



Capital Program

Thurston Elementary Questions Answered 02/2025

Q1. The fire department has flagged this site as violating distance to building code. Specifically: “It does not appear that the new structure will have the necessary fire access on the south side of the structure with the fencing around the existing structure to be removed.” How will AAPS handle liability to people and/or property in the event of a fire? Comments from the AAFD are *Plan Review* comments, not Citations of Violations. The AAFD has required that the project team address construction-related concerns to their satisfaction, as a requirement of gaining final approval. Solutions satisfying the AAFD are in development and will be submitted as an official response.

This is a typical process.

Note that the AAFD has already approved the final construction condition of the site.

Q2. The GeoTechnical Report by G2 Consulting Group has marked this site as containing problematic soil. How do you plan to manage the periodic maintenance they determined will be the outcome of building in the new location? Where will this funding come from? Geotechnical Reports are due-diligence mechanisms the AAPS employs early in design for each project involving substantial earthwork. These Reports are used specifically to determine what cannot be seen: sub-surface conditions.

- a. Geotechnical investigations provide critical design data based on the projects site-specific subsurface soil and groundwater conditions including bearing capacity, settlement potential, and the presence of hazards like compressible soils. With this data designers are enabled to provide cost-efficient, site-specific design and construction.
- b. Geotechnical investigations are also mandated by the Michigan Building Code, ensuring that all projects comply with regulatory requirements and maintain structural integrity and safety.

Problematic soils, or soils giving rise to construction challenges, are present on nearly every project. Where they are encountered, Design Professionals base their designs on compliance with the Geotechnical Engineer’s recommendations.

Depending on the encountered depth of any problematic soils, there may be a range of solutions that could include leaving the problematic soils in-place, and dealing with challenges related to construction, or removing and replacing the soils to improve the site capacity. In instances where the problematic soils are left in-place, the soils might be amended to improve their capacity, or foundations could extend through the problematic soils to bear on more competent bearing soils.



This is a typical process.

For Thurston, buried organic soils were encountered. These soils are considered problematic due to their potential to compress with increases in the pressure applied to the soils. Based on the presence of organic soils at the site, the position of the proposed building was adjusted as much as possible, however, the potential for foundations constructed over problematic soils remained. The solution to navigate the remaining problematic soils was to amend the problematic soils capacity by using ground improvement techniques, in this case, rammed aggregate piers or rigid inclusions.

Diligence related to soil conditions does not end with the design and implementation of recommendations made in the Geotechnical Report. It continues through construction, under the direct supervision of Geotechnical and Structural Engineers, to ensure that suitable sub-surface conditions are present under the building and surrounding site.

The periodic maintenance referenced in the Geotechnical Report is typical language to give the pavements the best chance of achieving their design life; budgeting for and performing routine crack-filling maintenance on the pavements.

Geotechnical Engineers recommend regular timely maintenance be performed on the bituminous pavements to reduce the potential deterioration associated with moisture infiltration through surface cracks. The District is prepared to seal cracks in the asphalt with a hot-applied elastic crack filler as soon as possible after cracking develops, and as often as necessary, to block the passage of water to the subgrade soils. This typical recommendation is unrelated to sub-surface conditions.

Q3. Recess space will be substantially reduced during construction. Approximately 200 kids will be squeezed into space currently used by the other 300. Where do you plan to have the kids play during peak construction? Please provide diagrams for concerned parents and staff. During installation of the driveline, bus loop, and geothermal, recess space is virtually non-existent, what is the plan for outdoor access during this phase of construction?

Outdoor play amenities will be adequate for school operations during construction and will return to their generous condition post-construction. All AAPS projects involving construction on active school sites (Thurston is one of thirteen such sites) will see impacted but adequate play area offerings during construction, with the approval of and cooperation from each Building Principal and staff.

Play areas will be reduced more in some phases of construction than in others.

But the size of the final outdoor play area for the new Thurston will actually increase compared to the current play area for students. The new play areas include what is available today with formal playfields and the addition of blacktop areas. Recess monitoring of the play areas will be the same as it is today.



The bus loop will be gated and will remain vacant during school hours except during drop-off and pick-up. The improvements to the parking lot/parent drop off and bus loop are critical safety improvements that the current Thurston does not have due to lack of space. Separating cars and buses is a known safety protocol recommendation that AAPS incorporates at campuses across the district, when space allows. The parent and staff parking driveway will see very little traffic through the day, with the highest concentration at drop-off and pick-up times. Just like current conditions, there is very little traffic in the parking lot during the school day.

These conditions are similar at all AAPS elementary schools.

Q4. Typical construction noises exceed 90 dB. The prolonged exposure to noise and vibrations will be disruptive to many Thurston students, including violating IEPs. What types of remediation have you planned for those students??

The noise level from construction activities in the nearest Classrooms is expected to be below 44dB.

To further mitigate noise disturbances, the approach to all AAPS construction projects is to conduct the noisiest operations during the summer months, and/or when school is not in session.

All AAPS projects which involve work within occupied buildings or on occupied sites include allowances to accommodate occupant's needs. Adjustments are commonly made to suit student needs, both on the construction operation and school operation sides.

This is a typical process.

Q5. Staging mitigates all of these problems. What are the costs and logistics to stage at current Logan?

Though this statement does not define what 'all of these problems' are, specifically, staging certainly does not mitigate all problems.

Staging Thurston will delay much-needed benefits to between 950 and 1,035 Students, and between 90 and 170 Staff, by between 2 and 5 years, and it would reduce the available budget for Thurston by between \$8M and \$13M, which is between a 10% and a 20% reduction in scope.

The AAPS avoids staging wherever possible.

Q6. Many parents and teachers are concerned with little kids getting in the pond due to the new proximity. What safety measures will be put in place to avoid drowning?

While the current plan places the new building closer to the pond, the concerns remain very similar to present conditions. Students and non-students have been frequent users of the Thurston Nature Center for over 60 years. Just as now, when the TNC is incorporated into the curriculum, students will be accompanied by classroom teachers and adult volunteers. This applies to any time students are on the playgrounds during the school day, just as it does now. The top priority for AAPS is student safety and for all visitors to the TNC. The evaluation of added risks due to the new school location has not produced



concrete evidence of additional concerns but AAPS will always monitor and respond to any safety concerns appropriately.

Q7. This build has several complicated aspects as a result of moving the new building so close to the pond. Additional expenses include dewatering and deep pile foundation installation. What are the final bid costs, and how does this compare to the initial estimates?

We do not have final bid costs at this time, but soils conditions are included in AAPS' budgets for each project.

Q8. A wetland delineation report is typically required when building near water. What study was performed by Gilbane? Who from AAPS has reviewed it?

Wetland delineations are conducted when conditions present on a site suggest the presence of Wetlands.

Wetland delineations for Thurston were conducted by Barr Engineering on February 21, 2023, and field-located by Spalding DeDecker on March 3 and 20, 2023. Findings from the delineation appear on the project's Topographical Survey made publicly available in early February 2025.

The Thurston project stays at least 100' away from delineated Wetlands. No permit is required from the City or State for any work that is greater than 25' from a wetland boundary.

Q9. Re-grading the entire school site to mitigate settling soil will be expensive and time consuming. How much does this cost compared to building on the well drained high point of the site closer to the current school?

The Geotechnical Report does not state that the entire site needs to be regraded. Particular areas of concern for sub-surface conditions are identified, for which compliant mitigation measures have been implemented in the current design.

Q10. Construction projects legally require a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan. Where is Gilbane's SWPP? Who has verified this is compliant with the Huron River Watershed Council requirements?

Gilbane is not the author of the plan. Gilbane is the AAPS Owner's Representative.

