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**Fact Sheet**  
December 2019

## Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Baltimore



View full report at [www.bluewaterbaltimore.org/GSIreport](http://www.bluewaterbaltimore.org/GSIreport)

### Introduction

**Stormwater runoff is a leading cause of pollution to Baltimore's waterways.**

Pavement and other impervious surfaces cover more than 45% of Baltimore's landscape. <sup>1</sup> When it rains in Baltimore, much of the rainwater cannot soak into the ground. Instead, it rushes to the nearest storm drain, carrying with it trash, oil, and other pollutants from our streets and pavement. In addition to the pollution in the stormwater itself, the sheer volume of water erodes our stream beds and overwhelms our pipes, contributing to sewage overflows.

An increasingly popular approach to better managing stormwater pollution is called green stormwater infrastructure (GSI). GSI can help Baltimore City combat stormwater pollution to keep our streams, rivers, and Harbor clean.

### What is Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI)?

GSI focuses on the removal of hard surfaces and the treatment of stormwater runoff with plants and soils. Examples of GSI include rain gardens, green roofs, and rain barrels. The nature-based approach of GSI provides many additional benefits beyond stormwater management that make cities like Baltimore healthier and more desirable places to live.



## What are the Challenges to Implementing Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Baltimore?

Despite the benefits it provides, GSI is not widespread in Baltimore. Blue Water Baltimore has identified several barriers to creating GSI projects in the city:

### Challenge 1: Unclear Regulatory and Permitting Provisions for Voluntary GSI

- There is no provision for voluntary GSI in the city code. This has resulted in ad hoc permitting processes that lack clarity and predictability.
- A lack of standardization has resulted in burdensome liability and maintenance requirements for communities, often leading to the cancelation of GSI projects.

### Challenge 2: Poor Communication among City Agencies and with City Residents

- Government planning for GSI is largely limited to the Department of Public Works. This inhibits collaboration, communication, and value for GSI between City departments.
- The process for applying for a reduction on the Stormwater Utility Fee for GSI projects on private property is burdensome and may discourage property owners from pursuing GSI projects.

### Challenge 3: Insufficient Funding for GSI

- Baltimore City has a dedicated fund for stormwater remediation through the Stormwater Utility Fee. However, much of this funding is spent on general operations like street sweeping instead of GSI.

## Recommendations

Baltimore City can do more to encourage GSI and reap its environmental, public health, and community development benefits. Blue Water Baltimore supports the following key actions:

### 1. Update the City Code to define and promote voluntary GSI

- Develop a streamlined, time-bound, and transparent permitting process.
- Establish reasonable liability and maintenance requirements commensurate with GSI project scopes and benefits.

### 2. Develop a collaborative GSI Task Force

- Include relevant city agencies and external stakeholders to improve communication, encourage innovation, and engage broader participation in GSI planning, execution, incentives, and evaluation.

### 3. Substantially increase the portion of Stormwater Fee revenue that supports GSI

## Resources

1. Baltimore City Department of Public Works, Baltimore City MS4 Restoration and TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan, page v. <http://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Baltimore-City-MS4-and-TMDL-WIP-Rev-August-2015.pdf>.

