

Date: September 9, 2024

To: **Mayor and Council.**

Name and title: Deanna Wasnik, Director of Planning & Development

Subject: Stormwater Infrastructure Fund Public Engagement Results

Attachment(s): Appendix A: Summary of Survey Responses  
Powerpoint Presentation

**Recommendation(s):**

That Council CONSIDERS the options 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 as described in the report dated September 9, 2024 from the Director of Planning and Development, titled “Stormwater Infrastructure Fund Public Engagement Results”.

**Purpose:**

For Council information about the results of the Stormwater Infrastructure Fund public engagement and seeking Council’s direction on next steps towards implementing a dedicated fund.

**Strategic Priorities:**

Continue to improve processes and practices to support effective and efficient service delivery and implement local government actions that advance environmental protection including climate change and adaptation.

**Background:**

In 2021, Council received for information, the City’s new Integrated Stormwater Management Plan (ISMP). Within the plan are key action items to move the City towards sustainable service delivery for stormwater management. One of the top actions in the plan is to create a dedicated fund for stormwater infrastructure. Stormwater infrastructure was also identified as being in the top three most important to fund by the community during budget consultations in 2023. On Feb 26, 2024, Council was provided an update on progress with the ISMP action items, including plans for public engagement for a dedicated fund during the spring/summer of this year.

Currently the stormwater system is mostly paid for using property taxes. But since this money isn't set aside just for stormwater, it has to compete for funding along with other services like parks, sidewalks, and city facilities every year. Creating dedicated stormwater funding will ensure a consistent source of money reserved solely for stormwater infrastructure. With this approach, the City can better manage the community’s stormwater needs, including maintenance, repairs, and replacements, and ensure there's enough funding available when it is needed.

## Discussion:

### Method and Duration of Consultation

An online survey was available to the public from May 21<sup>st</sup> to June 28<sup>th</sup> and then re-opened for 7 days on July 22<sup>nd</sup> after the Toronto flood was in the media. To provide more information about stormwater management and to promote the online survey, Administration advertised through the City's website and social media pages; Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn. Further to this, there were ads on CKPG TV, a segment on the CKPG Today show, an ad in the Prince George Citizen, ads on the radio, a media release, 2 digital newsletters, and a pop-up information session at Pine Centre Mall. An FAQ was created and added to the website based on comments from Facebook posts.

There were 145,402 impressions across the 4 social media platforms (the number of times our content entered a persons' screen), 1,650+ web page views and 314 survey respondents.

### Survey Summary

The first question asks which funding option is preferred. The most preferred is Option 4, a utility fee based on a sampling of actual measured hard surface for all residential types that is then applied to all property types, residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional. Respondents chose their preferred option because it seemed the most fair.

Many respondents are interested in having a utility fee incentive program where they can make an effort to reduce the amount of stormwater that enters the system from their properties. Most were interested in rain barrels and rain gardens as a way to do this.

Many of the survey respondents were in favour of having a fee variance based on the level of service; whether a property has a ditch to manage stormwater versus curb, gutter, and catchbasins.

There were 219 comments entered by survey respondents. These comments were grouped into key themes:

- Environmental and Sustainability Initiatives
- Infrastructure and Maintenance
- Support for Rain Barrels and Incentives
- Alternative Solutions and Strategies
- Property Characteristics and Existing Solutions
- City Planning and Regulations
- Complexity and Implementation Concerns
- Fairness and Equity
- Taxation and Financial Burden

More details of the survey responses can be found in the attached Appendix "A".

## Next Steps:

Based on what we've heard in the survey, social media, and interactions with the community, Administration is seeking Council's direction on one of the following five options:

1. **Option 1** – create a dedicated levy on property taxes,
2. **Option 2** – create a utility fee based on property type and tiered by size,
3. **Option 3** – create a utility fee based on the zoning's maximum site coverage to determine the amount of allowed hard surface on a property,
4. **Option 4** – create a utility fee based on the actual measurement of the hard surface area in a sampling of all types of residential properties,
5. **Option 5** – do not create a dedicated fund and continue to include stormwater related expenses within the general tax levy, where it will need to compete with other City service categories.

### Summary and conclusion:

One of the top priority actions from the Integrated Stormwater Management Plan (ISMP) is to create a dedicated fund to work towards a sustainable stormwater service now and into the future. Public engagement happened over the summer in a variety of ways. The majority of survey respondents chose Option 4 as their preferred method of collecting stormwater infrastructure fees. Administration is seeking direction on next steps in the implementation of a dedicated fund.

### Respectfully submitted:

Deanna Wasnik, Director of Planning & Development

Prepared by: Kristy Bobbie, Manager Asset Management

### Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2024/09/25

# STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT RESULTS



# Presentation Outline

- How we Informed
- Key Messages
- Survey Results
- What's Next

# How we informed



**24** social media posts  
across **4** platforms (145,402 impressions)



**57** commercials  
on tv

**30** radio ads  
on **2** stations

**1** print ad in the  
Prince George Citizen



**2** digital  
newsletters

**1,650+** web page  
views



**Pop-up  
information  
session**  
at Pine Centre mall



**3** informational  
posters  
created



Media release  
sent to over 900  
subscribers

Stormwater funding survey:  
May 23 to July 26, 2024

**314** survey  
responses



## Dedicated stormwater funding

In simple terms, stormwater management is mostly paid for using property taxes. But since this money isn't set aside just for stormwater, it has to fight for funding along with other things like parks, sidewalks, and city facilities every year.

Creating dedicated stormwater funding will ensure a consistent flow of money reserved solely for stormwater projects. With this approach, we can better manage our stormwater needs, including maintenance, repairs, and upgrades, and ensure there's enough funding available whenever it's needed.

Canadian municipalities spend an average of \$4.2 million per year to operate and maintain their stormwater systems, where Prince George only spends about \$1.8 million per year despite having the most stormwater infrastructure per capita.

# Key Messages

Dedicated funds for stormwater management are a relatively new thing in Canada...

### Municipalities in Canada with dedicated stormwater funding



# Maintaining our stormwater system



# Key Messages

Prince George's stormwater system consists of a massive network of pipes, drains, and other infrastructure that works together to safely divert water.



**440 km**  
of below-ground storm sewer pipe



**696 km**  
of ditches



**971**  
culverts



**6,293**  
catch basins



**6**  
stormwater pump stations



**4,304**  
maintenance holes



**34**  
ponds and wetlands

## Stormwater maintenance since 2022



Renewed outfall



Crews working to renew a pond



Renewed catch basin

- **2.3 km** of new gravity main lining installed
- **8** outfalls renewed
- **16** ponds renewed
- **53** catch basins renewed
- **7 km** of pipe inspected by camera





**STORMWATER SYSTEM FLOODING**

**2018**

Source: My Prince George Now



**2024**

Credit: Chuck Nisbett/The Prince George Citizen August 2024

# Consequences



**2020**

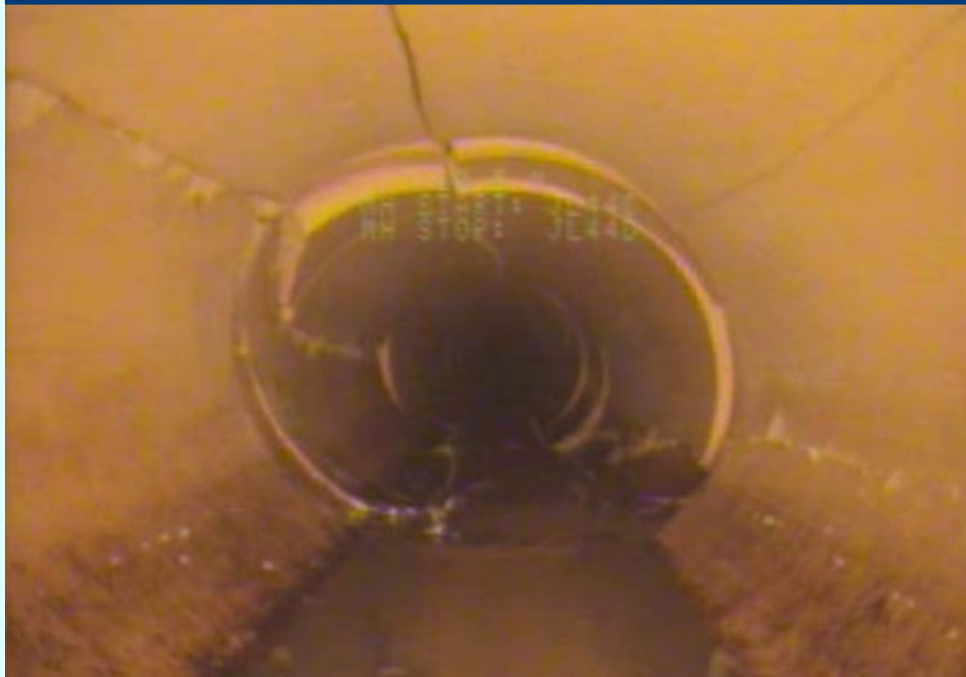


**2024**





**INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURES**



# Consequences



**SINKHOLES**



# Survey Results



# Proposed Funding Options

## Option one: Dedicated tax levy

- An annual fee in your property tax each year. The rate is calculated based on property assessment values in the same way that property taxes are calculated.

## Option two: Tiered flat rate

- Based on the type of property (residential, business, etc.) and tiered by property size, a flat fee would be charged on your utility bill.

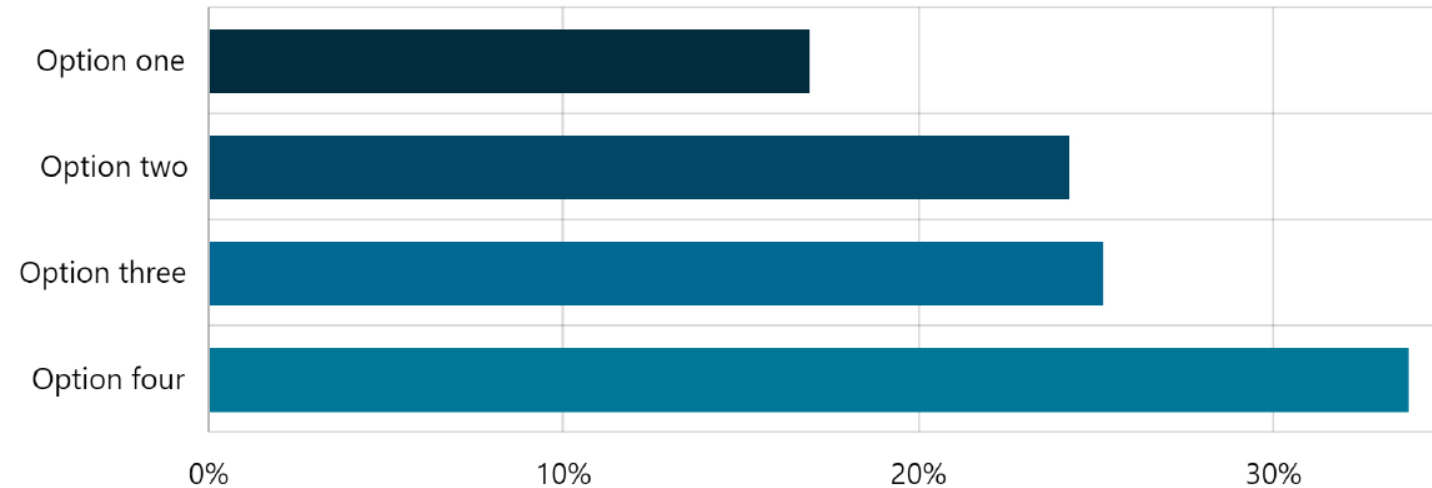
## Option three: Equivalent residential unit (ERU) – zoning maximums

- Based on the zoning of your property, a formula will be developed to determine how much your property is contributing to the stormwater system. This is calculated by using the zoning's maximum site coverage to determine the amount of allowed hard surface on your property.

