



Capital Program

Thurston Elementary Questions Answered

Q1. Did the Board of Education have knowledge of the site plan prior to the community meeting on September 26, 2024?

Yes, the full Board of Education was presented the site plan at the September 25, 2024 meeting. The Bond Committee reviewed the site plan at the June 7, 2024 meeting.

Q2. Where will the soil come from to build up the foundation for the new building as the site is a low spot?

Project engineers make every effort to balance project sites (not requiring trucking soils in or out), but should new soils be necessary for foundations, they would be clean engineered fill brought in from offsite.

Q3. How will the regrading take place with the various phases and challenges presented over the two years?

All construction activities, including grading operations, will take place in a safe, sequenced manner and coordinated by the onsite construction management team.

Q4. Is there no chance to have a new school in a different area?

Other locations onsite have been evaluated and are not feasible. Though other building shapes may be possible, they would all be located north of the existing building, and none would represent a lesser impact on the site. This is due to many factors, including but not limited to: current regulatory requirements for new school construction, provisions for the safe separation of bus and vehicular traffic, engineered studies of soil bearing capacity on the site, constructability, accommodations for programmatic needs to support quality learning environments, and safety considerations for school operations. In regards to the acquisition of a site elsewhere in the northeast sector (within the Thurston boundary), there is no available property, nor would the AAPS unnecessarily divert funds for such an acquisition from directly benefiting students.

Q5. Has this rough design been built on another site?

This design has not been built on another site.

Q6. Why add a "plaza" when the community already meets on the playground?

This space will be used regularly by students to support daily school operations, while also meeting regulatory requirements.

Q7. Can we build a third floor for a smaller footprint?

Because of the required functions that must remain on the first floor to meet regulatory requirements and support our youngest learners, adding a third floor will not reduce the building footprint.



Q8. Can we place portables where new Thurston is planned, to do an in-place remodel/rebuild?

This is not feasible. A portable village (as these are sometimes called) allowing for the strategic deconstruction/demolition, full renovation and expansion of the existing building site would divert significant funds away from directly benefiting students and would represent a greater overall impact on the site and its habitats, than the current plan does. Portables are also not the best educational environment for students. When they are incorporated (generally for additional classroom space only) at a school it is usually as a last resort while other options such as renovations or new buildings are planned. Gymnasiums, cafeterias, libraries and the infrastructure to support these spaces all present costly and significant challenges for a temporary solution. Any temporary solution still needs to meet all current regulatory requirements for public schools in the state of Michigan.

Q9. Why can't you add on to the current building like Northside did in 2009?

This option was evaluated and deemed not feasible. It does not meet District objectives.

Q10. Was any thought given to adding a new addition to alleviate crowding to minimize site impact and reduce the footprint?

This option was evaluated and deemed not feasible. It does not meet District objectives.

Q11. Will the utilities be an improvement at a new school?

Yes, all utilities required for this building will be new.

Q12. Will the amphitheater be kept or the signs there? Can the signs for the space with special designations be kept and incorporated into the new design?

Current plans will have little to no impact on the Amphitheater. The District intends to incorporate signs with special designations into the new design.

Q13. Can you flip the parking lot and green space?

There are many constraints making this infeasible which include construction logistics, safety and the impact to school operations.

Q14. Is there any way possible for the current butterfly/rain garden to be kept in the new design?

A new, larger Butterfly / Hummingbird Garden is planned to replace the existing one nearby.

Q15. How will the new building placement affect people who use the Nature Center during the day, walking those trails?

For most of the roughly two years of construction, access should remain as it is currently. There may be periodic times when the trail may be closed during construction.



Q16. Where will the garden and Thurston Nature Center shed be moved to? Where are the possible locations?

A final location for the garden has not been determined. The ideal location would be in good sun, close enough to the building to encourage expanded use by students, with convenient access to water.

Q17. Could protective window markings be used on the second story windows for bird safety?

Great suggestion that is being taken into consideration.

Q18. Could the lights used on the pond side of construction be the purple lights used in other locations to reduce light pollution?

The AAPS is complying with the City of Ann Arbor's Ordinances governing Light Trespass and Glare, which are intended to eliminate light pollution experienced by adjacent properties.

Q19. Is there a site plan with dimensions available?

Technical, dimensioned plans will be available at the time the project is issued for bid.

Q20. Does AAPS have a survey that shows where the property line is between Thurston and my property?

A complete topographic survey has been done and will be among the documents made publicly available when the project bids.

Q21. There is a galvanized fence between my property and Thurston, but I don't know if it is on Thurston property, my property, or on the line. If it is on Thurston property, will you be removing it or replacing it?

Fences installed by others on District property are expected to be removed or relocated by those who installed them. The District does not have firm plans to remove fences installed by the District.

Q22. I am a resident of Prairie Street near Thurston School, and my back yard backs up to the new school location. My question is, regarding the new school plan, can there be more trees and shrubs planted on the west side of the new school so that the adjacent neighbors on Prairie Street won't be seeing a 2-story wall (the school) outside of their back yards?

The District anticipates more plantings than currently exist on the site, with enhanced natural buffers.

Q23. What is the response to concerns raised by the Thurston Nature Center Committee regarding land use, flooding, watershed, etc.?

Responses to specific concerns raised by the Community can be found elsewhere in [FAQs](#) posted to the [A2SchoolsBond.org](#) website, including this one.



Q24. How does the current plan affect opportunities for teaching/learning about nature, environmental issues, etc.?

The current building design is arranged to encourage indoor / outdoor connections for Students and Staff, including to project terraces, a project courtyard, outdoor classrooms, rain gardens, a Butterfly / Hummingbird garden and nature trails.

Q25. Could stakes be placed showing actual loss of space where the access routes will be and the setback from the pond?

This is not available as engineered site plans are in progress.

Q26. What are the Impacts of the Thurston Elementary project on the Thurston Nature Area?

Of the nearly 12 acres of habitat set-aside by the AAPS, the Thurston Elementary Project will impact roughly 1.0 acre of unmown area within the AAPS property boundary. This impact is comprised of two closely-related areas, 0.41 acres of the southern edge of the main habitat surrounding Thurston Pond (which includes the Butterfly / Hummingbird Rain Garden) and the fragmented 0.62 acre Oak micro habitat. The new project will result in roughly 3 acres of unmown area (twice as much as is present today), planted with native trees, shrubs, groundcovers, flowers, and grasses, serving to extend the present habitat to the southern extreme of the site. Much of this will be in the form of an edge condition, averaging 40' in width, which will also serve to buffer school operations from surrounding neighbors. Within this doubling of habitat is roughly an acre of semi-contiguous Rain Garden, and a new Butterfly Garden, roughly 1.5 times as large as the existing version. Our aim is to encourage our students to visit, appreciate, and learn from these habitats by incorporating their educational setting more closely with them. The areas of the Thurston Nature Center impacted by the project were constructed after 2010. The project team continues to work to limit impacts on the site while addressing the current and future needs of Thurston students, staff and school community.

Q27. How is AAPS supporting the goal of maintaining/increasing exposure to nature, biodiversity, etc. by paving over more land and reducing the Thurston Nature Center?

The Thurston Elementary project is anticipated to expand rather than reduce habitat areas on AAPS property and around the Thurston Nature Center. The new project will result in roughly 3 acres of unmown area (twice as much as is present today), planted with native trees, shrubs, groundcovers, flowers, and grasses, serving to extend the present habitat to the southern extreme of the site. Much of this will be in the form of an edge condition, averaging 40' in width, which will also serve to buffer school operations from surrounding neighbors. Within this doubling of habitat is roughly an acre of semi-contiguous Rain Garden, and a new Butterfly Garden, roughly 1.5 times as large as the existing version. Our aim is to encourage our students to visit, appreciate, and learn from these habitats by incorporating their educational setting more closely with them.



Q28. Will you be filling in the Thurston Pond?

