

**Subject:** South Prairie/Thurston Nature Center/Fire Lane  
**Attachments:** IMG\_1068.MOV

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**From:** Birgit Rieck <birgitrieck@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 5, 2025 11:44 AM  
**To:** Mallek, Jon <JMallek@a2gov.org>; Watson, Chris <CWatson@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; NAP Natural Area Preservation <NAP@a2gov.org>; Delacourt, Derek <DDelacourt@a2gov.org>; Bennett, Michelle <MBennett@a2gov.org>; Manor, Courtney <CManor@a2gov.org>; Lenart, Brett <BLenart@a2gov.org>; Dohoney Jr., Milton <MDohoney@a2gov.org>  
**Cc:** Kennedy, Mike <MKennedy@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** South Prairie/Thurston Nature Center/Fire Lane

Hallo,  
my name is Birgit Rieck, I live in Ward 2 and have been supporting my neighbors in the effort to save the Thurston Nature Center, an urban environmental teaching site, built 60 years ago and tended to by our volunteer neighbors ever since. Thurston Pond is the headwater for Millers Creek Watershed, one of the two most unstable watersheds in the Huron River watershed. The land around the Pond has been carefully developed by our neighbors to mitigate flooding, and is a unique example on how native plants help stabilize our environments and attract native fauna. It teaches children (and adults) about the Michigan environment and how flora and fauna works with each other and keep our neighbors' basements dry.

Since the new plan for building Thurston School in the wetlands had been unveiled last fall I have been asking and waiting for city officials to enter the discussion - especially after the Thurston Nature Center was backed by numerous regional and state politicians. While most of the property belongs to AAPS, the city and county (and neighborhood fundraisers) have spent millions of dollars to stabilize the watershed, help dredge the pond and limit the size of the ever growing vernal pool between the Pond and Prairie Street. The city would certainly have the right to publicly question the construction plan, discussing the fiscal responsibilities of problems occurring in the watershed area in the future, and - for example - asking AAPS to put a large amount of dollars into an escrow account to help mitigate future flooding and sinkholes in our neighborhood. However, the only replies from city officials were regret about the situation, not even an acknowledgment that millions of tax payers dollars would go to waste, if the new building is situated in a wetland above the Millers Creek Watershed.

Now, after neighbors have spent endless hours combing through official documents (essentially doing the work of city officials) it has come to light that the South Prairie portion of the Nature Center is owned by the City of Ann Arbor. This area is supposed to be paved over and used as a fire lane and AAPS has quietly tried to rush through permits for this construction.

I very much hope the city planners will deny permissions to pave over the prairie, remembering what our city and our neighbors around town stand for: respect and conservation of nature within the city. If you need a refresher of why this is important, please, contact Professor Bob Grese, director of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and the Nichols Arboretum, who designed the South Prairie at Thurston.

Even if you don't care about nature and the environment, I hope you would wonder about the safety of the proposed fire lane. Not even three feet from where the pavement would be is a culvert, through which you can hear the water of the Millers Creek Watershed rushing underground. I am attaching a short video with sound to illustrate the amount of water finding its way underneath the planned road; and I attach a photo of the huge vernal pool from last month, it is even bigger now after two days of rain and the end is not even ten feet from the proposed street. I

also want to add that the soil in this area has always been unstable, extending to Prairie Street. The walkway on Prairie Street along the South Prairie is very uneven; I stumbled and fell there last fall so badly, I am still in physical therapy, unable to use my right hand for most tasks. Relying on access to a school with 500 kids in case of an emergency on a road on that kind of unstable ground seems extremely careless at the very least. (I am copying Fire Chief Mike Kennedy on this email.)

Please, as our representatives, not AAPS' or Gilbane Construction's, do not issue a permit to allow the cared-for nearly 40-year old prairie being turned into a road - for environmental reasons but also for safety reasons. Protecting the South Prairie and the Millers Creek Watershed (and Thurston Nature Center by extension) is well within the Natural Features Resolution adopted by the City Environmental Commission just last month.

Sincerely,  
Birgit Rieck  
Burlington Street, Thurston Neighborhood

Culvert, May 8, 2025:

Vernal Pool, May 2025, flooding the trail between Clague and Thurston and a large area of the forest:

