

# DULUTH

## Parks and Recreation master Plan



### CHAPTER 3

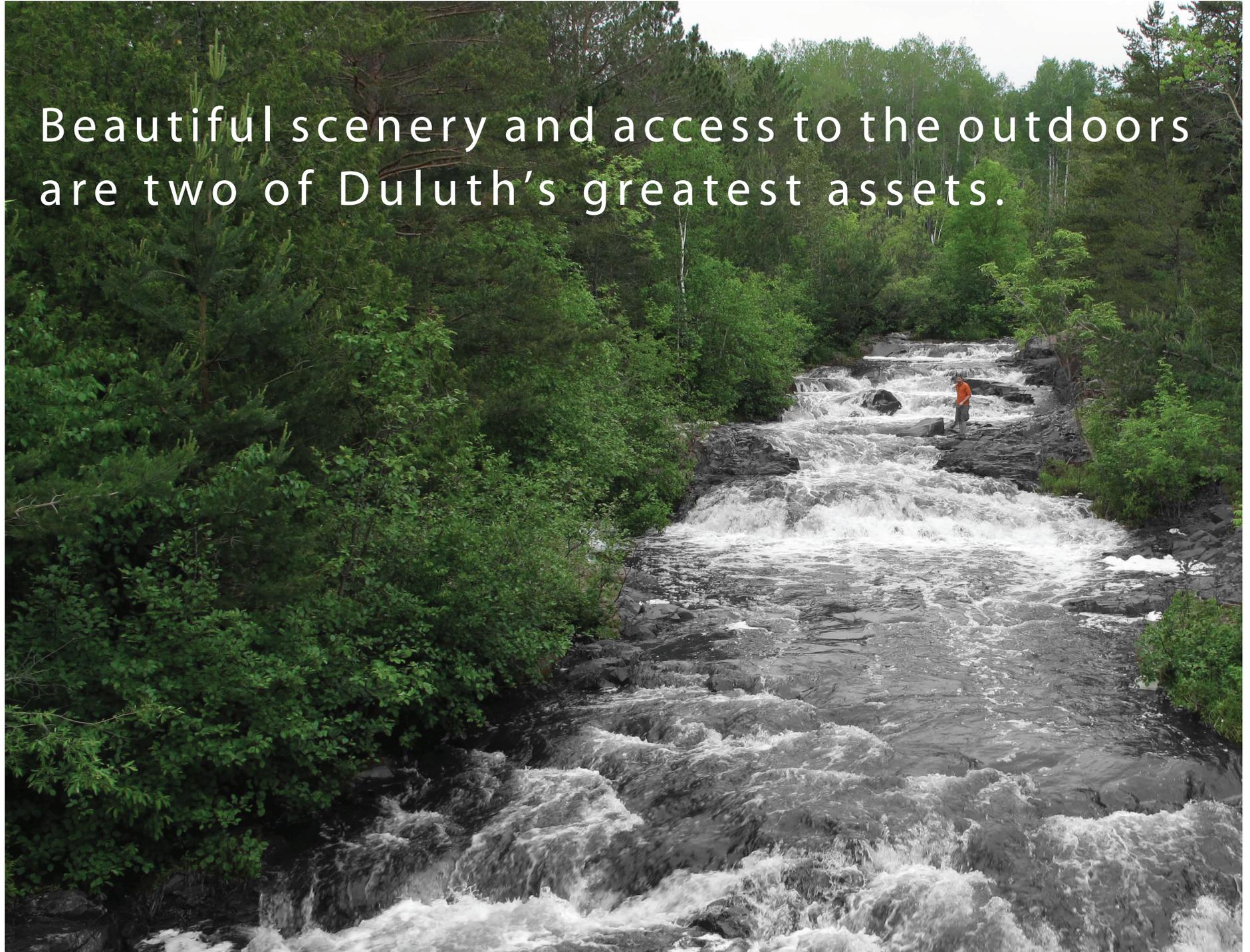
## THE STATE OF THE SYSTEM

...WHERE WE ARE TODAY

One of the ways to bring about change is to know where you are relative to where you want to be...

Beautiful scenery and access to the outdoors are two of Duluth's greatest assets.

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It is immediately apparent upon viewing Duluth's well-loved park system that is a defining element of the community for many residents and visitors. Analysis of the park system, input from public open houses, and staff meetings, illuminated Duluth's unique position as a city with tremendous natural resources, but also shed light on the park and recreation system's issues of sustainability.

Duluth's parks are well positioned for the future, but recreation buildings are deteriorating and closed, and maintenance of many parks is not meeting residents' expectations. Due to budget constraints, funding for park maintenance, recreation programs and facility replacement has been cut back and parts of the system are suffering from neglect. Some parks, trails and facilities are underutilized and in need of repair and recreation opportunities are not available to all residents. Improvements, changes and additional resources are needed to assure a positive future and to realize the potential of the park, trail and recreation system. There is a need for adequate and sustainable funding for parks and recreation.

### Community Input:

The City wanted to make sure this Plan was informed by community and stakeholder input. To accomplish that a number of methods were used to gather community input (reference side bar at right). The full results of the community input is summarized in a separate companion document: *the Duluth Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Background*. Key points and community, stakeholder, staff, and parks commission guidance is permeated throughout this chapter and is recognizable by the headings:

✓ what we saw

✓ what we heard

### The Needs Assessment Process:

- A field evaluation of the park system and distribution analysis of access to existing parks and trails.
- A review of existing City and agency plans, such as the Duluth Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the 1997 Park Master Plan, the Skyline Parkway Corridor Plan, etc.
- Parks and Recreation Commission Input: Regular meetings with the Commission were held throughout the process to help shape the plan.
- Focus Group Meetings: Focus group sessions were held with stakeholders covering the following topics - Youth Recreation, Trails, Partner Organizations and City staff.
- Community Meetings: A series of four meetings were held across the City in December, 2009. Approximately 130 people attended the meetings and provided suggestions and ideas for improvement. Additional meetings were held in August 2010 to gather input on the Draft Plan and in November 2010 to gather input on the Final Plan.
- Community Survey: In November 2009, 439 Duluth households completed a mailed survey regarding use of the park system and opinions and priorities for the future.
- On-line Survey: In November and December 2009 80 people completed an on-line questionnaire regarding park and recreation needs and ideas for the future.
- Community Benchmark Comparisons: Duluth's parks and recreation system was compared to ten other similarly sized cities in Minnesota.

# what we saw

- ✓ Good park coverage overall.
- ✓ Most Duluth residents are within 1/2 mile of a City park.
- ✓ Busy roads, railroads, and creeks inhibit easy access to parks for some residents.
- ✓ There are needs for :

**A** Better access and visibility to high quality/signature parks in the western part of the City.

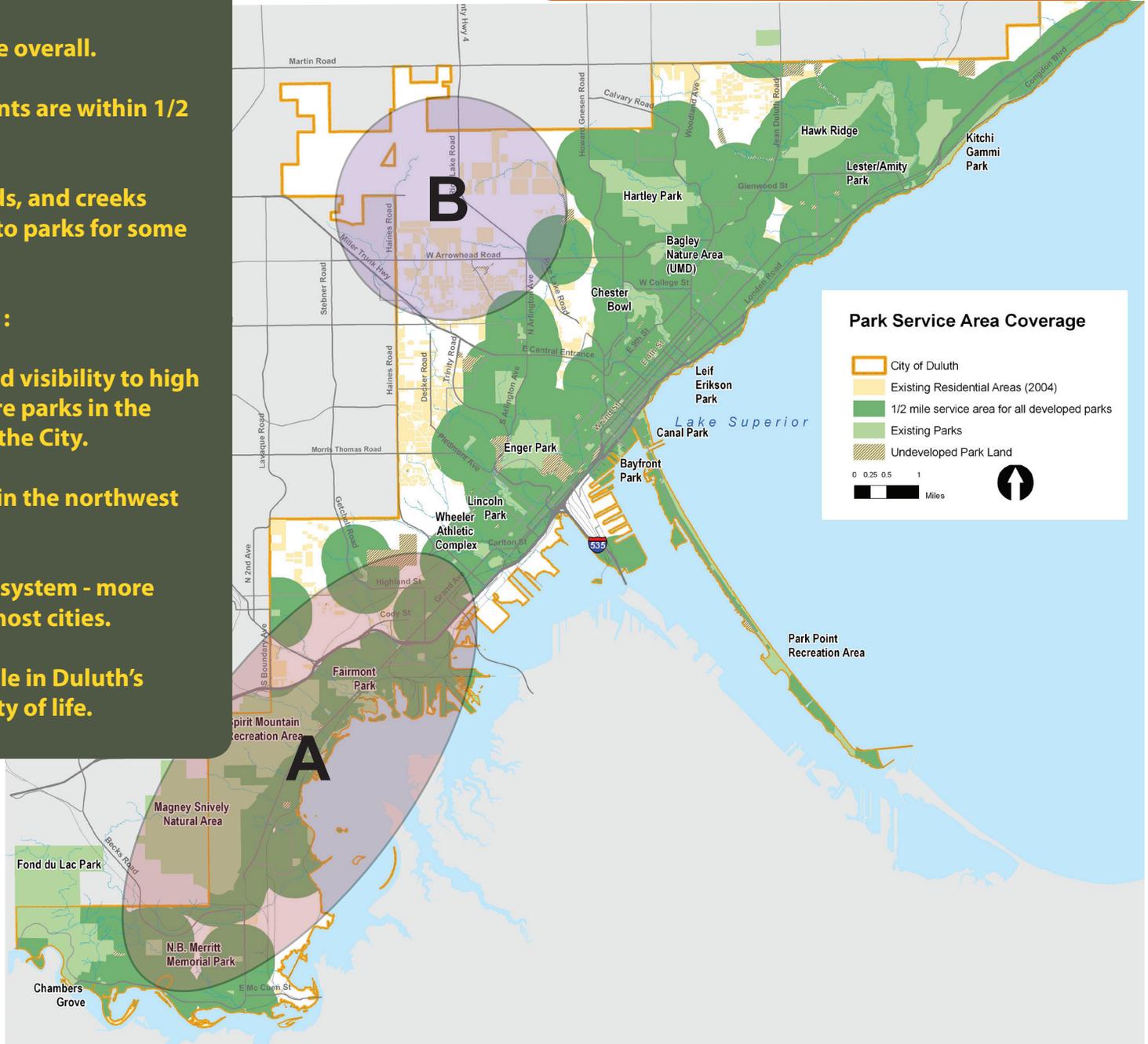
**B** Access to parks in the northwest part of the City.

- ✓ An extensive parks system - more parks/capita than most cities.
- ✓ Parks play a vital role in Duluth's economy and quality of life.

## FOR CONTEXT:

Number of Parks: 105  
 Acreage of Parkland:  
 11,600 acres

## PARK COVERAGE AND GAPS



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# what we saw

- ✓ There is a greater need for convenient access to parks in the urban core and some central and western neighborhoods (low mobility areas).
- ✓ Duluth has both seasonal and physical challenges to mobility: The winter challenges of ice, snow, and cold weather as well as the topographic challenges that hinder mobility.

