

Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Funding Study: Public Questions and Comments

May 31, 2018 (revised June 19, 2018)

Received	Form	Category	Question/Comment	Response
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Request to make it clear early on in the process who will pay the new stormwater utility fee.	This information will be included in the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Funding Study Summary to be posted on the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility website page. It was also included in the materials covered at the April 18 public meeting.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	What assurance is there that current sources of funding will be maintained and the additional service charge will supplement and not be a replacement?	When establishing the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility in 2017, the County Council indicated their intention to continue existing funding levels and to use any new funding from the Utility for anticipated new future costs and specific services. However, it is within the County Council's authority to change funding levels in the future.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Comment that there is limited potential for fee revenue from new development.	This is true; however, providing a mechanism to charge for new development is a fairness issue.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	How many properties are there that will pay the new fee?	This has not yet been determined and will part of the future funding study.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	About how much will the fee be? Statement that rumors are going around that the fee will be very high.	Fee rates have not been determined. The advisory committee will evaluate alternatives and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The County Council will make the final decision on the fee level.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Comment that it's premature to estimate what the rate will be. That's the purpose of the funding study and task force/advisory committee.	See above
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	How the new utility will function? Will it be an independent organization? Will consultants be hired? Will the county hire new staff? Who will be in charge?	Whatcom County's Lake Whatcom program is managed by the Stormwater Division within the Public Works Department. The Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility is merely a mechanism for Whatcom County to generate revenue to fund stormwater needs in the Lake Whatcom watershed. Portions of the Lake Whatcom program will be managed as a utility, meaning there will be a fee that is proportional to the service provided, rather than a tax on property valuation. The creation of the utility and the funding mechanism that it provides will have no impact on the way Whatcom County manages stormwater activities. These activities will still be managed by county staff within the Public Works Department which is part of Whatcom County government.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Will funds collected be used outside of the Lake Whatcom watershed/service area?	No, funds collected will only be used for Lake Whatcom management and water quality protection purposes.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Will the issue of homes along Northshore that are not on water/sewer be part of this effort?	No, the question of sewer service to homes along Northshore is not part of this process.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Stormwater Utility Structure	Will landowners get a credit for already having built a phosphorus treatment facility?	This has not yet been determined. This issue will be part of the funding study.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	What percentage of the Lake Whatcom watershed population is in the City of Bellingham vs. Whatcom County?	Approximately 23% of the Lake Whatcom watershed population is within the City of Bellingham and 77% is in unincorporated Whatcom County (estimate based on the number of dwelling units in the 2018 Lake Whatcom Watershed Annual Build-out Analysis Report multiplied by the county-wide average of 2.56 people/household). See parcel and population estimates table in the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Funding Study Summary.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	What is the population of the new Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility service area?	The approximate population of the new service area is 14,000 people (estimate based on the number of dwelling units in the 2018 Lake Whatcom Watershed Annual Build-out Analysis Report multiplied by the county-wide average of 2.56 people/household). See parcel and population estimates table in the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Funding Study Summary.

4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	How many parcels are in the service area?	There are 7,988 parcels in the new service area. Not all parcels will be eligible to be charged the new fee. For example, the 133 parcels in commercial forestry cannot be charged according to state law (<i>updated with correct parcel number of 7,988 on 6/19/18</i>).
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	What percentage of the service area parcels are in tax exempt status?	There are 515 parcels within the new service area with some form of tax exempt status; however, parcels with tax exempt status can still be charged service fees. This will be determined through the funding study process.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	What do city water users pay for Lake Whatcom watershed protection? How does this compare to County residents? (multiple questions/statements about what city and county residents pay)	Residents within the Bellingham City Limits currently pay three fees that provide funding for Lake Whatcom stormwater-related expenses: the stormwater utility fee, Lake Whatcom watershed charge, and the Flood Control Zone District tax. Whatcom County residents currently pay the Flood Control Zone District tax, which provides funding for Lake Whatcom programs. For a home valued at \$400,000 the annual cost/year is \$359.35 in the City of Bellingham and \$66.37 in unincorporated Whatcom County. See table in the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility Funding Study Summary.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	Comment that city residents are not paying their fair share and/or not very much for watershed protection.	See above. For a house valued at \$400,000, a city homeowner pays more than five times more than a homeowner in unincorporated Whatcom County.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Fee Equity/Fairness	Comment that city stormwater utility revenue is not being spent on stormwater-related expenditures.	The City of Bellingham stormwater fees pay for: maintenance and operation of the City's stormwater system; replacement of existing facilities and construction of new facilities; flood control, improved water quality, and enhanced fish habitat; compliance with state and federal water resource regulations. Direct additional questions to City of Bellingham Public Works Stormwater Section (360) 778-7800.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Current Funding	What types of expenditures go into the administrative category? Concern that the percentage is too high.	Additional explanation of administrative costs will be available in June.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Current Funding	Will the new revenue generated by the stormwater utility affect the ability to receive grant funds?	Grants have been increasingly less reliable for funding stormwater related projects over the past few years. The Washington State Legislature has experienced delayed budget approvals that have resulted in years-long delays in the Department of Ecology award process. The existence of a utility is not part of the criteria for rating projects and should not directly impact the awarding of grant funds for a Lake Whatcom water quality improvement project. Having a local funding source may help provide required match for potential future grant awards.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	Request to put the April 18 public meeting presentation available online.	All meeting materials will be available at http://whatcomcounty.us/2830/Lake-Whatcom-Stormwater-Utility .
4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	Request to use Nextdoor to share information about comments/questions and responses.	Whatcom County staff will periodically post updates on the funding study through our Nextdoor account. These posts will direct interested residents to visit our website page where a question/response document will be available.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	What kind of qualifications are required to be considered for the citizen advisory committee?	Any registered voter who lives in the service area is eligible to serve on the advisory committee (Whatcom County Council appointed advisory committee members on May 8, 2018).
4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	Who will decide who the Sudden Valley Community Association representative on the citizen advisory committee will be?	Whatcom County Council will appoint the Sudden Valley representative (Whatcom County Council appointed advisory committee members on May 8, 2018).
4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	Comment that an advisory committee of five is not enough. There should be more members to be representative.	The size and structure of the advisory committee was modeled on other Whatcom County advisory committees and was set by the County Council.

