

Preliminary FAQs - Decatur SWMP Update

The Decatur Stormwater Master Plan (SWMP) Team has assembled the below list of Preliminary Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help answer community questions about our project and planning process.

1. What is stormwater?

Stormwater is water that falls as precipitation and flows overland as runoff. Areas that are more permeable or have denser vegetation typically allow infiltration of some rainwater and generate less runoff. Stormwater is collected by gutters, along curbs, in ditches, and in pipes, via which it is conveyed and discharged to the nearest stream.

2. What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this project is to help plan the City's stormwater infrastructure needs for the next 20 years. The City has hired a consultant, AECOM, to study the existing stormwater infrastructure, evaluate public concerns, and recommend updates to the master plan of stormwater improvement projects. The project started in July 2018 and will last around a year.

3. What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan is a planning tool that helps a community identify goals, with an action plan based on prioritized projects, estimated costs, possible funding sources, and an implementation schedule. The Decatur Stormwater Master Plan will identify immediate needs as well as long-term solutions looking 20-years forward. The plan will identify a list of capital improvements and lay out a plan for prioritized construction of these improvements. Improvements may include increasing drainage pipe sizes, adding catch basins and pipes in areas of inadequate infrastructure, development of detention ponds, green infrastructure, and stream and buffer restoration.

4. What are impervious surfaces?

Impervious surfaces are mainly artificial areas that impede water from infiltrating into the ground and recharging the groundwater. **Examples include** pavements, asphalt, concrete, brick, stone, gravel, and buildings.

5. How is stormwater treated?

Stormwater is usually NOT treated. It may temporarily pass through a detention pond, which can slow the water's movement and allow it to be discharged more slowly. Detention ponds provide some water quality improvement through the settling of suspended solids from the water.

6. What is stormwater infrastructure?

Stormwater infrastructure consists of the system used to collect and convey stormwater from the source where it runs off to the stream where it is discharged. Stormwater infrastructure includes inlets, bioswales, pipes, ditches, and ponds.

7. Will immediate issues be addressed through the SWMP?

The SWMP will prioritize the City's stormwater needs. Prioritization will be based on circumstances specific to each concern, and factors to be considered will include project scope to resolve the situation, area of impact, severity, frequency, and source of stormwater. Resolving immediate issues can sometimes require complex or costly solutions, which is one reason why this plan update is necessary. If you have immediate concerns about a previously unreported stormwater issue, they can be reported to the City for evaluation.



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8. What is green infrastructure?

Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other elements and practices to restore natural processes to manage water and create healthier urban environments. At the city or county scale, green infrastructure is a patchwork of natural areas that provides habitat, flood protection, cleaner air, and cleaner water. Examples of green infrastructure include bioretention and bioswales, as seen in Decatur on North McDonough Street.

9. What kinds of stormwater problems do we have in Decatur?

Much of the City's stormwater management system is aging. It was constructed prior to 1960 when stormwater was managed much differently. By today's standards, many areas of the City have inadequate or undersized stormwater infrastructure. Based on public input to the SWMP process so far, many residents have concerns about local drainage, particularly in residential areas of the City. Residents have also expressed concerns about water quality.

10. How does development influence stormwater runoff?

Most commercial and multifamily projects have improved stormwater in Decatur by replacing existing impervious parking lots and mitigating runoff. Individual homes have typically been exempt from stormwater requirements, resulting in many small runoff increases that can have a cumulative effect. Compacting soil, removing vegetation and adding impervious surfaces can limit opportunities for stormwater to infiltrate back into the ground and force more water to run off. Higher levels of runoff place a greater strain on the city's stormwater infrastructure.

11. What is the City doing to control stormwater problems associated with development?

Stormwater mitigation systems are required for commercial and multi-family projects to control the rate of runoff. Rate control typically involves vaults detaining and releasing water slowly to mimic natural conditions. If an individual home adds or replaces an impervious area larger than 4,058 square feet, mitigation is required. When the impervious area on any project exceeds 5,000 square feet, mitigation must include water quality control, often achieved with gravity oil-grit separators.