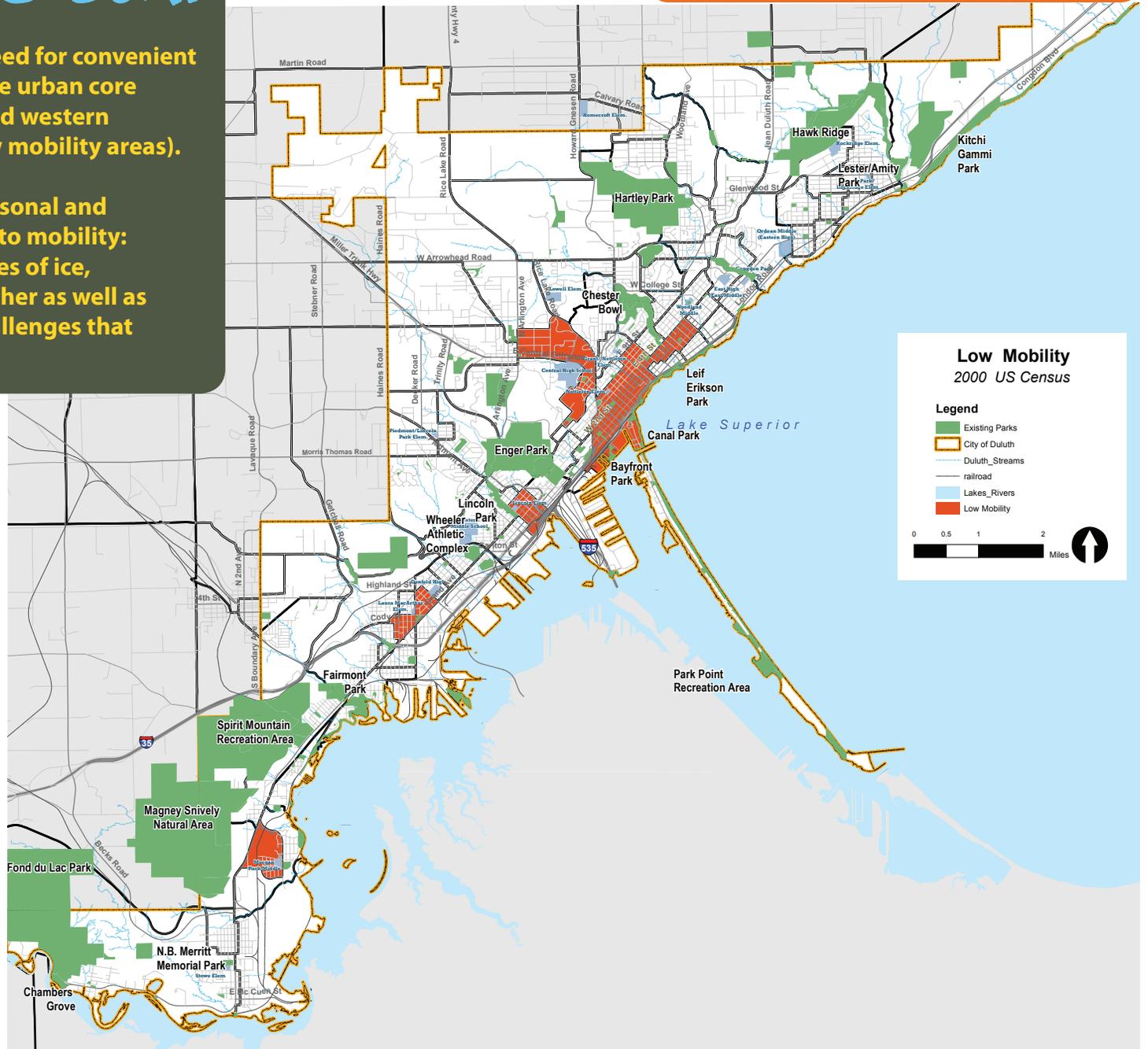
The low mobility analysis focuses on individuals with limited mobility: children (5-14), the elderly (65+), those in poverty and those in households without cars.

Low mobility is calculated in two ways - based on the percentage of the total population in a census block group and based on the density of these population groups.

Dark orange color indicates areas where the percentage or density of people with low mobility is high compared to other areas of Duluth.

Data source: 2000 census data by block group. Modeled after work done by the Metropolitan Design Center for the Trust for Public Land Minnesota in June 2005.

## LOW MOBILITY AREAS



# what we saw

- ✓ There is a large gap in the ability to adequately maintain the system.
- ✓ Many park buildings are closed.
- ✓ Facilities are in disrepair.
- ✓ There is a large variance in quality of upkeep.
- ✓ Signature Parks (Chambers Grove, Lincoln Park, Brighton Beach, Chester Bowl, Enger Park, Leif Erikson, Rose Garden, Bayfront Festival Park, and Park Point) are well-maintained, while maintenance and repair of some neighborhood parks is lacking.