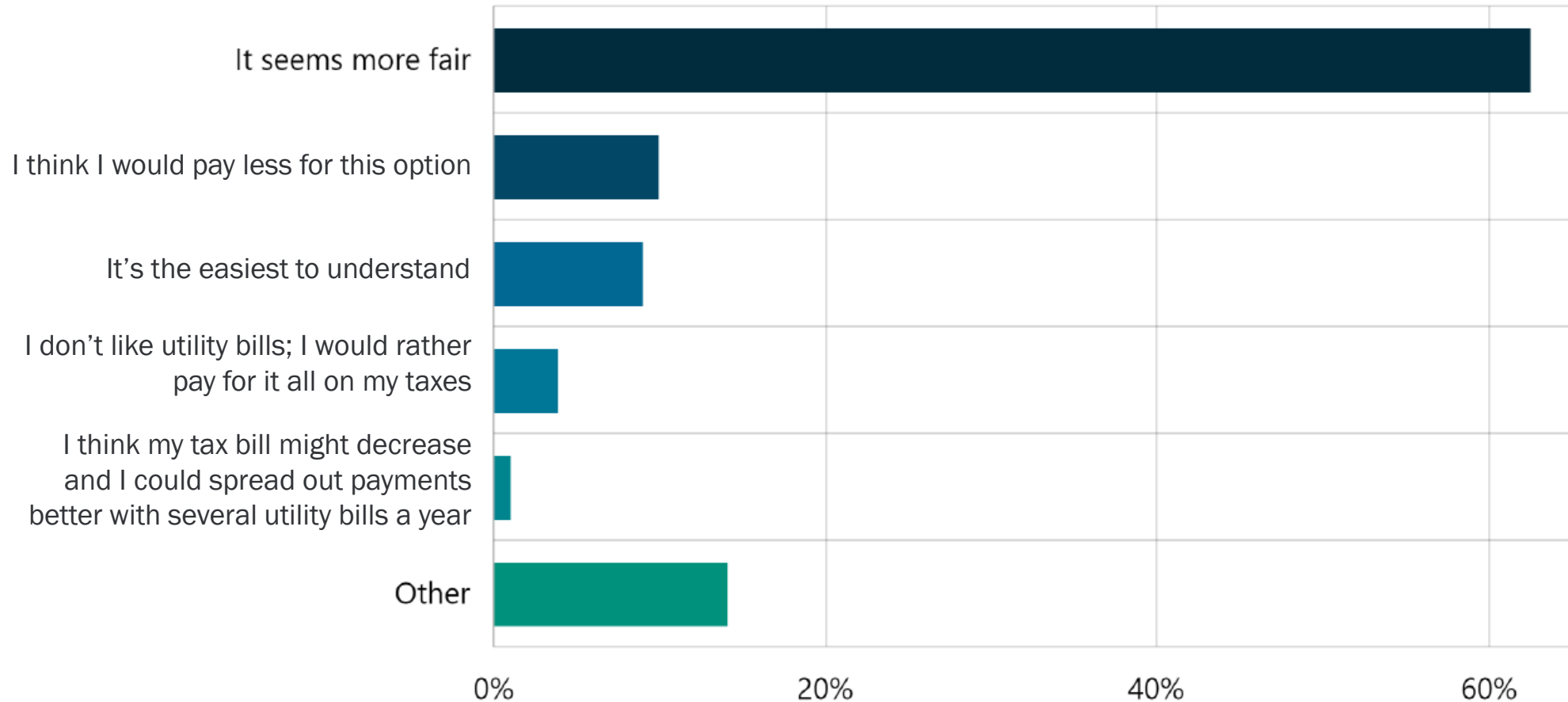
## Option four: Equivalent residential unit (ERU) – statistical sampling

- Similar to option three, but based on the actual measured hard surface area in a sampling of all types of residential properties.