No. The Thurston Pond, its trails and nearly 11 acres of pond habitat will not be impacted, other than coordinated improvements to trail conditions where needed.

Q29. Why are you rushing to cut into an area established 60 years ago with trees even older, saying you don't have time to consider the people who live here?

The areas of the Thurston Nature Center impacted by the project were constructed after 2010. The project team continues to work to limit impacts on the site, while addressing the current and future needs of Thurston students, staff and school community.

Q30. How will the population of fireflies be protected that currently live in the Oak Savanna?

The Oak trees will be transplanted during the months both the trees and the fireflies are dormant. Replacement of native ground cover plantings and grasses will be re-established, as part of the project, to support habitats.

Q31. Has AAPS done an environmental study for climate impact?

AAPS is designing new schools to meet the Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) Verified Leader standard. This process includes but is not limited to reviewing local Climate Vulnerability Assessments, developing a Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment in order to reduce embodied carbon, as well as utilizing energy modeling to reduce operational carbon and align with the objectives outlined in the [AAPS Environmental Sustainability Framework](#).

Q32. When and how will the Oak trees be moved? What is the follow up care, in particular watering, they will receive?

Any Oak trees which are healthy and transplantable will be transplanted during the months they are dormant, and will receive two years of care thereafter.

Q33. Who will decide where trees are moved to? How will we know they won't be moved again?

The AAPS's plan is to move the trees once with input from the Thurston Nature Center committee.

Q34. What is the setback, building from the edge of the pond?

At its closest point, new Thurston will be located 150' from the seasonally-variable pond edge.

Q35. Will the building lights be left on, with no drapes or blinds, all evening, night & weekends, as happens now with the current building?

The updated building automation and control system will ensure that no lights are on when the building is unoccupied. The practice of leaving 'night lights' on in the building will also be abandoned to the extent permissible by life safety codes, in favor of reducing energy costs.



Q36. Will the AC be on and noisy outside school hours also; will it be louder without the tree buffer?

Exterior noise levels will be voluntarily set at or below levels required to meet City of Ann Arbor Ordinance for noise. The District anticipates more plantings than currently exist on the site with enhanced natural buffers.

Q37. One big concern of the former principal was the safety of children near a water source. What steps are being taken for this?

AAPS takes the safety of all students seriously and will ensure all school operations support the safety of school children as well as staff and visitors.

Q38. Will the District be fixing the damaged gate and fence by the inlet and water valve? This space, in particular, is very deep.

Ongoing pond improvements are very important to the District; however they are separate from the new Thurston Elementary project. An AAPS maintenance crew will review the gate and fence by the inlet and water valve.

Q39. We were told the Clague project would only take 2 years to complete, and they are still there working. What happens if this project doesn't conclude on time by more than just a few months?

The project scale and specific details between Clague and the new Thurston Elementary are quite different. However, supply chain and unforeseen delays have been included in the construction timelines to mitigate any potential delays.

Q40. What is the buffer between building completion and the start of Fall 2027 term?

The project timeline requires the building to be turned over to the AAPS with ample time for commissioning and move-in.

Q41. Are there going to be buses backed up on Georgetown or does "alt 3" take care of that?

All site traffic, including buses, will access the site via Prairie, using driveways whose lengths are more than adequate to accommodate traffic without backing up onto the street.

Q42. Where will construction traffic be coming in?

At this time, plans involve using the City right-of-way, which extends East from Renfrew for construction access.

Q43. Can the proposed new traffic loop handle the vehicle capacity?

The parent drop-off and pick-up loop is sized to safely accommodate for estimated traffic volumes for the maximum projected enrollment at Thurston.



Q44. Can you divide the construction traffic equally through 3 routes, Renfrew, Aurora and Prairie? I live on Renfrew Street.

Temporary construction access must be kept completely separate from ongoing school operations to ensure a safe and sure site for Thurston students, staff and school community. Access off Renfrew meets this need.

Last Update: 10/23/2024

Don't see a question listed? Please visit the New Construction/Major Project FAQs [here](#).