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## SYSTEM CONDITION



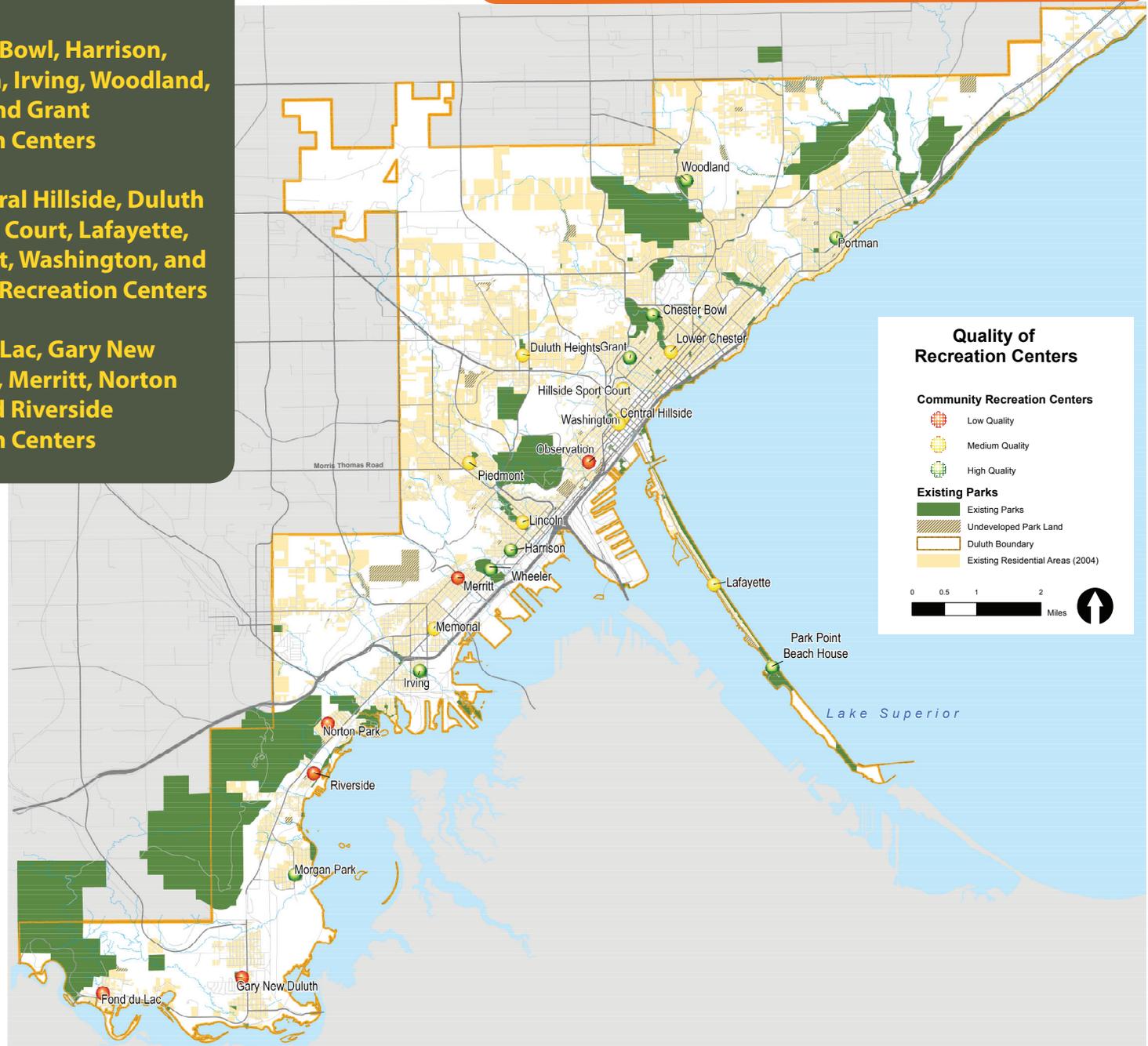
# What we saw

- ✓ **High Quality:** Chester Bowl, Harrison, Morgan Park, Portman, Irving, Woodland, Wheeler, Park Point, and Grant Community Recreation Centers
- ✓ **Medium Quality:** Central Hillside, Duluth Heights, Hillside Sport Court, Lafayette, Lincoln Park, Piedmont, Washington, and Memorial Community Recreation Centers
- ✓ **Low Quality:** Fond Du Lac, Gary New Duluth, Lower Chester, Merritt, Norton Park, Observation, and Riverside Community Recreation Centers

The quality rating of the Community Recreation Centers reflects more than just the structure of the building. It explores a number of criteria, including:

- » Condition of Structure
- » Location of Structure
- » Proximity to Other Facilities/ Opportunities for Centralization
- » Usage
- » Operating Cost
- » Programming
- » Site Factors

