

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2005**

**SESSION LAW 2005-441
HOUSE BILL 1029**

AN ACT FACILITATING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS TO CLEAR STREAMS BY CLARIFYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY FOR SUCH ACTIONS AND TO ALLOW THE VILLAGE OF CLEMMONS AND THE TOWN OF KERNERSVILLE TO COLLECT DELINQUENT STORMWATER UTILITY FEES IN THE SAME MANNER AS IT MAY COLLECT DELINQUENT PERSONAL AND REAL PROPERTY TAXES.

Whereas, the clearing of obstructions in streams, such as dead trees, fallen tree limbs, root balls, underbrush, and trash and debris furthers the health, safety, and welfare of the State's citizens by allowing such streams to function more efficiently to remove stormwater, thus reducing flooding; and

Whereas, local governments are deterred from engaging in stream-clearing activities by the possibility that they will become legally responsible for regular stream clearing, or the possibility that they will become legally responsible for the impact on private properties of natural events such as flooding, which have never been the legal responsibility of local governments; and

Whereas, many private landowners do not have the resources to clear obstructions from the streams that are located on their property, and it is in the public interest to facilitate the establishment of stream-clearing programs by local governments; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Article 6 of Chapter 153A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 153A-140.1. Stream-clearing programs.

(a) A county shall have the authority to remove natural and man-made obstructions in stream channels and in the floodway of streams that may impede the passage of water during rain events.

(b) The actions of a county to clear obstructions from a stream shall not create or increase the responsibility of the county for the clearing or maintenance of the stream, or for flooding of the stream. In addition, actions by a county to clear obstructions from a stream shall not create in the county any ownership in the stream, obligation to control the stream, or affect any otherwise existing private property right, responsibility, or entitlement regarding the stream. These provisions shall not relieve a county for negligence that might be found under otherwise applicable law.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect existing rights of the State to control or regulate streams or activities within streams. In implementing a stream-clearing program, the county shall comply with all requirements in State or federal statutes and rules."

SECTION 2. Article 8 of Chapter 160A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read:

"§ 160A-193.1. Stream-clearing programs.

(a) A city shall have the authority to remove natural and man-made obstructions in stream channels and in the floodway of streams that may impede the passage of water during rain events.

(b) The actions of a city to clear obstructions from a stream shall not create or increase the responsibility of the city for the clearing or maintenance of the stream, or for flooding of the stream. In addition, actions by a city to clear obstructions from a stream shall not create in the city any ownership in the stream, obligation to control the stream, or affect any otherwise existing private property right, responsibility, or entitlement regarding the stream. These provisions shall not relieve a city for negligence that might be found under otherwise applicable law.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect otherwise existing rights of the State to control or regulate streams or activities within streams. In implementing a stream-clearing program, the city shall comply with all requirements in State or federal statutes and rules."

SECTION 3.(a) G.S. 160A-314(a1) reads as rewritten:

- "(a1) (1) Before it establishes or revises a schedule of rates, fees, charges, or penalties for stormwater management programs and structural and natural stormwater and drainage systems under this section, the city council shall hold a public hearing on the matter. A notice of the hearing shall be given at least once in a newspaper having general circulation in the area, not less than seven days before the public hearing. The hearing may be held concurrently with the public hearing on the proposed budget ordinance.
- (2) The fees established under this subsection must be made applicable throughout the area of the city. Schedules of rates, fees, charges, and penalties for providing stormwater management programs and structural and natural stormwater and drainage system service may vary according to whether the property served is residential, commercial, or industrial property, the property's use, the size of the property, the area of impervious surfaces on the property, the quantity and quality of the runoff from the property, the characteristics of the watershed into which stormwater from the property drains, and other factors that affect the stormwater drainage system. Rates, fees, and charges imposed under this subsection may not exceed the city's cost of providing a stormwater management program and a structural and natural stormwater and drainage system. The city's cost of providing a stormwater management program and a structural and natural

stormwater and drainage system includes any costs necessary to assure that all aspects of stormwater quality and quantity are managed in accordance with federal and State laws, regulations, and rules.

- (3) No stormwater utility fee may be levied under this subsection whenever two or more units of local government operate separate stormwater management programs or separate structural and natural stormwater and drainage system services in the same area within a county. However, two or more units of local government may allocate among themselves the functions, duties, powers, and responsibilities for jointly operating a stormwater management program and structural and natural stormwater and drainage system service in the same area within a county, provided that only one unit may levy a fee for the service within the joint service area. For purposes of this subsection, a unit of local government shall include a regional authority providing stormwater management programs and structural and natural stormwater and drainage system services.
- (4) A city may adopt an ordinance providing that any fee imposed under this subsection may be billed with property taxes, may be payable in the same manner as property taxes, and, in the case of nonpayment, may be collected in any manner by which delinquent personal or real property taxes can be collected. If an ordinance states that delinquent fees can be collected in the same manner as delinquent real property taxes, the fees are a lien on the real property described on the bill that includes the fee."

SECTION 3.(b) G.S. 160A-314(c) reads as rewritten:

"(c) Except as provided in subsections (a1) and (d) of this section and G.S. 160A-314.1, rents, rates, fees, charges, and penalties for enterprisory services shall be legal obligations of the person contracting for them, and shall in no case be a lien upon the property or premises served, provided that no contract shall be necessary in the case of structural and natural stormwater and drainage systems."

SECTION 4. This act is effective when it becomes law and applies to stream-clearing activities commenced on or after that date. Section 3 of this act applies only to the Town of Kernersville and the Village of Clemmons.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 23rd day of August, 2005.

s/ Beverly E. Perdue
President of the Senate

s/ James B. Black
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ Michael F. Easley
Governor

Approved 3:10 p.m. this 27th day of September, 2005