirmation that any infrastructure used to direct stormwater runoff to Lake Ontario is maintained and in good working order

A renewal must be applied for before a credit expires. The renewal form can be found on the City's website. The form must be submitted with supporting documentation that the stormwater runoff continues to drain directly to Lake Ontario, any required maintenance to on-site infrastructure has been completed, and the on-site drainage infrastructure is in good working order.

Credit application and renewal forms can be submitted directly on the City's website, can be sent by email to [StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca](mailto:StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca) or can be mailed to the Project Manager, Stormwater Incentive Program at the City.

### 3.4 Stormwater Infrastructure Credit

The Stormwater Infrastructure Credit Program was designed to encourage and facilitate the implementation of on-site stormwater management measures that reduce the quantity or improve the quality of stormwater that runs off a site. The Stormwater Infrastructure Program is available to non-residential, mixed use, and multi-residential properties with greater than six dwelling units within Hamilton. Drainage to any stormwater management facility that is maintained by the City of Hamilton is not eligible for a credit.

Property owners or tenants must apply for stormwater infrastructure credits. Stormwater infrastructure credits are effective for a maximum term of five (5) years from the date of approval,



subject to compliance with terms and conditions, and may be renewed for subsequent five (5)-year terms.

The credit application form can be submitted online, sent via email or sent by regular mail. The form outlines the information that must be provided to apply for the credit which includes:

- Property owner/credit applicant contact information
- Property address
- Description of stormwater measures
- Supporting drawings and calculations
- Maintenance plan for the stormwater measures

While the initial credit application is focused on demonstrating the design and performance of facilities and pollution prevention practices, the renewal application is focused on demonstrating that these are properly maintained and are in a state of good repair.

If credit-approved measures are added, expanded, reduced, deleted or in any way modified such that their level of performance relative to their approved credit amount has changed, credit holders must notify the City and update their credit application accordingly. Stormwater infrastructure credits are available in each of four categories in the table below, which align with the overarching objectives of the City's stormwater program.

**Table 2: Stormwater Infrastructure Credit Categories**

Objective	Maximum Credit Amount Per Objective*	Description
Slow it down	40%	Percent reduction of the 100-year storm post-development flow to pre-development conditions of the site
Clean it up	25%	Remove ammonia, sediment, and phosphorous
Soak it up	40%	Percent capture of first 28 mm of rainfall during a single rainfall event
Prevent it first	15%	Develop and implement a pollution prevention plan (e.g. salt management plan, pesticide/manure management, sweeping, spill response plan, public education, etc.)

**\*Properties can receive a maximum credit of 50% if stormwater management practices can meet more than one objective.**

The Stormwater Infrastructure Credit cannot exceed more than 50% on any individual property or stormwater account holder. The 50% maximum reflects the maximum proportion of the City's stormwater program in terms of cost that may be beneficially impacted by on-site facilities. The balance of the City's program requires sustainable funding for general repair/replacement of existing infrastructure/conveyance regardless of facilities that may be in place on private and public lands.

The Stormwater Infrastructure Credit is primarily performance-based, rather than technology-based. This means that credits are awarded based on how well a measure achieves the defined performance criteria (as described in Table 2). Performance-based programs encourage creativity, provide flexibility and enable property owners to pursue technologies best suited for their properties and particular needs, as permitted by existing by-laws, codes, and regulations.

The City recognizes that some property owners may be unfamiliar with measures that may be credit eligible. The following is a sample list of common practices.

- Rainwater cisterns/rainwater re-use systems
- Constructed wetlands
- Stormwater ponds
- Rain gardens/bioretentation systems
- Infiltration galleries
- Roof gardens/green roofs
- Blue roofs
- Oil/grit separators
- Enhanced vegetative swales
- Street sweeping programs

- Pollution prevention plans
- Salt management plans

Many of the practices listed above could be eligible for more than one type of credit. For example, the City recognizes that a measure may provide both peak flow reduction and runoff volume reduction. In such cases, credits may be awarded for both categories. The cumulative maximum credit available to any property is 50%.

Eligibility of a measure is contingent on the Applicant providing documentation on the design and performance, as necessary, for the initial credit application. For subsequent credit renewals, proof is required documenting ongoing maintenance through self-certification reports, maintenance records, photographs, receipts, invoices and/or possibly City inspections. If the approved facility is not functioning as intended or has been substantially altered or removed for any reason, the applicable credit(s) may be cancelled.

## 4. Credit Application Process

### 4.1 Application Types

Below describes the types of credit applications that are included in the Stormwater Incentive Program.

