

Hartley Park Master Plan

Executive Summary

City of Duluth, MN - June 2014

Hartley Park is a premier 640-acre nature-based park and recreation area located in the heart of Duluth, MN. Within its boundaries are woodlands, creeks, ponds, meadows, rocky overlooks, remnants of an 1890 farm, and more than 13 miles of recreational trails. Hartley Park is operated in partnership by the Duluth Parks and Recreation Division and the nonprofit, Hartley Nature Center (HNC). The Park is a laboratory, classroom and regional showcase for ecological restoration that engages an array of community groups in visionary restoration of Hartley's diverse landscapes. In addition to HNC, key partners in Hartley Park include Cyclists of Gitchee Gumees Shores (COGGS), the Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (DXC), the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA), and the W.J. McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League.

Master Plan Process

The master plan process included: site inventory and analysis, program development, a natural resource management plan, schematic trail design, preparation of cost estimates and a phasing plan. The master plan integrates public feedback into its recommendations and works to propose enhancements compatible with the Park's unique history and identity. Over several months, six meetings and three open houses were held to facilitate dialogue with the public and collect feedback. In addition, the public had the opportunity to comment via the City's website.

Park Resource Protection

The Master Plan is designed to protect important natural and cultural resources in

the Park. The Plan highlights three natural resource protection priorities:

1. Invasive species management, such as buckthorn removal.
2. Forest restoration, such as thinning and replanting of pine plantations to increase species and age diversity.
3. Tischer Creek/Hartley Pond restoration and preservation. The plan recommends a third party study to assess the feasibility of restoring one mile of Tischer Creek trout habitat in a manner that will preserve and enhance Hartley Pond.

An evaluation of the historic features along the Old Hartley Road is under way. Findings will shape implementation of the master plan.

Trail System

The trail system in the Park includes cross country ski trails, multi-use trails open to all human-powered users, and the Superior Hiking Trail. Trails are frequented by hikers, bicyclists, trail runners, dog walkers, cross country skiers, snowshoers, photographers, neighborhood residents, birders, anglers, bow-hunters, HNC program participants and visitors to Duluth. Public input from users and field investigation identified opportunities for improvement associated with each trail.

After taking into consideration needs of trail user groups, and public input, several themes emerged to guide trail recommendations. These include:

- » Provide a high quality experience for multiple user groups including Nature Center participants

- » Create better connections to the surrounding neighborhoods
- » Improve trail sustainability through the use of advanced trail building techniques
- » Provide accessible trails with one Core Trail
- » Create a comprehensive wayfinding system
- » Develop a comprehensive trail plan for the Park, collaborating with all trail user groups
- » Conduct all future trail design in close partnership with Hartley Nature Center and the City of Duluth
- » Maintain the natural character of the Park

Parking

Off-street parking is available at the, often overfull, HNC lot. Limited on-street parking is available at three neighborhood access points - Hartley Road, Fairmont Street and North Road. Neighborhood access points need improved wayfinding, interpretive signage, curbs, gutters, and, in some places, modest widening.

Park Amenities

There are several distinct areas within the Park that provide specific recreational and educational opportunities. These include HNC and their Nature-Based Preschool. The main HNC building provides restrooms, classrooms and an exhibit hall. They also have a classroom Yurt and are creating a nature play area in partnership with the City of Duluth. The Preschool provides year-round opportunities for kids ages 3-5 yrs. Depending upon its growth, HNC may seek to expand its facilities.

Plan Phasing

A phasing plan prioritizes park and trail development to allow for appropriate funding opportunities and park planning.

Proposed Phase One improvements include:

- » Evaluation of Old Hartley Road, the root cellar, well and other structures for historical significance

- » Improvements to Old Hartley Road Trail and development of the Core Accessible Trail
- » Creation of Crushed Stone Accessible Trail around Rock Knob
- » Improvements to existing Natural Surface Multi-Use Trail, Ski Trails and Superior Hiking Trail
- » Implementation of a wayfinding signage system
- » Installation of a boardwalk across the wet meadow to avoid trail flooding
- » Management of Red/Norway Pine Stand
- » Removal of Buckthorn and other invasive plants
- » Completion of feasibility study for restoration of Tischer Creek and preservation of Hartley Pond

Proposed Phase Two improvements include:

- » If indicated by feasibility study, restoration of Tischer Creek and preservation of Hartley Pond
- » Creation of Crushed Stone Accessible Trail around Hartley Pond
- » Installation of improved trailhead parking and wayfinding at Hartley Road, Fairmont Street, and North Road
- » Expansion and upgrade of the Nature Center parking area
- » Management of the Aspen mix, Northern and Lowland hardwood forests

Other improvements such as construction of the Nature-Based Preschool facility and a grade separated crossing under Woodland Avenue will be taken into consideration as plans move forward for Hartley Park.

Funding Criteria for Plan Implementation

The Duluth Parks and Recreation Division will seek funding to implement the goals outlined in the plan. There are several funding sources available, including the Legacy Amendment and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (Legacy funding), the Department of Natural Resources and other grants.