City of Ann Arbor Stormwater Comprehensive Plan

Focus Group Meeting with Ann Arbor Public Schools

December 22, 2025

Attendance: 3 AAPS Staff / 4 City Staff / 2 Consultant Staff

AAPS Staff: Kevin Stansbury, Jason Bing, and Christopher Bullinger

City Staff: Jennifer Lawson, Skye Stewart, Peter Stephens, and Miekyn Cotton

Consultant Staff: Don Carpenter and Jenna Troppman

Meeting Overview

The City convened a focus group with Ann Arbor Public Schools (AAPS) as part of the Stormwater Comprehensive Plan development process to better understand school district perspectives, operational challenges, and opportunities for coordination. Discussion focused on how flooding is defined and experienced within school facilities, the adequacy of existing stormwater standards under changing climate conditions, infrastructure age and equity considerations, and opportunities for partnership in education and nature-based solutions implementation.

AAPS emphasized the importance of distinguishing between stormwater-related flooding and other building system failures, as well as the need for improved public education regarding stormwater system limitations. Participants discussed shared interest in strengthening coordination during major storm events and establishing ongoing collaboration to align infrastructure investments, risk-based asset management, and educational initiatives.

General Comments

- Stormwater management at Ann Arbor Public Schools (AAPS) is closely tied to operational continuity, facility management, and public perception. A recurring concern is the perception that school developments "cause flooding," even when no site changes have occurred. AAPS emphasized the importance of clarifying the limitations of stormwater systems and educating the public on how these systems function.
- Flooding is generally understood as water disrupting school operations, such as water entering buildings, tunnel infiltration, or system backups. Not all flooding incidents are stormwater related. Temporary external ponding may be acceptable if it drains within a reasonable timeframe (generally within 48 hours for new projects). Participants acknowledged that flooding is often defined as "water where it shouldn't be," though formal definitions can be difficult and contentious.

- Climate change and increasing storm intensity are part of ongoing design conversations, particularly for roofs and site stormwater systems. While AAPS complies with current regulatory standards, there is concern about whether those standards are sufficient under future climate scenarios, such as back-to-back 100-year storm events. Limited in-house engineering capacity presents challenges in evaluating evolving requirements.
- There is strong interest in strengthening public engagement and educational partnerships. AAPS expressed enthusiasm for connecting stormwater management to student learning and future workforce development. Previous collaborations, including urban hydrology initiatives, were viewed positively, and there is interest in reviving City–School partnerships. AAPS currently partners with organizations such as the Huron River Watershed Council and communicates with families through facility-based outreach.
- Equity considerations include schools with older infrastructure, Title I schools, and facilities located in more vulnerable areas. Many stormwater challenges are linked to aging infrastructure rather than recurring localized flooding. Schools that have experienced past issues include Angell, Open, Bach, Slauson, Tappan, Pioneer, and Burns Park.
- Stormwater investment priorities should focus on rehabilitating and replacing aging infrastructure using a risk-based asset management approach. Nature-based solutions are of interest; however, barriers include maintenance costs, lack of dedicated funding, safety concerns related to standing water, and limited space on smaller school properties.
- Improved coordination during major storm events was identified as a need, particularly in sharing real-time information when downstream infrastructure failures affect school properties. Strong interest was expressed in continued City–AAPS collaboration to jointly communicate stormwater benefits, develop maintenance strategies, and support implementation of resilient practices.

Next Steps

- Consider establishing quarterly coordination meetings between the City and AAPS
- Explore pilot partnerships focused on stormwater education and nature-based solutions
- Improve communication protocols during major storm events
- Identify opportunities to align infrastructure investment with equity and risk-based prioritization