

## Proposed Stormwater Levy – Background Information

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### Q. What is stormwater?

- ⇒ Stormwater is defined as the quantity and quality of stormwater (rainwater) that flows off land.
- ⇒ When it rains, some stormwater is collected from your roof, driveways or paved and landscaped areas and flows over land or through the pipes and drains to the existing public stormwater system and into our creeks.

### Q. Who is responsible for stormwater?

- ⇒ Land owners are responsible for the management of stormwater that falls on their own land or naturally runs across their land. This usually involves an owner collecting or redirecting this water in some way.
- ⇒ Once this water is discharged off private land it generally becomes the responsibility of the public system. Council manages this system on behalf of the entire community.
- ⇒ The public system usually means
  - Council owned easements
  - major drainage channels in the western parts of Fairfield City and the industrial estates
  - the roads, including gully pits and footpaths
  - the piped drainage system connected to creeks and other water bodies
  - the creeks themselves
  - devices to improve water quality (such as gross pollutant traps or wetlands).

### Q. What is the Stormwater Levy?

- ⇒ The State Government recently amended the Local Government Act to encourage councils to implement a program of major improvements for stormwater management funded by a Stormwater Levy.
- ⇒ It is proposed that ratepayers be charged an annual Stormwater Levy from the 2006/2007 financial year.
- ⇒ This levy will see an additional \$1.2 million per year dedicated to significant stormwater related projects for the benefit of the local environment, via the *5 Creeks Stormwater Management* program.
- ⇒ This is in addition to funds already allocated in the budget for stormwater projects.
- ⇒ Details of projects funded through the Stormwater Levy each year and their cost will be reported in Council's annual report, separately from the rest of Council's budget.

### Q. This is the first I have heard of the Stormwater Levy. How is Council letting the community know about it?

- ⇒ Council is undertaking an awareness campaign as part of its Management Plan and budget process.
- ⇒ This includes placing material on Public Exhibition from 10 May to 7 June at Council's Administration Centre at Wakeley, Customer Service Centre at Fairfield and Council's libraries at Cabramatta, Fairfield, Smithfield, Wetherill Park and Bonnyrigg, giving the community the opportunity to provide feedback.
- ⇒ Information will also be available via Council's web site, Council's newsletter *CityLife*, the Mayor's Column and a leaflet which will be sent to each ratepayer with their rates notice.

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- ⇒ A publicity campaign will also be undertaken with media releases prepared in English and key community languages and forwarded to local newspapers, local radio and selected community language media.

### **Q. What do I get for my money?**

- ⇒ Funds raised by the levy will be allocated to urgent work that will improve the management of stormwater.
- ⇒ Work that will help stop buildings being flooded and improve water quality in the local creeks will be conducted across Fairfield City including
  - work to reduce local flooding due to blockages in the piped drainage system
  - work to ensure creek banks do not collapse in large storms
  - work to reduce erosion of the creeks
  - work to collect litter washed down stormwater drains
- ⇒ Some projects will also collect water that will be used to irrigate parts of the City (eg watering playing fields). This is important, especially at times of drought, as it helps reduce the amount of drinking water being used.

### **Q. How much is Council spending now on Stormwater Management projects?**

- ⇒ The average expenditure on stormwater management over the past 3 years has been \$400,000 per year.
- ⇒ This expenditure will continue but the stormwater levy will provide more funds for additional work to improve stormwater management even further and at a much faster pace.

### **Q. How much will Council be able to spend on Stormwater Management projects as a result of implementing a Stormwater levy?**

- ⇒ Total expenditure will increase from \$400,000 to \$1.6 million annually.
- ⇒ The planned expenditure is \$4.8 million over 3 years. This includes the \$400,000 per year previously budgeted for and is more than triple the \$1.2 million in total spent over the past 3 years.

### **Q. How much will I need to pay?**

- ⇒ For residential landowners the levy will be \$25 per traditional residential dwelling or \$12.50 per strata unit.
- ⇒ For business the charges will be as follows:
  - For land up to 2,100 square metres - \$25
  - For land 2,100 to 21,000 square metres - \$100
  - For land greater than 21,000 - \$1,500 (this will only apply to a very small proportion of properties in Fairfield City)

### **Q. I am a pensioner – do I get a pensioner discount?**

- ⇒ Eligible pensioners who receive a pension rebate on their rates are entitled to a discount of 40% of the levy. This rebate will be applied automatically where Council is aware of this information.
- ⇒ The pensioner discount is \$10 for residential dwellings and \$5 for owners of strata units.
- ⇒ For new pensioners, the discount for the levy will be included as part of their pension rebate application.