12. How does the City's impervious coverage threshold relate to stormwater?

The City has two different requirements in its Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) that relate to impervious surfaces and development. The zoning requirements in the UDO (Article 1) establish a maximum 40% lot coverage for residential lots. The Stormwater Management requirements in the UDO (Section 9.3) requires mitigation for projects that add more than 4,058 square feet of impervious surface. On a typical 10,000 square foot lot, the zoning and drainage regulations apply with similar results because 40% of 10,000 feet, the threshold for the zoning requirement, is close to the 4,058 square foot threshold of the stormwater requirements. On smaller lots, the 40% limit in the zoning requirement controls impervious coverage, because 40% of area on smaller lots will not be greater than the 4,058 square foot threshold for the stormwater mitigation requirements. On larger lots, impervious coverage can exceed the 4,058 square foot stormwater mitigation threshold while still complying with the 40% lot coverage zoning requirement.

13. How do tree requirements relate to stormwater?

Trees and greenspace protection can improve stormwater management by reducing runoff (intercepting rain before it hits the ground and runs off) and increasing stormwater infiltration. The greatest influence that trees have on stormwater runoff is for rain events of less than 0.5 inch over 24 hours; this type of event is smaller in magnitude



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than the City's current stormwater mitigation requirements. Trees can provide helpful mitigation of stormwater runoff in small rain events; however, in larger storms, additional management infrastructure is needed. Moreover, in large storms, trees can also create hazards. Decatur's stormwater management ordinances focus on treating stormwater runoff generated from impervious surfaces. So areas with protected vegetation do not require stormwater treatment. After that water runs off, it needs to be collected, conveyed, and filtered where possible.

14. How do the City's stormwater requirements compare to other metro Atlanta Cities?

Stormwater ordinances in many local metropolitan communities require mitigation at 5,000 square feet of impervious surface increase. The City of Decatur's thresholds are currently more stringent than most metro areas cities and counties. The City of Atlanta has adopted more stringent stormwater mitigation thresholds than most other metro communities and requires stormwater mitigation at very low levels of impervious addition (1,000 square feet for single family residential and any level of impervious increase for other types of development).

15. Is the City considering changes to its stormwater mitigation standards?

Yes, stormwater management ordinance evaluation is a part of this project. Recommendations for changes may be an outcome of the planning process.

16. Who maintains Decatur's stormwater infrastructure?

The City owns and maintains all structures located within the Right of Way or within a dedicated easement that the City has accepted. Some of the stormwater systems that convey runoff from multiple properties, however, are located on private property, and the City does not own this infrastructure, nor does it have access to maintain these systems. This infrastructure is considered private, and maintenance and repairs are the responsibility of the owner.

17. Is this study looking at sanitary sewer issues?

This project is focused on the City of Decatur's stormwater system. The City of Decatur has no combined sewers, so there are no direct, intentional connections between the storm and sanitary systems. However, sanitary sewers are subject to some inflow and infiltration during storm events and may be impacted by rains. The sanitary sewer system in Decatur is owned and operated by DeKalb County. Sanitary sewer concerns can be directed to the DeKalb County Department of Watershed Management.

18. How can the public report stormwater concerns?

Location-specific concerns can be submitted at the following website for the project:

<http://wikimapping.com/wikimap/Decatur-SWMP-Update.html>

General comments on stormwater concerns can be submitted via the Decatur Next planning website:

<https://www.decaturnext.com/Stormwater/>

19. I have previously reported my concerns to the City; do I still need to report them to the project?

Input from residents and business owners, who see stormwater firsthand at homes and shops, is immensely important to the planning process. While City staff has documented 184 areas of concern previously reported by the community, everyone is still encouraged to share their experiences online or at public meetings to ensure the best possible plan. The project team is tracking all comments. Repeat submissions are preferred to missing an important concern.

