



Dianne Saxe, J.D., Ph.D in Law
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Environmental Commissioner calls on the Province to lead stormwater funding reform

Aging municipal infrastructure and poor funding models are putting communities and environment at risk

Toronto, ON, November 15, 2016 — Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Dianne Saxe, warned today that most Ontario municipalities do not have adequate funding models to properly manage stormwater. "Stormwater runoff – from heavy rain or snowmelt – can cause flooding, stream or river-bank erosion, and water pollution," says Commissioner Saxe. "Properly managing stormwater is critical to protect our communities and environment." Municipalities are largely responsible for this important, but often invisible, service, but the province sets the regulatory frameworks.

The Commissioner's report, *Urban Stormwater Fees: How to Pay for What We Need*, calls on the province to require municipalities to recover the full costs of managing stormwater runoff; for example, by charging landowners a separate stormwater fee based on runoff volumes.

Following decades of declining investments, Ontario's municipalities are now facing a \$6.8 billion deficit to fix existing stormwater infrastructure and to accommodate future growth. This financial gap could get even bigger as municipalities deal with larger flows and more polluted runoff, as landscapes are paved over to meet growth pressures. There may also be additional costs to deal with changes in precipitation, and thus runoff, from climate change. The Commissioner surveyed municipalities and found that only about 35% currently recover the full costs of managing stormwater.

As a first step towards cost-recovery, the Ontario government should also require all municipalities to prepare asset management plans for both their grey (pipes, drains, etc.) and green (wetlands, green roofs, permeable pavement, rain gardens, etc.) stormwater infrastructure. Asset management plans help municipalities know what their actual costs are and how much money they need to recover. But 40% of the municipalities that responded to the Commissioner's survey do not have asset management plans for their stormwater infrastructure.

The Commissioner calls on the Ontario government to provide better support to municipalities that want to charge a separate stormwater fee as a way to recover the costs of managing stormwater. "Cities need to explore innovative approaches; for example, Kitchener-Waterloo and Mississauga use stormwater fees," reports Saxe. "Stormwater fees are a great option for cities to shift to cost-recovery, better protect the

environment and become more resilient to climate change,” says Saxe. Stormwater fees not only provide a dedicated and fair funding source for municipalities, they can also nudge property owners towards better stormwater treatments on-site. In Ontario, these fees can range from \$3.95 to \$14.92 per month for an average home.

“Without better municipal funding models for stormwater, our future will include more overland and basement flooding, sewage bypasses, beach closure days, and sediment in lakes and rivers,” reported Saxe.

The Environmental Commissioner’s report, *Urban Stormwater Fees: How to Pay for What We Need*, can be downloaded at eco.on.ca.

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*The **Environmental Commissioner of Ontario** is an independent officer of the Legislature who reports on government progress on climate change, energy and other environmental issues. The ECO is the province’s environmental watchdog and guardian of Ontarians’ environmental rights.*