In the state of Michigan, Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans are referred to as a Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control (SESC) Plans. SESC plans have been prepared by the project's Civil Engineer. A Sedimentation Control Permit will be obtained by the City of Ann Arbor, with regular inspections held by City Staff. The Construction Manager will also retain a Certified Stormwater Operator on the project, ensuring the sediment and erosion is controlled in accordance with all applicable regulations.

A Notice of Coverage (of the SESC plan) will also be filed with Michigan EGLE prior to mobilization.



The HRWC is not a Stormwater Authority and does not review or approve plans.

Q11. The Huron River Watershed Council has formally contacted AAPS with concerns about this project. Why were local environmental groups not included in the planning process? When do you plan to remedy this oversight?

The AAPS is not required to include environmental groups in the planning process but is instead extensively regulated by appropriate Regulatory Agencies, including, for Stormwater plans, the District's MS4, the City of Ann Arbor, and EGLE.

The HRWC is not a regulatory agency, but they are an important community organization; AAPS has reached out and will continue to do so.

Q12. EGLE has to legally approve any site near water but has not been contacted for a permit. EGLE has indicated that it is highly unusual to not have permits in hand this close to the start of construction. Why has this permit not yet been submitted?

An EGLE permit is applied for by the City of Ann Arbor after its Preliminary Plan process is completed. This process has been slowed, as compared to other AAPS projects, to allow the Professional Team to respond to Community concerns, but construction work will only take place after the necessary approvals have been granted.

If this inquiry refers to a Wetland, Lakes, and Streams permit, proposed work is not considered close to the waterbody or wetland by State standards, so this permit is not required.

If this inquiry refers to an SESC Notice of Coverage, this will be obtained after the City issues an SESC permit, which is obtained after the Preliminary Plan approval. Technically, this is a notification to the State that local coverage for SESC has been obtained and is not generally requested / granted until just before construction starts, as these permits require the name and contact information of the people performing the earthwork.

The typical process for this work is as follows:

1. A project is bid and an Earthwork Contractor officially enters under contract, then . . .
2. The earthwork contractor applies for and obtains the City SESC permit, then . . .
3. The Notice of SESC Coverage is sent to the State and construction may begin.

It is not unusual for SESC and NOC paperwork to be finalized in the days immediately preceding mobilization.



Q13. Many adjacent neighbors have already experienced flooding. What type of liability insurance will AAPS be providing to the surrounding homes to cover such events if construction exacerbates area flooding??

Current plans will improve surface and sub-surface water conditions controllable by the District (i.e. issues emanating from on-site), but will have no effect on pre-existing flooding conditions which do not emanate from on site.

Construction grading, utility, and stormwater designs have been carefully prepared to ensure that flooding conditions will not be exacerbated or made worse. Stormwater flow rates and volumes are being spread to the existing outlet points and will be reduced as a result of stormwater detention and infiltration systems.

All planned infiltration will occur 7-8 feet below basement levels and will not exacerbate basement flooding.

All designs are compliant with all regulations to protect neighboring properties.

Q14. The final recess spaces will be small and segmented, and in between motive car areas. How will AAPS provide additional resources for monitoring the various recess areas?

Final outdoor play area size will increase over what is present today, with playgrounds provided of the same size as today, formal playfield areas of the same size, and additional blacktop areas.

The bus loop is gated and will remain vacant during school hours other than pick-up and drop-off times. The parent and staff parking driveway will see very little traffic through the day, with the highest concentration at pick-up and drop-off times. For the rest of the day, very small numbers of drivers will use these drives, travelling at very low speed limits.

This is no different than conditions at the majority of the AAPS' school sites today.

Monitoring of recess is not expected to be any different than it is today.

Q15. The now defunct bond advisory committee was supposed to provide relevant expertise throughout the planning process. When will this committee be reassembled? Who will be considered?

This is currently being considered by the Board of Education.

Q16. No alternatives have been formally presented to the BOE nor public for logistics and cost. How does the cost of building in the new location (near the pond) compare with building closer to the current location of the school?

We don't have final costs from bids at this time. The current plan is more cost-effective than any plan that involves constructing a new school, plus staging.