4/18/2018	Verbal	Public Process	Suggestion to have smaller neighborhood scale meetings to gather input.	Whatcom County typically uses advisory committees to help guide these types of public processes, and County Council chose this method to gather stakeholder input on this funding study. All advisory committee meetings are open to everyone who wants to attend and provide comments. Furthermore, members of the public can provide written comments on specific issues as the committee is developing their recommendations. Another public meeting will be held after the advisory committee develops their preliminary recommendations, and a public hearing will be held before the council makes any decisions.
4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Why are other ways to increase dissolved oxygen beside phosphorus reduction not being considered?	The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) conducted a Lake Whatcom water quality study from 2002 to 2008. Findings from this study found that excess phosphorus in the lake is the main cause of declining oxygen levels. Based on these findings, Ecology is requiring Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham to reduce phosphorus levels in the lake to meet dissolved oxygen water quality standards through their municipal stormwater permits. For more information, read the Water Quality Study Findings document at https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/summarypages/0803024.html .
4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Comment that more flow is needed in the lake to increase dissolved oxygen levels.	There is no direct correlation between the amount of water that was used by Georgia Pacific, the City of Bellingham's Nooksack Diversion, and low dissolved oxygen levels. It can be several years from the introduction of phosphorus into the lake to see lowering dissolved oxygen levels, and is quite difficult to determine when the lake exhibits effects from historic phosphorus loads. The city has not diverted water from the Middle Fork Nooksack for almost four years. Studies show that the amount of water diverted at that time of Georgia Pacific do not create a "flushing" of the lake and do not have a significant effect of ridding the lake of phosphorus that contributes to low dissolved oxygen levels.
4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Comment that sediment inputs from the Middle Fork Nooksack River diversion and Mirror Lake should be considered as a source of phosphorus.	Limitations to address historic sources of phosphorus in Lake Whatcom through a stormwater utility fee will be addressed in the upcoming funding study. The City of Bellingham has recognized the need to address the Middle Fork Nooksack River diversion's contribution to phosphorus loading in Lake Whatcom. The city completed a study to determine the amount and seasonality of the phosphorus load in the Middle Fork Nooksack River, the diversion pipeline, Mirror Lake and in Anderson Creek. The study's data were used to identify the periods of low phosphorus load in the river and to then provide guidance for operating the diversion with the least impact on Lake Whatcom. The city has also contracted a study of Anderson Creek to identify opportunities for habitat and water quality improvements such as channel stabilization that will decrease erosion of the stream channel and lessen sediment deposition in Lake Whatcom. This is in addition to property acquisition and restoration planting of the Anderson Creek stream corridor.
4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Comment that boats contribute to phosphorus loading in the lake.	Phosphorus inputs from motor boats were not considered in the Washington State Department of Ecology's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) water quality study and model. The ban of two-stroke carbureted engines on Lake Whatcom in 2006 (City of Bellingham) and 2009 (Whatcom County) limit the amount of unburned fuel, and any phosphorus it contains, from entering the lake. Sediment already in the lake doesn't change with motor boat activity. Wakes from motor boats could cause shoreline erosion, increasing sediment and phosphorus inputs into the lake; however, no data are available to quantify this source.
4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Comment that Lake Whatcom water quality monitoring and the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study and implementation plan process have been going on for decades. There are other ways to get involved on this subject.	Citizens interested in learning more about the science behind phosphorus regulation in Lake Whatcom can visit https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-improvement/Total-Maximum-Daily-Load-process/Directory-of-improvement-projects/Lake-Whatcom-Watershed-multi-parameter-TMDL . To learn more about Lake Whatcom management policy, interested citizens may attend the Lake Whatcom Policy Group meetings. Information on these meetings is available at https://www.cob.org/gov/council/lwpg .

4/18/2018	Verbal	TMDL/Phosphorus	Comment that impervious surface is not the cause of the problem.	Impervious surfaces are an indirect cause of excess phosphorus loading in Lake Whatcom. Sources of phosphorus like sediment, pollen, and animal waste collect on these surfaces and are washed into the lake during rainstorms. In a forest, phosphorus sources soak into the ground and the soil and plants act as a natural filter.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Other	Too many deer in the watershed are causing the problem with bacteria.	Fecal coliform bacteria live in the waste of all warm-blooded animals. Sources of fecal coliform in the Lake Whatcom watershed include wildlife, domestic animals (dogs and other pets), livestock, and human waste from failing on-site sewage systems (septic systems) or sewer system failures. Our current bacteria reduction programs focus on strategies to address all of these sources. While newer technologies are emerging that may help identify specific sources of bacteria, there is not currently a cost-effective and reliable way to quantify the amount of fecal coliform in a water body coming from any specific animal. These technologies will be incorporated into current pollution identification and correction programs as another tool for source tracking as they become available. In areas around the county where bacteria reduction efforts have been successful, we have found that by addressing human sources of bacteria (e.g., septic systems, pet waste, and farm practices), we can improve water quality and meet our water quality goals, even when wildlife are still present.
4/18/2018	Verbal	Other	Comment that county park lands and increased park use have an impact on water quality.	Increased recreational use of county parks does have an impact on lake water quality. Parks properties will be subject to the future stormwater utility fee along with all other developed parcels in the service area.