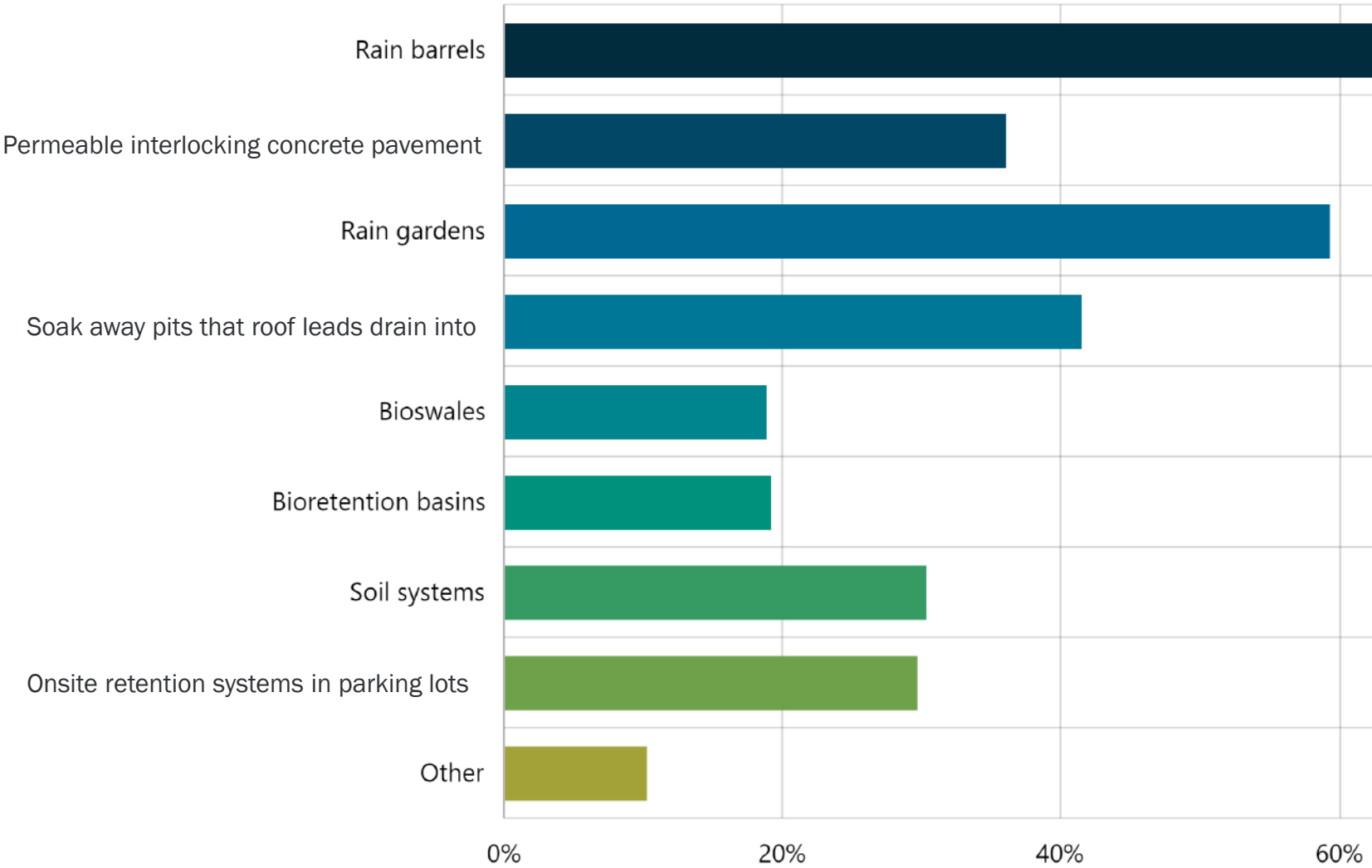
314 Survey responses



# Why Did You Chose that Option?



# Incentives

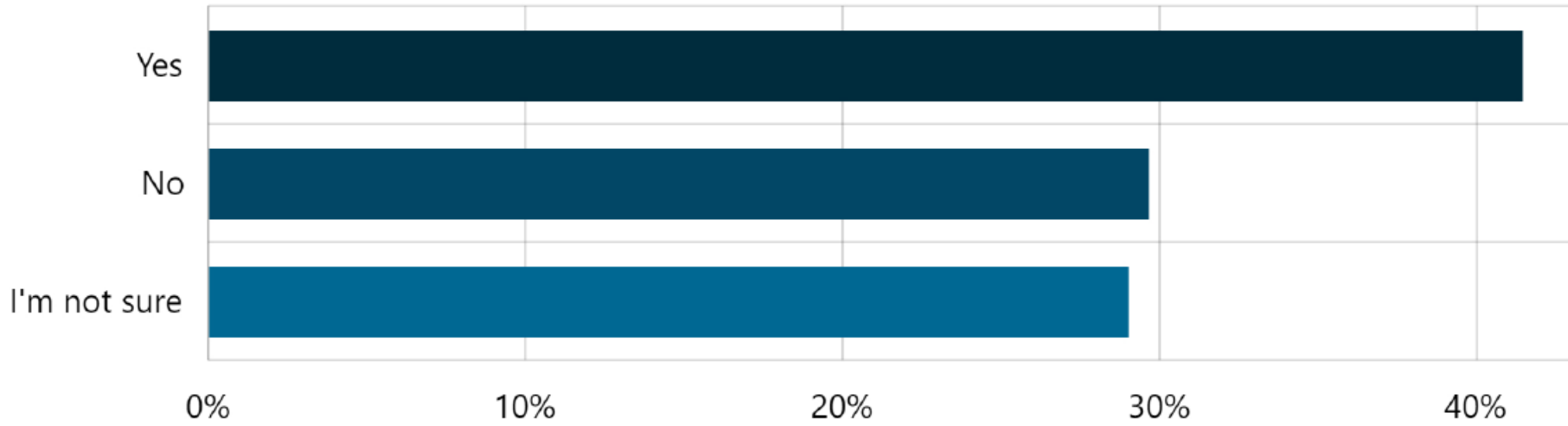


Soak Away Pit



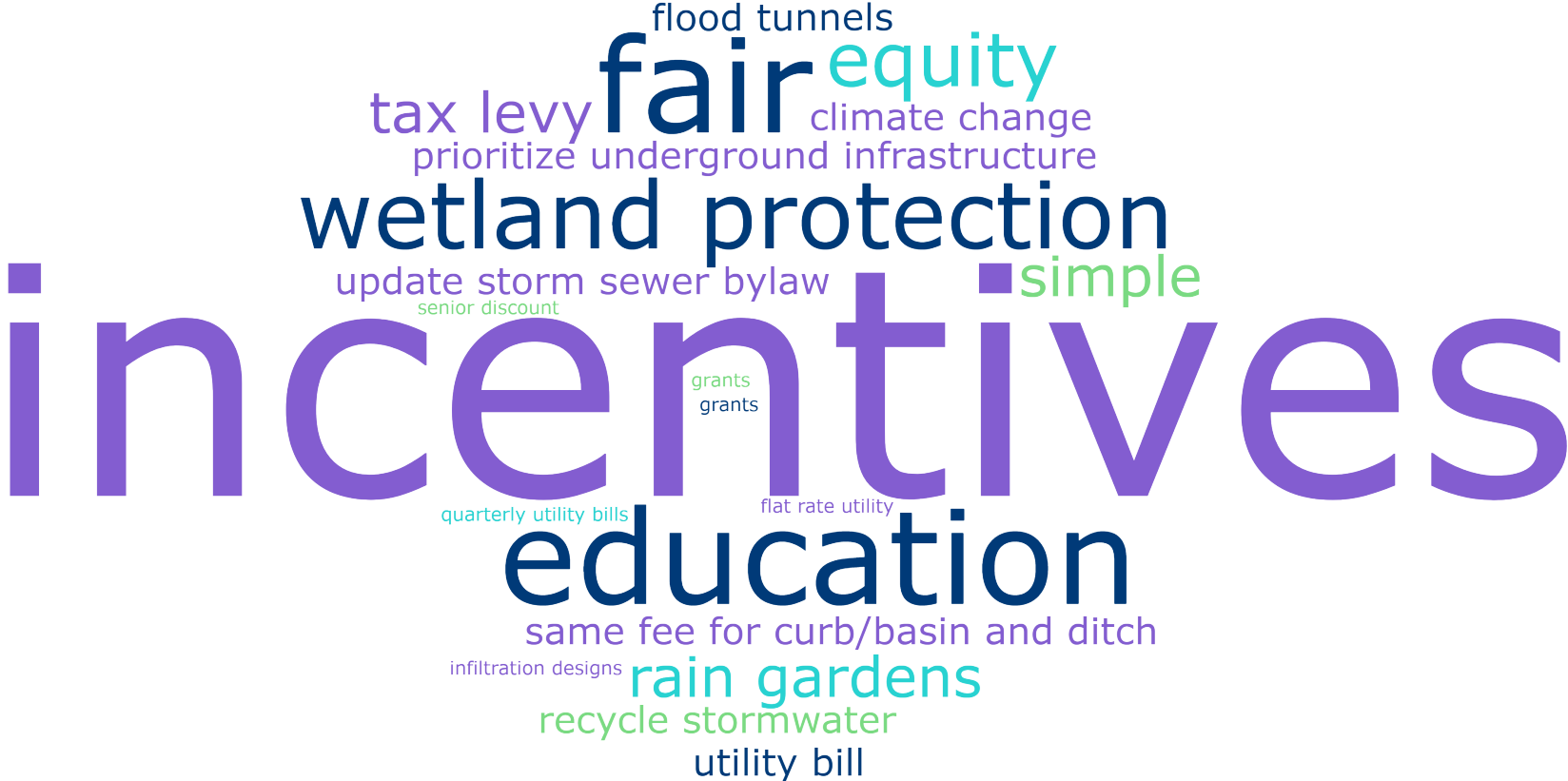
Rain Gardens

# Fee Variation Based on Level of Service *(Ditch vs. Curb & Gutter)*

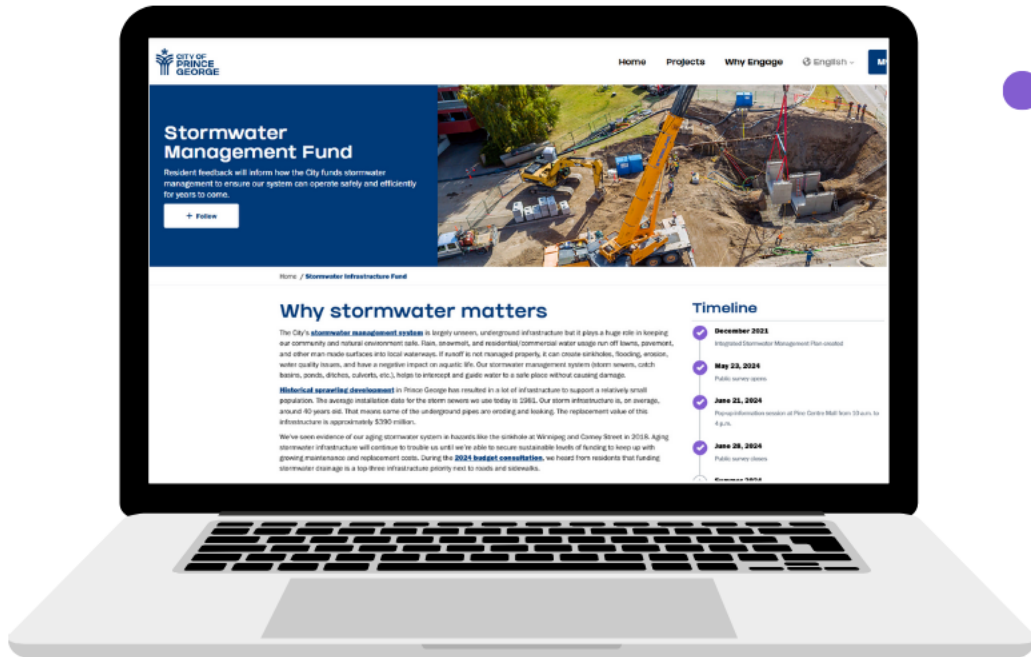


# What We Heard

Sentiment



# What's next?



## ● [getinvolved.princegeorge.ca/stormwater](https://getinvolved.princegeorge.ca/stormwater)

The webpage includes project updates, information on the four funding options, links to the Integrated Stormwater Management Plan and its updates, and links to informational stormwater posters.

Our community can still provide input by emailing:

[getinvolved@princegeorge.ca](mailto:getinvolved@princegeorge.ca).

