Ann Arbor Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan
Stormwater Advisory Group (SWAG) Meeting Minutes
Session 6 – January 14th, 2026

Attendees:

The following individuals attended the in-person meeting on January 14th:

Michelle Bennett	Jerry Hancock
Stephen Brown	Jillian Hesler
Don Carpenter	Criag Hupy
Dan Christian	Jasmine Isaac
Miekyn Cotton	Jen Lawson
Erin Donnelly	Melissa Menerey
Gretchen Driskell	Richard Norton
Omar Gates	Andrea Paine

Meeting Agenda:

The meeting consisted of the following components:

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Technical Memo #5 – Floodplain Hazards
3. DPW Operations and Maintenance
4. Closing and Adjournment

The PowerPoint slides presented to the SWAG have been attached. A summary of current and upcoming action items for SWAG members is available at the end of the meeting minutes section below.

Meeting Minutes:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Don Carpenter led a round of introductions while meeting agendas were distributed to the SWAG members. It was noted that associated meeting minutes, including prior minutes, would be distributed via email for approval. A lack of remark/revision is treated as acceptance of the material provided. The project team is working to reduce turnaround on meeting minute approval.

Jen provided key updates on focus group and stakeholder meetings.

University of Michigan (UM) and Ann Arbor Public Schools (AAPS) have been identified as key stakeholders, each holding their own stormwater permits. Smaller, targeted dialogues with AAPS (facility group, facility director, and environmental consultant team) and UM (AEC, Office of Sustainability, Dana Wilkinson) were conducted. Conversations with both groups yielded meaningful communication and both groups were interested in continued, regular communication.

The group also noted that a lawsuit against the City for its use of stormwater utility rates was recently refused by the supreme court. This maintains the legality of the City's stormwater utility rates and sets a precedent for the establishment of stormwater utility rates. There are 10 stormwater utilities across the state, but many are limited to specific projects where the City's provides continuous funding.

2. Technical Memo #5 – Floodplain Hazards

Technical Memo #5 (TM5) evaluates flood hazards within the City and outlines subsequent actions that could be taken to enhance floodplain management efforts. It should be noted that TM5 considers flooding in the context of rivers and creeks.

TM5 Key Considerations

- Increased frequency and intensity of rainfall
- Flooding outside mapped floodplains
- Tensions between redevelopment and risk analysis/communication

Key Considerations Regarding FEMA Floodplain Maps

- Flood insurance rate maps show a single 100-year floodplain where reality is more complex.
- FEMA floodplain maps are primarily for regulations/insurance. They provide consistency and clarity but lack detail pertaining to risk/uncertainty.
- While floodplain maps with FEMA are valid, legal, and compliant, they are created with outdated data, and this could be an opportunity to integrate more detailed, current data.
- Key Concept: Probabilistic Flood Modeling
    - Newer floodplain analysis generally uses a range/spectrum of risk as opposed to a single boundary such as the 100-year floodplain boundary in FEMA regulations.
    - More detailed maps are not inherently tied into permitting but could provide crucial regulatory context and precedent.
    - These detailed maps are also helpful to communicate real flooding instances/risk.

Key Questions Explored in TM5

- Are we using the right information?
- Are we making consistent, defensible decisions?
- How can we best prepare for and communicate risk?

Key choices in TM5 were identified for further discussion in three rounds. For each round, the group broke into two and discussed the topics separately before sharing findings as a larger group.

2.1. Round 1: FEMA Floodplain Maps and Communication of Risk

Questions

1. **From a planning perspective**, what are the limitations of relying only on FEMA floodplain maps?
2. How comfortable are you with the City using **non-regulatory flood risk information** (beyond FEMA) to inform planning and infrastructure decisions?
3. What concerns should the City be aware of when communicating more nuanced or uncertain flood risk to the public?

Discussion

It was noted that the City has a stormwater model that is incredibly detailed and grounded with system measurements, and that this existing model can be implemented towards probabilistic modeling/mapping. This would incorporate more recent and higher detail data, going beyond the level of detail captured in typical FEMA mapping. While not a common practice, communities can create their own models, not beholden to FEMA review, and base regulations on their local, more updated models.

Question 1:

- The FEMA model is static and reflects the best available data at the time of its development. The update process is cumbersome, typically spanning several years.
- It was noted that areas not indicated in the 100-year floodplain also experience flooding, making the 100-yr floodplain delineation an incomplete way to communicate flood risk.

Question 2:

- The group was generally in favor of adding more detailed, probabilistic mapping to enhance regulations and understanding.
- FEMA key limits:
    - Based on historical data
    - Limited data available for its generation
    - Mapping continuity issues related to political/site boundaries
    - Existing FEMA zones don't communicate risk
    - Layer symbology is inconsistent
- Adding detail and probabilistic risk is consistent with hazard mitigation plan.
- To tie information into regulations, there is going to need to be clear definition in addition to the information provided. Newer, more detailed maps provide valuable information but must be associated with legally precise/enforceable boundaries.
- Fine-tuned model leads to fine-tuned regulations
- The group acknowledged the cost of model development, constituent pushback, and litigation as potential reasons people utilize FEMA instead of independently updated, higher detail models.

Question 3:

- Transition between 100-year floodplain and probabilistic risk map should be communicated as an improvement to accuracy as opposed to a blanket increase or decrease of floodplain area.
- Resources should be developed (and clearly communicated) for houses that are identified as at risk, especially those that were not already included in the 100-year floodplain.
- Need consistent clarity around where people can and cannot build.
- Requires education – in many ways, how fast this can be implemented comes down to how fast it can be explained and accepted.
- In defining flooding, incorporate "substantial potential for damage" as a key element
- Need to recognize moving floodplain boundaries.

The group was generally comfortable utilizing updated, non-FEMA models to inform regulations. While it becomes more complex/harder to explain, it provides a more informed basis for decision making. All information should be provided in context, with implementation guidance.

2.2. Round 2: Floodplain Restoration and Property Acquisition

Questions

1. In what **types of situations** do you think floodplain restoration or property acquisition makes the most sense in Ann Arbor?
2. What **concerns or unintended consequences** should the City explicitly address if it expands or formalizes these approaches?
3. What principles should guide when these tools are *appropriate* versus when other solutions should be prioritized?

Discussion

Question 1:

- The group discussed focusing on key areas of concern for acquisition. "Choke points" and the floodway should be prioritized, and it was noted that floodplain restoration can often be a harder pitch in terms of $/benefit yielded.

Question 2:

- Generally, property acquisition has been coordinated through FEMA grants. This provides fund matching but also can lead to slower turnarounds associated with program shutdowns. It was suggested that this be put forward as a local program to avoid federal program limitations.
- Tension between development needs and recognition of floodway.
- Any acquisition program should take measures to ensure property values are maintained – to the benefit of the surrounding community and the property owner.
- Regarding unintended consequences, environmental justice should always remain in consideration. Acquisitions should avoid removing affordable housing or impacting property values.

Question 3:

- If possible, find ways to demonstrate potential savings associated with the program.
- FEMA's cost benefit analysis (CBA) tool can be used as a reference/starting point for consideration, but the tool should be tailored to City-specific use cases.
- The City should always be able to clearly explain its decision making.

2.3. Round 3: Establishing Priorities

Questions

1. Which of the following feel like the **most important and achievable** priorities in the next 5–10 years?
    - Updating flood models and data
    - Developing non-regulatory flood risk tools
    - Expanding floodplain restoration and open space
    - Strengthening redevelopment guidance
    - Increasing CRS participation and public education
2. Which directions feel important but **less realistic in the near term**?
3. Are there recommendations that need **clearer boundaries, caveats, or sequencing** to be workable?

Discussion

Question 1:

- Both groups considered a ranking of the provided priorities. Rank order voting was conducted in Group 2, while group 1 created a shared list of the overall importance ranking.
- CRS participation and public education were viewed as overarching components to all other priorities, so some participants hesitated to rank it with the other listed priorities. Public education was identified as a key priority.
- Group 1 Approximate Importance Ranking
    - *Most important*
    - 1. Updating flood models and data
    - 2. Public education*

    - 3. Developing new regulatory flood risk tools
    - 4. Expanding floodplain restoration and open space
    - 5. Strengthening redevelopment guidance
    - 6. Increasing CRS participation
    - *Least important*

      *Public education is included as its own priority, separate from CRS participation

- The most important priority was generally identified as 'updating flood models and data'
    - The second most important priority was less widely agreed upon, but generally split between 'developing new regulatory flood risk tools,' 'expanding floodplain restoration and open space,' or 'strengthening redevelopment guidance'

Question 2:

- The most achievable priority was generally identified as 'increasing CRS participation and public education,' followed by 'updating flood models and data'

Question 3:

- Probabilistic maps can serve as a basis for justifiable decisions and further planning
- If flood models were utilized to improve/update regulations, this could lead to increased CRS scores
- Updated, risk-aware regulations could be drafted in parallel with map development to ensure they agree with one another and that regulations are not developed in response to certain mapping outcomes
- While efforts should not await their publication, they should consider the anticipated publication of Atlas 15 in 2026.
- FEMA's CBA tool should be used and adjusted to local need/conditions

4. <u>DPW Operations and Maintenance</u>

The group took a tour of the Wheeler facility, with demonstrations provided by the stormwater team.

5. <u>Closing and Adjournment</u>

Action Items:

Current action items include the following:

- SWAG #5 Minutes (to be provided via email by Jen Lawson) and approved by 1/23/2026

Upcoming action items include:

- The next SWAG meeting will be held on March 11 at Cobblestone