Weathering the Storm: Stormwater Management and Priorities

Community Conversation Summary

This report consolidates key discussions, themes, and action points from all the tables at the Stormwater Community Conversation event on December 9, 2024 at Martin Street Baptist Church. The event was the second of two public engagements on stormwater management, hosted by Raleigh Stormwater, Planning and Development, and Community Engagement staff for Reflecting Raleigh: The Next Comprehensive Plan.

The conversation portion of the event followed a conversation between Raleigh's Stormwater Program Manager Wayne Miles, and Stormwater Management Advisory Commission Chair The Reverend Jemond Taylor. Event attendees were randomly assigned to one of twelve tables for three rounds of facilitated discussion. Volunteer table hosts asked participants to following questions:

- **Round 1:** As Raleigh grows, how much of that growth should be focused in areas of the city that are already developed and how much should be closer to the edge of city limits? How does this related to any concerns you have about stormwater?
- **Round 2:** Wayne and Reverend Taylor spoke about existing stormwater programs. Would you like to see Raleigh provide a higher level of service for stormwater management, along with an increased stormwater fee to cover the cost?
- **Round 3:** Have you heard of stormwater management strategies in other cities that you think could work in Raleigh? What partnerships should Raleigh pursue to improve stormwater management or expand existing programs?

Key Themes Across All Tables

1. **Equity and Transparency**
    a. Fee structures must reflect payer impact on stormwater issues.
    b. Low-income households and underserved communities are disproportionately affected by current fees and policies (Tables 2, 9, 10, 12).
    c. Transparency is critical to build trust in stormwater fee usage (Tables 1, 6, 12).

2. **Community Engagement and Education**
    a. Inclusive outreach methods beyond email and digital channels are essential for reaching underserved communities (Tables 2, 6, 7, 8).
    b. Education campaigns to explain stormwater program benefits and community participation opportunities are needed (Tables 3, 4, 12).
3. **Climate Resilience and Green Infrastructure**
    a. Prioritize green solutions such as rain gardens, permeable pavements, and native plants to enhance climate resilience (Tables 3, 7, 8, 10, 11).
    b. Implement long-term planning for climate adaptation and flood management (Tables 6, 7).
4. **Infrastructure Maintenance and Development**
    a. Address aging infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas like Southeast Raleigh (Tables 5, 11, 12).
    b. Encourage redevelopment of existing urban areas over urban sprawl (Tables 1, 9).
5. **Innovative Solutions and Partnerships**
    a. Leverage partnerships with nonprofits, schools, and private entities for innovative projects (Tables 8, 12).
    b. Explore public-private partnerships (P3s) to finance and implement stormwater initiatives (Table 12).

Detailed Insights and Recommendations

Urbanization and Fee Transparency

- **Key Points:**
    - » Vertical urbanization is preferred over sprawl to reduce impervious surfaces.
    - » Transparent communication about fee usage can enhance public trust.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Educate developers about sustainable practices and incentivize green infrastructure adoption (Table 1).

Equity in Participation

- **Key Points:**
    - » Developers have an advantage in navigating regulations compared to grassroots efforts.
    - » Many residents are unaware of how stormwater fees impact their communities.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Publish accessible water quality data to inform residents about program benefits (Table 2).

Fee Equity and Green Solutions

- **Key Points:**
    - » Adjust fee structures to reduce residential burdens while increasing commercial contributions.
    - » Reclaim underutilized spaces for conservation projects like wildlife habitats.

- **Recommendation:**
    - » Implement grants for native planting and rain gardens to support community participation (Table 3).

Awareness and Incentives

- **Key Points:**
    - » Strong public interest in preserving natural areas to prevent erosion.
    - » Public hesitance toward fee increases stems from unclear benefits.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Expand educational campaigns to explain personal benefits of stormwater programs (Table 4).

Citizen Volunteering

- **Key Points:**
    - » Older neighborhoods face critical infrastructure issues.
    - » Citizens are willing to volunteer for projects like streambank repair and native planting.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Develop volunteer programs integrated with city stormwater projects, such as "Keep Raleigh Clean" (Table 5).

Localized Outreach

- **Key Points:**
    - » Hyperlocal outreach is vital for underrepresented communities like Southeast Raleigh.
    - » Transparency in fee structures can improve trust.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Revitalize citizen advisory councils (CACs) to connect residents with decision-makers (Table 6).

Climate Adaptation

- **Key Points:**
    - » Emphasized climate change's role in exacerbating stormwater issues.
    - » Development should consider long-term impacts and avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Use future rainfall models to predict flooding impacts and plan new developments (Table 7).

Partnerships and Accessibility

- **Key Points:**
    - » Collaboration with nonprofits and schools can enhance public participation.
    - » Improve accessibility to stormwater program maps and resources.
- **Recommendation:**
    - » Build community partnerships to develop educational tools and implement conservation projects (Table 8).

Efficient Development

- **Key Points:**
  - » Efficient use of land within city limits is critical.
  - » Leverage Raleigh's membership in the Network of Biophilic Cities for resource sharing.
- **Recommendation:**
  - » Collaborate with other cities to adopt best practices in sustainable development (Table 9).

Native Vegetation

- **Key Points:**
  - » Low-income households are disproportionately affected by fees.
  - » Native vegetation plays a significant role in stormwater absorption.
- **Recommendation:**
  - » Launch community-wide planting initiatives to promote native species (Table 10).

Greenway Development

- **Key Points:**
  - » Older neighborhoods need infrastructure upgrades to meet modern standards.
  - » Greenways offer opportunities for stormwater retention and recreation.
- **Recommendation:**
  - » Expand Raleigh's greenways with integrated stormwater retention features (Table 11).

Innovation and Community Solutions

- **Key Points:**
  - » Innovative solutions like off-grid tiny homes can address homelessness and stormwater challenges.
  - » Public-private partnerships (P3s) can fund large-scale projects.
- **Recommendation:**
  - » Pilot tiny home projects with stormwater capture systems and community management (Table 12).

Consolidated Recommendations with References

Recommendation	Tables
Revise fee structures to ensure equity between sectors.	Tables 2, 3, 10
Expand educational campaigns to build public trust.	Tables 1, 2, 4, 12
Promote native vegetation and green infrastructure solutions.	Tables 3, 7, 8, 10
Prioritize infrastructure upgrades in underserved areas.	Tables 5, 11
Leverage public-private partnerships for large-scale projects.	Table 12
Develop volunteer programs for streambank repair and planting.	Table 5
Use advanced modeling to plan for future climate impacts.	Table 7
Create partnerships with schools and nonprofits.	Tables 6, 8
Launch community-led initiatives to reclaim underutilized spaces.	Tables 3, 9