## RECREATION CENTER QUALITY



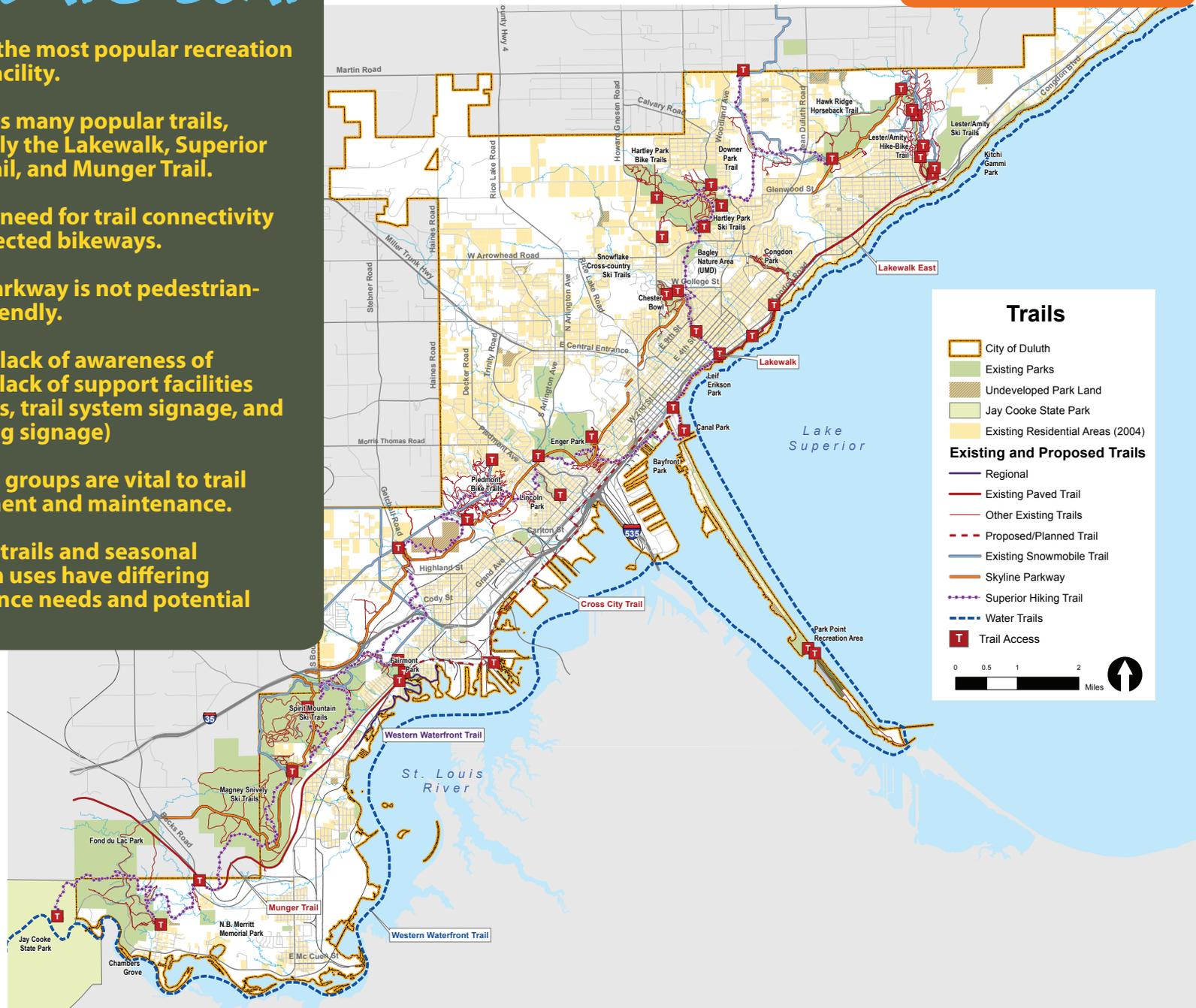
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# what we saw

- ✓ Trails are the most popular recreation activity/facility.
- ✓ Duluth has many popular trails, particularly the Lakewalk, Superior Hiking Trail, and Munger Trail.
- ✓ There is a need for trail connectivity and connected bikeways.
- ✓ Skyline Parkway is not pedestrian-bicycle friendly.
- ✓ There is a lack of awareness of trails and lack of support facilities (trailheads, trail system signage, and wayfinding signage)
- ✓ Volunteer groups are vital to trail development and maintenance.
- ✓ Multi-use trails and seasonal recreation uses have differing maintenance needs and potential conflicts.

