



CITY HALL

Toronto moves closer to making parking lot owners pay for stormwater management





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In an effort to battle climate change, the city on Monday inched closer toward making parking lot owners pay for helping manage stormwater runoff, which could potentially reduce the financial burden on other businesses and industries.

The city's budget committee recommended that Toronto Water look at whether the fees industrial and commercial customers pay for water use should be separated from the costs associated with stormwater management.

Currently the cost of managing stormwater runoff is borne by businesses and industries through city water use fees — the more water they use, the higher the bill — but that doesn't always accurately reflect how much stormwater runoff is created by the businesses.

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For example, an office tower that consumes a lot of water may have a relatively small footprint on the ground, with only a small paved area around the building.

A parking lot, on the other hand, typically doesn't consume any water and so doesn't get a water bill at all, while still contributing to the problem of stormwater runoff because of the large paved areas they operate.

As a result, there is no incentive for the parking lots to improve the problem of stormwater runoff.

Most of Toronto's sewers are combined, meaning in heavy rainfall the runoff mixes with sewage from homes and businesses, and often spills into rivers or [Lake Ontario](#), or backs up into basements. While permeable surfaces, like grass or gardens, can absorb rain, it runs off pavement.

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City officials have warned that climate change will see Toronto's sewers more frequently overwhelmed, increasing the cost of maintaining and improving the system.

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“Urban growth and impervious surfaces fundamentally alter the water cycle and path of water within our urban environment,” said Jennifer Drake, a professor at the University of Toronto in the department of civil and mineral engineering, who appeared at budget committee Monday to support the motion.

“The increase in runoff generated by hardscapes increases the frequency and severity of flooding, increases erosion and decreases water quality. These effects are hazardous to both life and property and our aquatic ecosystems.”

Heather Marshall, a spokesperson for Toronto Environmental Alliance, pointed to the major floods the city has experienced in recent years, warning that the costs of flood protection will continue to rise.

Marshall said the current system is unfair because some major producers of stormwater runoff pay nothing at all. A new system, based on the size of a property and how much runoff it has would encourage better management practices, said Marshall.

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An advertisement for Yukon travel agency. It features a solid orange background. At the top left, the text "Plan your dream trip today" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner of the ad, there is a small white "X" icon. Centered at the bottom is the Yukon logo, which consists of the word "Yukon" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, with a stylized sunburst icon above the letter "o". Below "Yukon" is the tagline "LARGER THAN LIFE" in a smaller, white, all-caps, sans-serif font.

The motion, put forward by Coun. Mike Layton (Ward 11 University-Rosedale), also asks staff to look at possible incentives for customers who undertake sustainable solutions to stormwater flooding.

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