

Parks and Recreation Division Report

December 2023

PROGRAMMING

Youth and Family Programs

November activities included our first Adult Cosmic Dodgeball night, which had 20 people attend! Homeschool Gym Time introduced an average of 15 youth per day to soccer, floor hockey, and Pickleball over three separate sessions. Music Together has had strong attendance during its fall session, with 28 registered children and their caregivers singing, laughing, and making music together over the course of ten weeks.



Adult Volleyball League

As we transition to the winter months, athletics has been utilizing the Washington Center gym. We are currently in our regular season portion of the adult volleyball league, which takes place on Sunday nights. This league has six teams with 40 total participants. The first adult volleyball league was offered last January-March, and moving forward, Parks and Recreation will offer two seven-week sessions during the winter months.

Adult Pickleball

Something new that has been added to our programming schedule is drop-in adult Pickleball, also at the Washington Center gym. Beginning on October 1, the gym has been turned into three Pickleball courts every Tuesday and Thursday morning. This program has seen 20 participants and will continue through at least the end of April.

55+ Programs

Thirty people attended the Senior Day Trip to the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis on December 5. We enjoyed a Swedish meatball Smorgasbord and went on a guided tour of the mansion. There will be another day trip offered in February to the Chanhassen Dinner Theater.

Parks and Recreation has partnered with Lighthouse Center for Vital Living to offer a Memory Café at Harrison Community Center. This program is a social gathering for people experiencing memory loss and their loved ones.

PERMITS

PERMIT TYPE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Park & Building Rentals	37	43	69	71	96	178	186	206	157	88	52
Commercial Operator Permits	3	1	3	7	8	6	2	1	2	2	0
Busker Permits	0	0	10	1	9	4	6	1	0	0	0
Alcohol Consumption Permits	2	8	3	9	6	12	18	7	1	1	2
TOTAL	42	52	85	88	119	200	212	215	160	91	54

PROJECT UPDATES

Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI)

On October 16, 2023, Duluth City Council approved ordinance 23-035-O, which authorized the renewal of the 0.5% food and beverage tax and 0.5% lodging tax (half-and-half tourism tax) to fund improvements to parks-based athletic venues that drive regional sports tourism. The renewed half-and-half tourism tax, titled the Athletic Venue Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI), will provide up to \$36 million of investment and will be implemented in phases over a decade.

Duluth City Council resolution 23-0748R outlines the anticipated phasing of AVRI projects. Phase I funds will be used to support time-sensitive projects that are already in-progress, including: Enger Park Golf Course irrigation system replacement, Gary New Duluth Recreation Area skate park construction, Spirit Mountain Nordic Center snowmaking and lighting installation, and Wade Stadium building repairs. Phase I funds will also support the development of an AVRI Action Plan to guide future phases of investment. Future phases of funding are anticipated to support improvements to existing outdoor athletics venues, including Lake Park Athletic Complex (Jean Duluth baseball and soccer fields), Arlington Athletic Complex, Wade Stadium, Wheeler Athletic Complex, Portman Park, and Duluth Heights Park, among other locations, and to support one or more new or renewed indoor athletic venues. City staff are preparing a Request for Proposals to solicit professional consulting services for the development of the Action Plan, which will include a needs assessment, community engagement efforts, prioritized investment recommendations, and site plans.

Mayor Larson appointed a 23-member Indoor Athletics Venues Task Force to advise on investment priorities and funding approaches that will best support the renewal of existing indoor athletics venues and/or the development of new indoor athletic venues. Task Force members will work in collaboration with City staff, project partners, and consultants to develop and deliver findings by September 30, 2024. The Task Force is chaired by Todd Fedora, former Duluth City Councilor and longtime regional leader in commercial banking.