## TRAIL NEEDS

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# what we heard

## Maintenance and Upkeep

- ✓ Better upkeep of parks, community centers and facilities is needed
- ✓ Have more bathrooms and year round access to bathrooms

## Funding

- ✓ More funding for staff and maintenance
- ✓ Look at options for park taxing authority

## Partnerships

- ✓ Enhanced coordination and actions with schools, groups, clubs, and non-profits
- ✓ Better utilization of and communication with volunteers is needed

## Equity

- ✓ Make facilities and programs accessible to all

## Connectivity

- ✓ Connect parks and the community with trails and bikeways

- ✓ Connect the trails

- ✓ Make Skyline Parkway safer for pedestrians and bicyclists

## Natural Areas

- ✓ Preserve park land and natural areas and manage natural lands
- ✓ Get County tax forfeited land used for trails into the City park system

## Programs

- ✓ More youth programs are needed
- ✓ More affordable programs are needed

## Facilities

- ✓ Focus on quality over quantity
- ✓ Consolidate and improve recreation centers - fewer but better buildings
- ✓ Renovate neighborhood parks
- ✓ Provide specialized facilities (dog parks, boat club, etc.)
- ✓ Schools must be community places

community meetings



Approximately 130 people attended four community open house meetings held in December 2009 to gather input on parks and recreation needs and ideas for the future. Attendees were given three ways to provide input:

- » Participation in Favorite Places Exercise where they were asked to identify their favorite parks and parks where improvements are needed.
- » A board where they could post ideas and suggestions.
- » A written questionnaire on needs and ideas for the future.

In August 2010 approximately 40 people attended an open house meeting to preview the Draft Park and Recreation Master Plan. Input can be viewed in the Needs Assessment Document.

# what we heard

survey results:

- ✓ 94% of respondents strongly agree or agree that Duluth’s parks, trails, recreation opportunities, and public open spaces are key elements in quality of life and the quality of the community.
- ✓ 74% are in favor of renovating and re-opening some recreation centers and closing others.
- ✓ 21% feel that there are gaps in recreation programs or activities needs that are not currently being met.
- ✓ 28% feel that reduction in park maintenance services and recreation facility replacement has negatively affected them.

**Below is what we heard in response to the question: *Which of the following improvements/additions to the Duluth parks and recreation system would you be willing to support? i.e. through a temporary or permanent tax increase?***

Great and Marginal Support	Great support	Marginal support	No support	Improvement Priority Category
86%	188	170	59	Expanded park maintenance
85%	182	168	61	Renovation of existing neighborhood parks
82%	212	136	74	Additions to and extension of bike/walk trails
79%	113	214	87	Renovation of existing community center buildings
78%	138	186	89	Improvements to existing passive, nature parks
77%	122	194	93	City sponsored recreation programs and activities
69%	82	203	127	Improvements to existing athletic fields