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⇒ The normal pro-rata arrangements made for rates will apply to the stormwater levy.

### Q. Do any other discounts apply?

- ⇒ Discounts or exemptions apply where significant stormwater management has taken place on site.
- ⇒ This includes where a 4,000 litre water tank has been installed by a licensed plumber or where there is an on site water detention system.
- ⇒ The stormwater levy does not apply to vacant land that has not been developed or covered by slabs of concrete or similar material that prevents water being absorbed on the site.
- ⇒ Commercial premises have different criteria, according to the size of the land.

### Q. How do I apply for a discount?

- ⇒ Simply fill out the application form available from Council. If you can demonstrate that you achieve the criteria (eg. proof of purchase and installation of a suitable water tank) send the form to Council together with any supporting documentation.
- ⇒ Refunds will be processed and cheques or credits arranged in most instances within 30 days.
- ⇒ Application forms will be available on Council's web site, from any Council office or businesses such as Child Care Centres, Libraries or *CityFarm* or telephone Council on 9725 0222.

### Q. Can I object to this levy and how do I go about it?

- ⇒ Yes you can.
- ⇒ Council is seeking feedback from the community before a final decision is made in June via the Management Plan and Budget process.
- ⇒ The draft Management Plan and Budget is on Public Exhibition from 10 May to 7 June at Council's Administration Centre at Wakeley, Customer Service Centre at Fairfield and Council's libraries at Cabramatta, Fairfield, Smithfield, Wetherill Park and Bonnyrigg giving the community the opportunity to provide feedback.
- ⇒ You can contact Council with your comments by
  - writing to Council (address your letter to Alan Young, City Manager and send it to Fairfield City Council, PO Box 21, Fairfield NSW 1860)
  - sending an email to Council at [mail@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au)
  - ringing one of the Councillors

All feedback must be received by 7 June 2006.

### Q. I have a private easement on my property and I manage my own stormwater. Why should I pay the levy?

- ⇒ Premises in the built up areas of the City contribute to the damage caused by stormwater when it rains because stormwater is collected on roofs, driveways and landscaped areas before it leaves the premises.
- ⇒ Even when this water is directed to an easement in the first place, it will eventually be directed to the street or other land and Council must manage the impacts of this concentrated flow.

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- ⇒ Council needs to maintain the public system in working condition to reduce the chances of a blockage that could lead to a private easement overflowing and causing damage on your property.
- ⇒ Council is implementing systems that will improve water quality by removing pollutants collected on premises before it is discharged.
- ⇒ Some premises may be eligible for a discount. Details can be found on Council's web site or ring Council on 9725 0222 for a copy of the exemption criteria.
- ⇒ In most instances this will mean installing a rain water tank with a minimum capacity of 4,000 litres for residential premises.
- ⇒ Commercial premises have different criteria according to the size of the land.

### **Q. I own a vacant block of land. Will I pay for that too?**

- ⇒ No. Vacant land is exempt from the levy.
- ⇒ Vacant land is land that is not developed or covered by slabs of concrete or similar material that prevents water from being absorbed on the site.
- ⇒ If you are charged the levy for vacant land, you should complete an application for exemption form.

### **Q. I live in a multi storey unit block. Why does each unit have to pay if our neighbour only pays once? The yard area is the same for both properties.**

- ⇒ Traditional single houses tend to have larger areas of yard that can absorb stormwater compared to multi unit housing which tend to have more of the land covered by development (eg. buildings, onsite parking, driveways and garbage storage areas). These areas are often covered in material such as concrete that collects water before discharging it into the public drainage system.
- ⇒ The State Government has set the method of establishing a charge applicable to each type of land. The charge for each residential strata unit has been set at \$12.50, which is half the charge for a traditional single house dwelling.

### **Q. Will I only have to pay this once or is it ongoing?**

- ⇒ The charge will be an annual charge that Council will reassess each year when the rates are set. There is no plan to increase the charge in the next 3 years.

### **Q. My land is considered to be more than one lot. Do I have to pay more than one levy?**

- ⇒ No.
- ⇒ If you have a single dwelling on more than one lot, the property will be considered a single parcel and the charge will be for a single dwelling. That is \$25.
- ⇒ The same approach will apply for residential strata units, where the charge will be \$12.50 per unit.
- ⇒ For business property the land area will be the basis for setting the charge and will be subject to a cap set by Council.