Q17. Due to the tight construction footprint, a local construction hygienist has raised concern for dust exposure for children with health conditions. Water trucks are not foolproof (especially during times of unpredictable winds). Additionally, the trucks can only be used on the dirt areas around the site but not directly on the actual work areas (where active construction workers would be in the way). What other safety measures have been put in place for the students and teachers during construction to prevent negative respiratory health outcomes?

In the current plan, the dustiest work will take place on site during the summer months, and/or when school is not in session.

Q18. Thurston attracts ASD students due to the low-sensory environment provided by the Nature Center. Construction will disrupt this. How will IEP stipulated sensory breaks be provided in this environment?

AAPS will be working with the school Building Principal and staff to address these concerns.

Q19. Many have lost faith in the AAPS board of education and will never support another bond. How do you plan to regain community trust? What considerations for the long term financial health of the district have been made in the event that future bonds fail to get passed?

AAPS greatly appreciates the decades of support it has received from the Ann Arbor area voters. This wide community understands and embraces the importance of an excellent public school system foremost for students but also for the vitality and health of the entire geographic area. The 2019 bond was a large ask to this community and with the support it garnered, it has allowed AAPS to plan 20 years out to ensure the old and aging facilities can be built new or remodeled to provide students and staff with much upgraded learning space.

The 2019 bond plan was created after a thorough facilities assessment to address schools that have the highest facility needs first. It also includes thoughtful renovation projects on historical buildings that have a long history in this community. The buildings from the 50's and 60's were not built with 100 years expected life. This includes Thurston. As the community grows and instruction evolves, the need to provide updated, safe and innovative learning spaces is the priority for AAPS.

We also understand that for the Thurston community there were vital missteps in engagement. We own these missteps and have corrected our process. While these missteps created a lack of faith in the district's plan for Thurston, we have committed to always provide fully vetted and researched plans from experienced architects, contract managers and environmental specialists. We commit that while the process of communication was not optimal, the plan is not flawed. We have listened to the community and made adjustments in the design where feasible. We believe that as a community we want the same outcome for our students: a better learning environment on a property that offers space to ensure



continuity for students while committing to revitalizing the curriculum using the resource rich Thurston Nature Center.

Q20. There is a lot of confusion regarding building timelines. What is the formal bid acceptance timeline for the Thurston project?

Bids for Thurston will be accepted on February 20, 2025, and will undergo a rigorous process to evaluate qualifications and completeness before being presented to the Bond Committee for recommendation no earlier than mid-March 2025.

Q21. The Thurston Nature Center habitats have been improved and maintained in collaboration between the community and AAPS. As a result, these projects and areas are well documented. Recently BOE members have revealed a lack of knowledge around key site features. What plans does AAPS have to bring all planners and decision makers up to speed with relevant knowledge about the site?

The Thurston Nature Center is not only the pride of the neighborhood, but it is a gem of the Ann Arbor Public Schools. We have previously enjoyed a close relationship with the TNC "caretakers" as we do at Scarlett Woods and other green spaces that the district owns. We do know that more recently the communication between the TNC and AAPS has waned and project coordination has not been as strong. AAPS commits to reestablishing this relationship as it is vital to the life of the TNC. True for many AAPS owned properties, it takes a coordinated process bringing experts to the table to address the various decisions and situations that may arise, especially on property that is used for recreational purposes and contains a wide variety of wildlife and natural areas.

AAPS has recently seated three new Trustees. They are less than two months into their term and the bond team meets with them frequently to keep them informed of every 2019 bond, not just Thurston. The role of the AAPS administration is to bring plans to the Trustees that have been developed by experts and then to explain the reasoning behind the decision-making process of the plan and answer any questions. It is not the role of the Trustees to become experts on every detailed aspect of the district's bond plan. With the information presented to the Board of Education, it is expected that the administration team will respond to all inquiries and bring the experts to the table for questions and concerns. It is unrealistic to expect Trustees to be experts in every detail of site features. That is the responsibility of the administration.

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