# What's next?

- Decide which option:

**Option 1:** create a dedicated levy on property taxes,

**Option 2:** create a utility fee based on property type and tiered by size,

**Option 3:** create a utility fee based on the zoning's maximum site coverage to determine the amount of allowed hard surface on a property,

**Option 4:** create a utility fee based on the actual measurement of the hard surface area in a sampling of all types of residential properties,

**Option 5:** do not create a dedicated fund and continue to include stormwater related expenses within the general tax levy, where it will need to compete with other City service categories.

# Thank you



# Appendix A: Summary of Survey Responses

## Proposed funding options

### Option one: Dedicated tax levy

- An annual fee in your property tax each year. The rate is calculated based on property assessment values in the same way that property taxes are calculated.

### Option two: Tiered flat rate

- Based on the type of property (residential, business, etc.) and tiered by property size, a flat fee would be charged on your utility bill.

### Option three: Equivalent residential unit (ERU) - zoning maximums

- Based on the zoning of your property, a formula will be developed to determine how much your property is contributing to the stormwater system. This is calculated by using the zoning's maximum site coverage to determine the amount of allowed hard surface on your property.

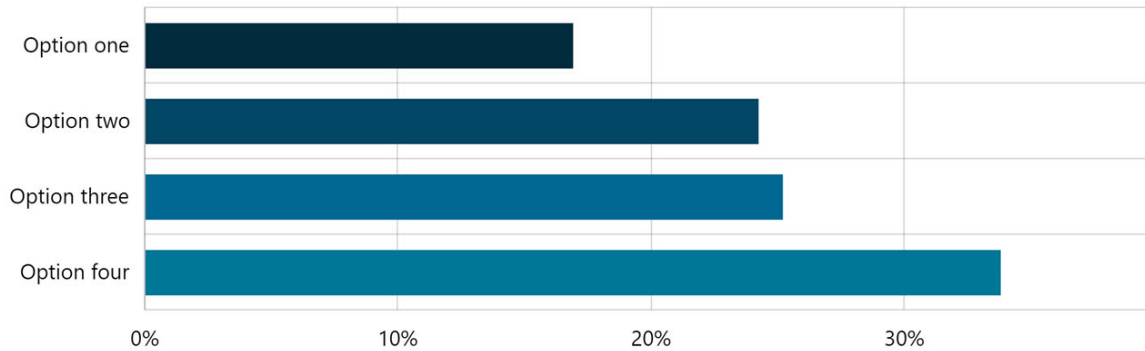
### Option four: Equivalent residential unit (ERU) - statistical sampling

- Similar to option three, but based on the actual measured hard surface area in a sampling of all types of residential properties.

### 1. Read the options in the proposed funding options section above and choose the option that you prefer.

Required

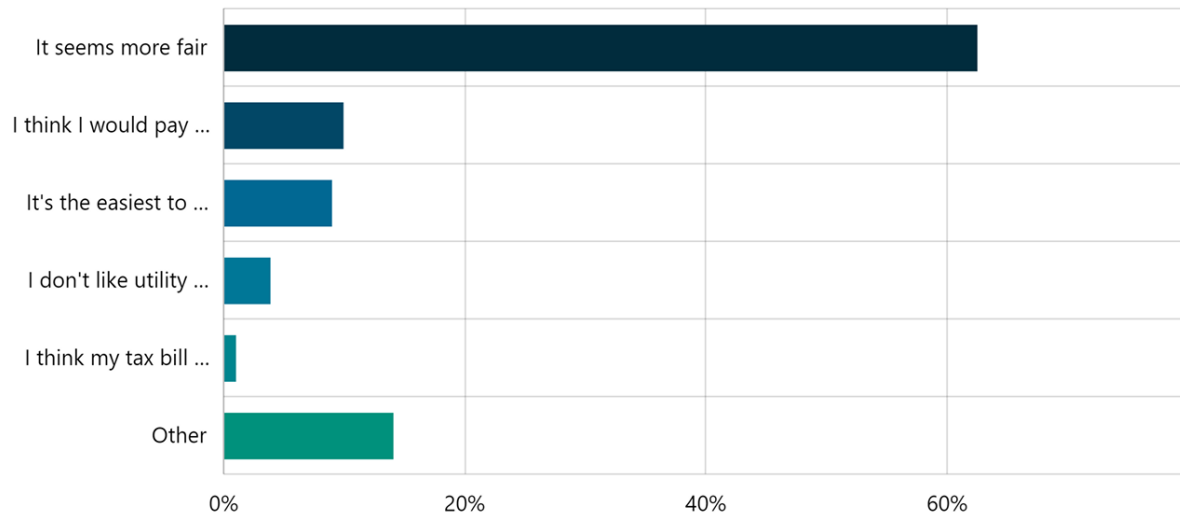
Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 314 (100%)



Answer choices	Percent	Count
Option one	16.88%	53
Option two	24.20%	76
Option three	25.16%	79
Option four	33.76%	106
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>314</b>

## 2. Why did you choose your preferred option? Required

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 314 (100%)



Answer choices	Percent	Count
It seems more fair	62.42%	196
I think I would pay less for this option	9.87%	31
It's the easiest to understand	8.92%	28
I don't like utility bills, I would rather pay for it all on my taxes	3.82%	12
I think my tax bill might decrease and I could spread out payments better with several utility bills a year	0.96%	3
Other	14.01%	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>314</b>

### Comments

**Provided:** 44 comments provided and summarized by theme and sentiment for this question.

### Positive

#### Fairness and Cost-Effectiveness

- Option two is fair and easier to implement and explain to people.
- Option three is a good mix of fairness to property owners and lower implementation cost.
- Option four would incentivize people to minimize runoff contribution, extending the life of the system.

#### Encouragement of Environmentally Friendly Practices

- Allowing residents to collect their own rainwater as an incentive in option three is a good practical solution that could in turn reduce residential water usage.
- Option four encourages people to reduce hard surface on their property.
- Option four encourages developers to leave as much green space as possible.

## Neutral

### Implementation Concerns

- Option one is easiest to manage. It is important to have dedicated funding that can't be clawed back.
- Option two, minimal need for staff time. Keep it simple to keep the administrative costs down.
- Option four, higher upfront cost, but more accurate billing.

### Mixed Views on Options

- Option two is utility based and the simplest option to get such a collection introduced specific to storm. May need to provide a cap on the amount for large properties.
- Option four seems too complex and difficult to implement. Option two seems to be the best option that is the most fair.

## Negative

### Financial Burden for Residents

- Find savings and budget within the tax revenue already being collected.
- None of these options are really acceptable, but option one is the most acceptable. Spend less elsewhere and prioritize the existing budget on infrastructure.

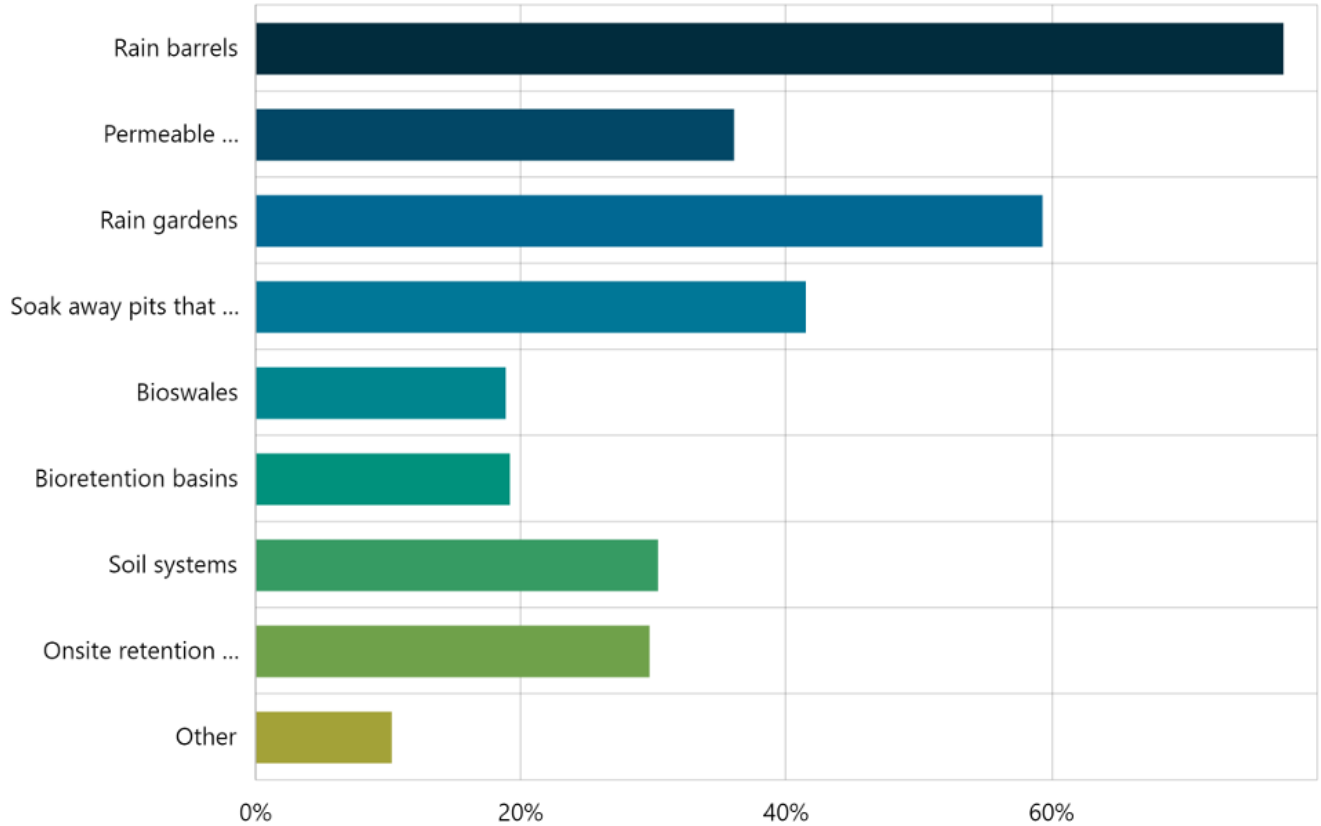
### Lack of Infrastructure and Services

- Live on the outskirts of town with no City services. Only want to pay for the services that provide direct benefits.

**3. Some communities offer utilities fee incentives for property owners that make an effort to reduce the amount of stormwater that enters the system from their properties. Check all that you are interested in.**

Required

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 314 (100%)



Answer choices	Percent	Count
Rain barrels	77.39%	243
Permeable interlocking concrete pavement	35.99%	113
Rain gardens	59.24%	186
Soak away pits that roof leads drain into	41.40%	130
Bioswales	18.79%	59
Bioretention basins	19.11%	60
Soil systems	30.25%	95
Onsite retention systems in parking lots	29.62%	93
Other	10.19%	32

**Comments**

**Provided:** 28 comments provided and summarized by theme and sentiment for this question:

## Positive

### Support for Rain Barrels and Incentives

- Rain barrels should be strongly encouraged and provide the added benefit of saving significant amount of drinking water used in irrigation.
- Programs that support residents buying rain barrels and bioswales systems should be developed. Many other cities across BC are doing so.
- Offer a rebate for properties who have stormwater systems in place that prevent stormwater from entering the City system.

## Neutral

### Property Characteristics and Existing Solutions

- Property is flat and majority of stormwater stays on the property with some entering catchbasins beside the road.
- Existing well designed landscaping helps to keep stormwater on the property.