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### **Q. How will I know Council will be using my money for its intended use and not something else?**

- ⇒ All additional work undertaken as a result of the Stormwater Levy and funds spent each year will be reported in Council's annual report, separately from the rest of Council's budget.
- ⇒ Works to be completed will be promoted via Council's newsletter *CityLife* and through local media publicity as well as in Council's budget documents which are available to the public.
- ⇒ When work is being undertaken the sites will be clearly signposted to indicate that the project is being funded through the Stormwater Levy.
- ⇒ When work is completed, permanent signage will be erected to identify this work as being part of the Stormwater Management program.
- ⇒ Council will be reporting on the implementation of each of the Stormwater Management projects on Council's web site as work progresses.
- ⇒ Council will also be reporting the works completed each year as part of the Council's annual report, which is available to the public and submitted to the Department of Local Government. The works actually carried out will be compared with the proposed works and will include a statement explaining any differences.
- ⇒ Council will also report on the continuing expenditure that it has always undertaken as part of the ongoing stormwater program. In 2006/2007 that work will be continuing with an expenditure of \$420,000 proposed in the draft Management Plan.

### **Q. Who looked after the stormwater before?**

- ⇒ Council and the State Government manage the existing stormwater using the revenue from your rates and taxes.
- ⇒ However, the State government has recognised that the cost of maintaining the system to properly and safely manage stormwater and flooding is greater than funding available through rates.
- ⇒ The Stormwater Management program will allow Council to speed up improvements to the system to help reduce the potential for flooding from failures or blockages within the system.
- ⇒ Some funds will be used to help improve water quality in the local creeks and to reduce the amount of drinking water used to irrigate parks and playing fields. This is especially important during this period of extended drought.

### **Q. What legislation covers this levy?**

- ⇒ The Local Government (General) Amendment (Stormwater) Regulation 2006 under the Local Government Act 1993.
- ⇒ A copy can be found on Council's web site.

### **Q. How does this levy and the proposed works fit with Council's other plans?**

- ⇒ In addition to the funds raised through the Stormwater Levy, Council is required by the State Government to continue the level of expenditure on stormwater that it has provided in the past.
- ⇒ Over the past 3 years Council has spent approximately \$400,000 annually on stormwater management.
- ⇒ This expenditure will continue and this year will increase to \$420,000.



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- ⇒ Additional work to be undertaken as part of the 5 Creeks Stormwater Management program will be funded via the Stormwater Levy. These are works that Council wanted to undertake previously to reduce the damage from stormwater but did not have sufficient funds to implement.
- ⇒ The overall Stormwater Management program will be implemented at least three times as quickly as would have been possible without the Levy.

### **Q. Will the levy help fix the salinity problem?**

- ⇒ The works proposed as part of the 5 Creeks Stormwater Management program will assist in reducing the impacts of salinity by better managing the impacts of stormwater.

### **Q. We are in the middle of a drought and it never rains, so where's the stormwater?**

- ⇒ Sydney is currently about mid way through a major drought. Some experts say that the cycle could be as long as 50 years, although even during the last 12 months Fairfield City has received heavy rains that have resulted in property damage from local flooding.
- ⇒ This is one of the reasons that the State Government has asked councils to implement better stormwater management programs which, in-part, will help reduce local impacts and reduce the reliance on drinking water to irrigate parks, playing fields and other uses.
- ⇒ Private landholders can also assist in this area by installing devices that harvest local stormwater for reuse in watering gardens, filling swimming pools and even connecting to laundries or toilets.

### **Q. I don't live near a creek so why do I have to pay?**

- ⇒ Most people do not realise that all stormwater flows to the creeks in the City before eventually getting to the ocean.
- ⇒ Fairfield has five major creeks in the developed areas and several smaller tributaries. Three of these creeks actually start in Fairfield City and flow to the Georges River.
- ⇒ Even if you cannot see a creek there is one nearby helping drain water away from your property.

### **Q. I live near a creek and my property floods all the time when there is a heavy downpour. Will this fix the problem for me?**

- ⇒ Many factors influence the impact of flooding on individual properties. The additional works planned under the 5 Creeks Stormwater Management program are designed to help reduce the impacts of local flooding resulting from failures or blockages of the local system.
- ⇒ Some works will help improve flows in the creeks and this can reduce the impacts of flooding. However, ultimately the effects of major floods are determined by the intensity of the storm and the impact of tides and how well the flood control works have been maintained.
- ⇒ Council will continue to spend more than \$1 million annually on flood control works but some parts of Fairfield City, particularly those adjoining local creeks will always flood.

### **Q. How can I get more information?**

- ⇒ Ring Council's Customer Service Centre on 9725 0222
- ⇒ Email Council at [mail@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au)
- ⇒ Visit Council's website at [www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au)