1. **Stormwater Infrastructure Credit Application** - This form is exclusively for applying for the Stormwater Infrastructure Credit. It is applicable to institutional, commercial, industrial, and multi-residential properties with seven or more units. Property owners must demonstrate that they have implemented and maintained eligible stormwater management measures. This form is also used to renew a credit within five years of originally receiving the credit.
2. **Harbourfront Credit Application** - This form is exclusively for institutional, commercial, industrial, and multi-residential properties with seven or more units seeking a stormwater credit when stormwater runoff from the property is discharged into Lake Ontario without utilizing natural or engineered municipal infrastructure. This form is also used to renew a credit within five years of originally receiving the credit.

In all cases, an application package consisting of a completed application form, and all required supporting documentation must be submitted. Full supporting documentation requirements are outlined on the application forms.

The Applicant is solely responsible for costs incurred in the preparation of the required documentation and/or the submission of the credit application. There is currently no application fee.

### 4.2 Application Forms

All forms must be completed in their entirety by the Applicant as part of the process of applying for stormwater credits.

The forms can be submitted through the following channels:

- online at: [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee)
- by email to: [StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca](mailto:StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca) in digital (PDF) format,
- by mail to:  
Project Manager, Stormwater Incentive Program  
700 Woodward Avenue  
Administration Building  
Hamilton, ON L8H 6B4

### 4.3 Application Review Process

The review of an application is a two-step process:

1. Assessment for application completeness; and
2. Technical review of application.

The City will notify the Applicant of receipt of an application and will conduct an initial screening to ensure application completeness. Applicants may be requested to provide additional information. An application is deemed complete when the Applicant has filled out all appropriate sections of the application form and submitted the relevant reports and documentation which support how the stormwater facilities/practices achieve the credits. If an Applicant fails to provide the necessary information, the application will be rejected, and additional information will be requested.

Complete applications will be registered, and the technical review will begin. The City may conduct a site inspection, if necessary, to verify submitted information. Credit approval may be awarded or additional information or clarification on matters from the Applicant may be requested during this time. The Applicant will be notified if the credit has been approved or not.

#### **4.4 Effective Date of Approved Credit**

Approved credits will be applied to stormwater fee on billing cycles following the approval of the credit for any measures that are already implemented.

For credit applications submitted in advance of construction or implementation of facilities, such as during the land development approval process (in conjunction with the stormwater management and site servicing review by City staff) or in advance of a proposed site retrofit or re-development, a credit may be conditionally pre-approved. A credit in this case will become effective upon demonstration by the Applicant or property owner or operator to the satisfaction of the City that the pre-approved facilities have been constructed and/or implemented and are in service.

#### **4.5 Stormwater Charges Billed while Credit Application is Under Review**

A pending credit application shall not constitute a valid reason for non-payment of the currently-assessed stormwater charge. Any stormwater charge that is billed during the credit application review process must be paid in full.

#### **4.6 Terms and Conditions of Credit Approval**

Any measures are expected to be operating and performing, as designed, for the entire term that the credit is applied. If it is found that the measure is not in operation or is not performing at the level at which the credit is being granted, then the credit can be suspended.

#### **4.7 Credit Update Application**

The stormwater account holder is responsible for notifying the City in writing if onsite facilities or practices undergo a material change, meaning an alteration, improvement, deficiency, or failure that impacts how the facility operates and was not expressly anticipated and addressed by the parties in the credit application process. Material changes may include actions taken by the property owner, a lack of action on the property owner's behalf and/or external factors unrelated to the property owner.

No later than three (3) months after any material change has been undertaken or occurs, the account holder must submit a credit update application to the City. Late submission of the application may result in a discontinuance of the credit amount. The City shall have full and absolute discretion to adjust (increase or decrease) the credit amount accordingly.

## 4.8 Credit Renewal Application

Approved credits are valid for five (5) years. Credit holders are required to submit a completed credit renewal application at least three (3) months prior to the expiration date should they wish to seek a renewal of their existing stormwater credits without experiencing a gap in the credit approval. Applications received after this date may not be processed and approved in time before the previously approved credit expires. In such circumstances, the stormwater account holder will not receive credit towards the stormwater charge during the period in which the previously approved credit has expired and the renewal application has not yet been reviewed and approved.

The approved credit renewal shall be effective upon the expiration date of the original credit, or as otherwise determined by the City. In general, credit holders wishing to renew their credit shall provide evidence that acceptable operation and maintenance practices have taken place and that any facilities are in a state of good repair and continue to function at the level for which the credit is granted. Details on supporting documentation requirements for Credit Renewal Applications are provided on the application forms.

## 5. Site Inspections

### 5.1 Inspections During Application Review

As part of the credit application review process, the City may contact the Applicant with a requested date to conduct a site inspection to verify that any constructed facilities are in conformance with the documentation provided and that these measures are operating in accordance with documented performance criteria. The results of an inspection will be taken into consideration as part of the application review.

If the Applicant fails to respond to the City by telephone, email or in writing to coordinate a site inspection date within thirty (30) business days, the credit application will be considered closed. The inspection must proceed within sixty (60) business days of the initial request. If the Applicant is unable to provide a date to facilitate the inspection within this time frame, the credit application will be considered closed.

### 5.2 Compliance Inspections

Each Applicant that has received a credit has the responsibility to regularly inspect, maintain and repair the stormwater management facility to ensure that it is functioning as designed and to the level for which a credit has been granted.

In addition, the City reserves the right to conduct site inspections and may, at any reasonable time, enter and inspect any property. The intent of the inspections will be to assess whether the facility is being maintained as per the approved credit documentation. Based on the results of a site inspection, credits may be suspended, reduced or cancelled.

At any point during the term of a credit, the City may contact the credit holder with a requested date to conduct the site inspection. City staff performing inspections may request to see operation and maintenance documents which credit holders are required to retain for a minimum of four (4) years. The inspection will result in a grading of either “passed”, “suspended”, or “failed”. Sites that are “suspended” will be given a sixty (60) business day period to take remedial action to bring their property up to a passing standard. Failure to take required actions within sixty (60) business days will result in a failed inspection and termination of the credit.

If the credit holder fails to respond to the City by telephone, email or in writing regarding the site inspection request within thirty (30) business days, the credit will be cancelled. If the credit holder wishes to request an alternate inspection date, it must be within thirty (30) business days of the initial date requested by the City. The inspection must proceed within sixty (60) business days of the initial request. If the credit holder is unable to provide a date to facilitate the inspection within this time frame, then the inspection will be considered failed and the credit will be cancelled.

The City reserves the right to conduct detailed field measurements and monitoring to verify performance.

## 6. Credit Suspension, Reduction or Cancellation

The stormwater credit may be suspended, reduced or cancelled by the City under the following circumstances:

1. Failure of the Applicant (or applicable property owner) to make stormwater charge payments as billed by the City;
2. Submission of inaccurate or false information by the Applicant (or applicable property owner);
3. Failure of the measure to operate or meet the performance criteria as documented in the Applicant's approved credit submission, or
4. Failure to submit a complete a Stormwater Infrastructure Credit update or renewal application within the required timeframe.
5. Failure of an applicable property owner to remain in good financial standing with the City.

### **Suspension**

If a property fails inspection, the credit may be suspended and the stormwater account holder will have sixty (60) business days to repair, clean, fix, or otherwise correct deficiencies, and schedule an inspection with the City. If the account holder fails to demonstrate action and reasonable progress to correct the deficiencies and schedule a re-inspection within sixty (60) business days, the credit will be cancelled. Suspension period extensions may be granted at the discretion of the City, and the credit applicant will be notified in writing of any suspension period extensions.

### **Re-Assessment**

A reduction or cancellation of a stormwater credit may be appealed by the Applicant in writing to the City by the following the reassessment process. The decision of the City shall be considered final and binding.



## 7. Reassessments

From time to time, properties may be redeveloped or be changed, which may impact the property's stormwater fee and/or associated credits. Many of these changes will be picked up in the City's permitting process and the property's stormwater fee will be reevaluated accordingly. If a property has a change that would affect the calculated stormwater fee but a building permit wasn't required (e.g., removal of asphalt), then the property owner or rate payer may apply for a fee reassessment.

If a rate payer believes that any of the following conditions apply to them with respect to the determination of their stormwater charge, then they can submit a reassessment request:

1. Your property has been incorrectly considered a residential property;
2. Your property has been incorrectly considered a multi-residential property (seven or more units), institutional, commercial or industrial property;
3. Your property has been considered with the incorrect number of residential units;
4. The area of impervious surface on your property has been incorrectly determined or has recently changed.
5. You have applied for a credit and your credit has been incorrectly calculated, reduced, or cancelled.

An appeal can be submitted through the following channels:

- online at: [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee)
- by email to: [StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca](mailto:StormwaterIncentives@hamilton.ca) in digital (PDF) format,
- by mail to:  
Project Manager, Stormwater Incentive Program  
700 Woodward Avenue  
Administration Building  
Hamilton, ON L8H 6B4

The forms are available at [www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee](http://www.hamilton.ca/StormwaterFee).