## Negative

### Complexity and Fairness Concerns

- Utility fee incentives add complexity and "judgement call" type decisions that remove fairness.

### Alternative Solutions and Strategies

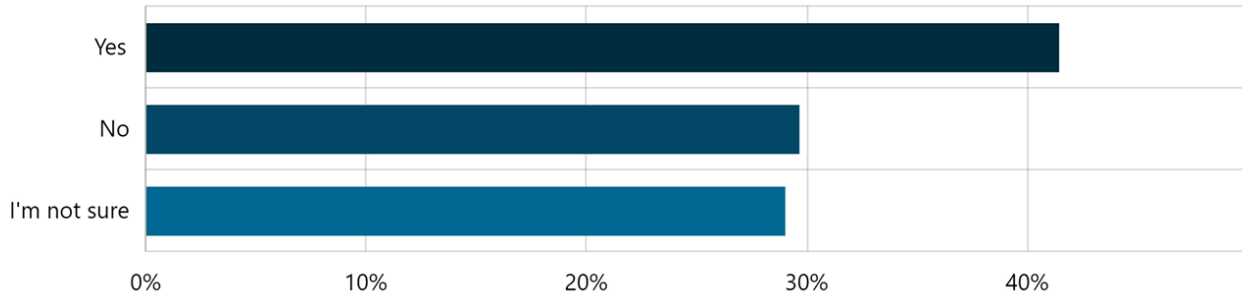
- Create a simple permitting process for residents who want to build an inexpensive onsite stormwater system like french drains and dry wells to promote onsite stormwater management while ensuring a homeowner is not causing damage to building foundations etc.
- Promote gravel driveways.

### City Planning and Regulations

- Promote densification.
- Improve Bylaws for commercial and industrial zones to better manage storm water onsite, including sediment management.
- Protect the wetlands the provide stormwater treatment.

**4. Some communities vary fees based on properties that have an open ditch vs. a property with curb, gutter, and catch basins (also called storm drains). Do you think this is more fair?** Required

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 314 (100%)

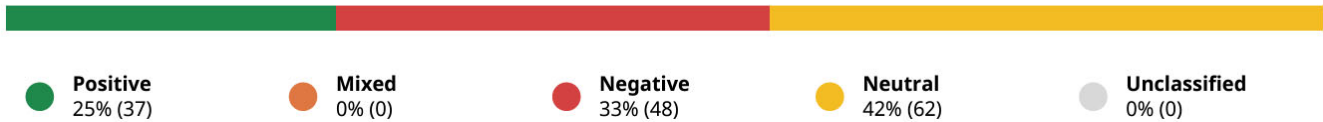


Answer choices	Percent	Count
Yes	41.40%	130
No	29.62%	93
I'm not sure	28.98%	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>314</b>

**5. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?**

Short Text | Skipped: 167 | Answered: 147 (46.8%)

**Sentiment**



**Comments**

**Provided:** 147 comments provided and summarized by theme and sentiment for this question.

**Funding and Taxation**

**Positive**

- Look for as many provincial and federal grants as possible.
- Consider offering a sponsorship to help gain funding for rain gardens if they are to be park-like.
- Properties that absorb runoff should get a refund on their stormwater fee.
- Incentivize water conservation such as discounts on rain barrels or tax/utility breaks for rain gardens and drought resistant landscaping.

**Neutral**

- Keep it simple like the road improvement levy.
- What about renters and owners in apartment style buildings? Who's contributing?
- Ensure the amount of a new levy or utility is clearly identified and subtracted off the general property tax bill.

**Negative**

- No more taxes.

- This looks like another tax grab for no benefit. If implemented some other tax should be reduced.

## **Fairness and Equity**

### **Positive**

- All property owners should pay for this service, and no exemptions should be allowed for any reason. All properties physically contribute to storm water therefore the owner should pay for that service.
- This is proactive and appreciate the focus on fairness.

### **Neutral**

- Concern that properties that have no storm sewer connection and only have a ditch will subsidize those that have storm service connections, sidewalks, and catch basins.
- Rural properties should contribute a lesser amount as very few have paved areas.
- A lot of older properties are not set up for best storm water management and it's not fair these residents have to pay more because their properties are older, unless the City provides deductions for mitigation.

### **Negative**

- Unfair that property owners in newer neighbourhoods outside of the bowl pay the same for utilities when it costs more to deliver these homes the services. Utilities should reflect that.

## **Infrastructure and Maintenance**

### **Positive**

- Curbs and ditches both drain to the rivers eventually. Some water from ditches may be absorbed on route in non-winter conditions. Older corrugated metal pipes could have liners placed inside vs replacing the entire system.
- Option 2 because it is a good balance between being fair and not overly administrative. Better that dollars go towards the infrastructure rather than towards the time it takes to administer the more complicated options.
- Update to the storm sewer bylaw, require parking lots to have onsite retention basins and oil/grease interceptors prior to discharging to the storm, ongoing maintenance and installation of detention system for the Hudson's Bay Wetland.

### **Neutral**

- More long-term planning needs to be put into payment of infrastructure upgrades.

### **Negative**

- Why wasn't managing and maintaining infrastructure already budgeted for? This should have been in the plan since it was installed.

## **Environmental and Sustainability Initiatives**

### **Positive**

- Given climate change predictions, having dedicated funding is imperative.
- Imperative to put protections in place for the wetlands/swamps/marshes around our community - they provide huge storm water benefit to our community and to individual properties (in addition to wildlife/habitat benefits, air quality, etc.).
- Enhance the Hudson's Bay wetland system for storm water management by daylighting streams and adding rain gardens. Use natural water management systems to enhance urban aesthetics.
- More methods of green stormwater management should be incorporated in public areas and incentivized within private property.