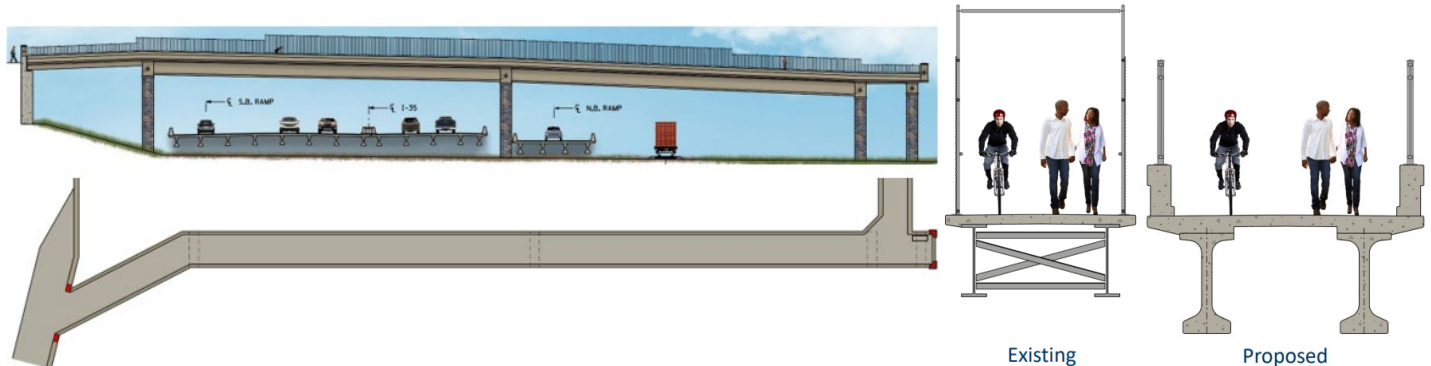
Quarry Park Ice Farming

With freezing temperatures, Duluth Climbing Coalition (DCC) has completed inspections and tested the irrigation equipment at Quarry Park in preparation for ice farming. Ice farming occurs along the upper rim of the quarry by pumping water through in-ground irrigation lines; the water is then sprayed as a fine mist onto the quarry wall to create quality pillars of ice for winter climbing.

Cross City Trail I-35 Pedestrian Overpass

City staff are working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to design the replacement of the I-35 pedestrian overpass that connects W Michigan Street and Railroad Street. The overpass serves the Cross City Trail and pedestrian connection between Lincoln Park and downtown. Through the project, MnDOT will improve user experience by widening the overpass from the current width of roughly 8 foot to 12 foot, and changing the angles for the connections to W Michigan Street and the ramp down to ground level. Currently, the angles for the connections at both ends are 90 degrees, which is very challenging for bicyclists to navigate.

The replacement will be funded entirely by MnDOT, with the potential for City contribution to support additional lighting or overpass amenities. The concept images below show the improved alignment and width. The project is scheduled for construction in 2024. Information about MnDOT's project is available at www.dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/i-35-pedestrian-bridge/index.html



Lakewalk Shoreline Repairs

The shoreline adjacent to the Lakewalk below Gichi-Ode' Akiing was restored after damage that was sustained during storms in November 2022. The repair work was supported by Minnesota State Disaster funding. During the restoration process, an engineered concrete wall was built and large rock was added to the shoreline. This combination is intended to protect the shoreline and the Lakewalk from future damage from Lake Superior wave action. To accommodate the construction, the Lakewalk closed through the project area on October 23. The Lakewalk reopened to the public on December 8. Remaining work will take place in the spring, including replacing the boardwalk section that was removed for construction, asphalt replacement, and installation of the permanent fencing between the Lakewalk and shore through the area. There will be temporary fencing narrowing the Lakewalk through a portion of the restoration area until spring of 2024.



Trails

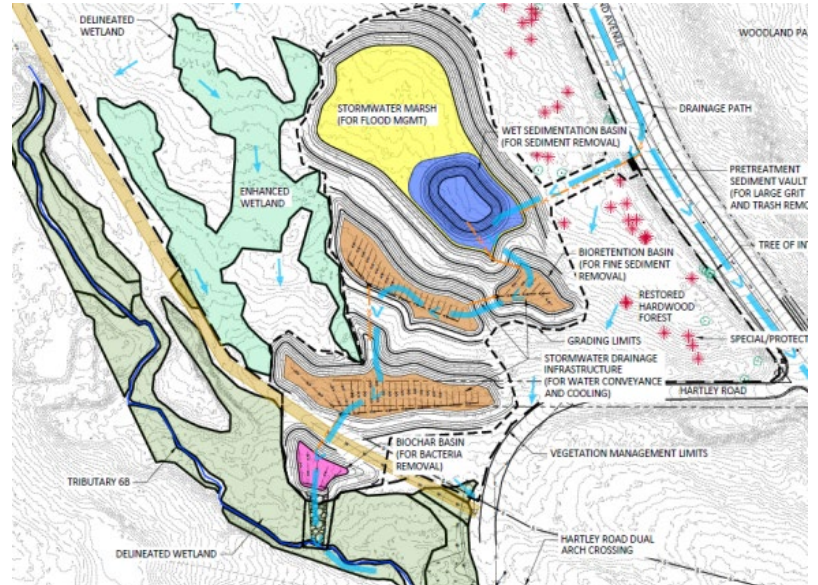
Ski Trails – Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (DXC) gathered volunteers to receive training from Park Maintenance staff on cross-country ski trail corridor clearing, brushing, and other preparation. With 38 miles (61km) of ski trails to maintain, coordination with, and support from DXC volunteers is vital to review and prepare all the trails for the upcoming ski season. Park Maintenance staff have also been busy updating and replacing ski trail signage. Ski trail preparation is complete and the trails are ready for some snow.

