Rain falls freely. But stormwater management does not. Cranberry currently spends more than $1.7 million a year just to maintain its already extensive stormwater system, and that cost is about to go up, largely due to new regulations that affect municipalities throughout the country.

That updated set of requirements – which includes reducing stream sedimentation and pollution from various sources – takes full effect in 2023. Municipalities like Cranberry, with separate stormwater and sanitary sewer systems, are subject to those requirements. And they’re serious. Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection and the federal Environmental Protection Agency plan to enforce them by imposing fines on violators.

As a relatively new community, Cranberry’s stormwater infrastructure is in much better shape than in some of the region’s older communities. But there is a lifecycle to certain assets, like underground buried pipes, and after 50 years, they typically approach the end of that cycle. Right now, several of Cranberry’s pioneering neighborhoods have reached the point where the failure of pipes and culverts is increasingly likely. And if they fail, the Township’s compliance with the new regulations is put at risk.

When they were new, many of Cranberry’s stormwater facilities had been built in conjunction with housing plans and commercial centers by private developers. But particularly in residential areas, those assets had long ago been transferred to the Township. The cost of cleaning, repairing and otherwise maintaining them has fallen onto local taxpayers. And that cost is growing.

Several years ago, Cranberry created a General Authority. Under Pennsylvania law, Authorities are better able to handle certain financial transactions than townships of the second class, including Cranberry. Earlier this year, the Authority was asked to study the financial implications of the Township’s stormwater management requirements, and it came up with a plan to maintain and to upgrade Cranberry’s extensive stormwater system as required. Discussion of their plan is still underway. However, to pay for managing the system, they proposed a fee, to be collected by the Township as part of its monthly water, sewer and trash bills, which the Authority would retain and then distribute back to the Township for implementation, consistent with its plan. The fee for private homes, which the Authority’s plan visualizes starting with the January bill, would be $3 a month during the first year, and $6 a month in 2021. The fee for commercial and institutional properties would be determined based on the area of impervious surface – structures and pavement – which have been built on the site.

For more information, visit CranberryTownship.org/Stormwater