Natural Surface Trails – with the bi-annual freeze/thaw cycles, coordination with trail partner organizations, such as Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) and Cyclists of Gitchee Gumees Shores (COGGS), has been crucial to communicate up-to-date trail conditions with the broader trail user community. This fall included temporary warm ups that allowed trails to reopen. Closing the natural surface (dirt) trails when temperatures fluctuate below freezing overnight and thawing during the day protects the surface from erosion and preserves longevity of the trails.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Woodland Stormwater

The City has partnered with St. Louis County to install a series of stormwater management basins in Hartley Park. These basins will mimic natural wetlands, capturing and filtering the salt, sand, litter, and other pollutants from Woodland Avenue and 110 acres of the Woodland neighborhood that currently flow directly into Tischer Creek. The project area is a portion of Hartley Park that is heavily infested with buckthorn and other invasive plants. As part of the project, these invasive species will be removed and replaced with a wide variety of native upland and wetland trees and other vegetation that benefit butterflies, birds, and wildlife. Work will begin in the coming weeks, including removal of some trees and invasive species. The maps below depict the project area and the scope of the stormwater basins.



Hartley Pond and Tischer Creek Feasibility Study

The City is working with the Minnesota DNR on the Hartley Pond/Dam and Tischer Creek Feasibility Study. The purpose of the Study is to assess the feasibility of proposed options to improve the aesthetic value and recreation opportunities in Hartley Park, while also mitigating the temperature and sediment impairments that are negatively impacting downstream trout. A third public informational presentation was held on Tuesday, November 21 at Hartley Nature Center. The meeting was well attended and the consultants shared the progress of the Feasibility Study. The consultants are working towards finalizing the report. In spring 2024, there will be a presentation about the Feasibility Study at a Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. There will also be opportunity for written public comment over the coming months to guide any potential future implementation of the proposed options.

Park Maintenance Division Updates

This fall has included an array of projects and seasonal transitions:

- Winterizing the Rose Garden, including the annual Tipping of the Roses in late October.
- Draining irrigation systems and winterizing bathroom facilities in various parks.
- Completed playground inspections and repairs.
- Now that leaves are off of trees, it is easier to locate and remove abandoned waste in park spaces. Some locations along Skyline Parkway require pulley systems to retrieve waste from the base of steep cliffs. The pictures below show the pulley process to retrieve an abandoned couch in late September.



- Daily operations for maintaining parks includes garbage and recycling collection. Each week, staff remove approximately 2,000 lbs of waste from parks and trails.
- Landscaping renewal at Leif Erikson Park between the bridges to remove excess plant material, reestablish viewsheds to the Lake, and planting new turf and trees.
- Staff are supporting the Chester Bowl Improvement Club for winter snowmaking on the hill.
- Removing a beaver dam and restoring creek flow beneath a pedestrian bridge in Hartley Park to prevent flooding and possible damage to the bridge.



- Spring floods caused damage at various park spaces, and staff continue to work through repairs. The washouts at gulleys on the ski trails at Lester Park were repaired. Boardwalks, bridge damage, and washouts at Hartley Park are in the process of being repaired now.
- Tree removals continue in response to the invasive Emerald Ash Borer. This fall, staff planted 131 trees throughout the city in boulevards and park spaces. Staff are in the process of grinding stumps of removed ash trees, and have begun annual tree pruning.
- A portion of Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail along Spirit Cove had some drainage challenges that was resulting in wet and muddy spots. Staff repaired the trail through those areas and relocated a bench.
- Benches were replaced at the Bayfront Family Center and a new firepit was installed. Staff also prepared for the ice rink, which will be installed after Bentleyville concludes and as weather permits.
- Dilapidated retaining walls were removed at the Pulaski Street trailhead parking lot islands. The sites were relandscaped with plants that support pollinators. The photos below show before, during, and after the project.