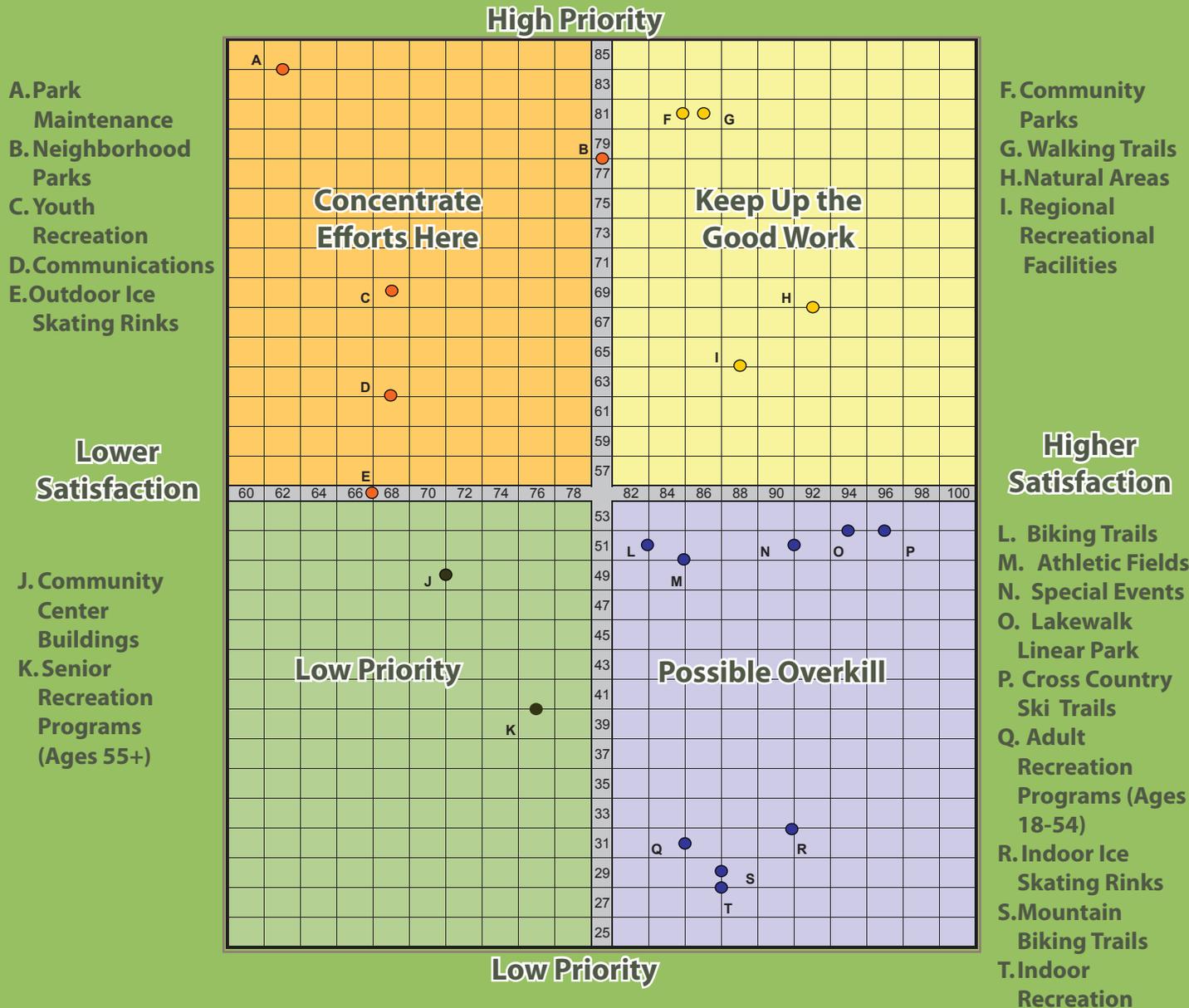
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The City of Duluth conducted a statistically valid survey of residents in November 2009 to gather opinions about parks and recreation issues and priorities for the future. Survey questionnaires were mailed to 3,500 randomly selected Duluth households. 439 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 13%. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 5% at a confidence level of 95%. A summary of the survey results is continued in the Needs Assessment document.

# what we heard

survey results.

Below is what we heard in response to the question: *How satisfied are you with the following elements of the Duluth parks and recreation system and what priority does the element hold for your household in the future?*



The satisfaction and priority ratings of survey respondents can be compared to indicate potential policy direction. The chart plots survey responses for the park and recreation facilities, programs and activities into four policy quadrants. The two axis intersect at the average satisfaction rating and the average priority ranking.

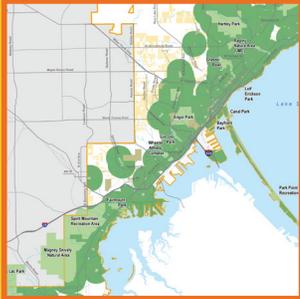
## DULUTH PARKS: IMPRESSIVE AND IN SAD SHAPE

*How can this seemingly conflicting statement be true?* Duluth has an exceptional park system with great preserved open spaces and premier places like the Lakewalk, Bayfront Festival Park, Chester Bowl and others, but at the same time, some parks are deteriorating, recreation buildings are closed, city recreation programs have been eliminated, some residents lack access to quality parks and are not satisfied with basic services within the park, such as trash collection, mowing and bathrooms. Duluth parks should be clean, safe, fun and inviting. Some parks are all that and more, but others are not in acceptable condition due to cuts in maintenance and lack of funds for facility replacement. The intent of this Master Plan is to guide actions and investment initially to best respond to the current budget crisis and to set in motion a long-term plan to allow Duluth residents, businesses and visitors to fully realize the benefits of the parks and recreation. Both the short-term and long-term strategies and recommendations are designed to make the park and recreation system and the community more sustainable in terms of economics, operations and the environment.

To achieve a healthy, sustainable future will take time, cooperation, change and additional resources. This Master Plan helps set the stage for that positive future to occur through actions and strategies to enhance parks, increase access to recreation, connect the community and empower partners and volunteers.

## The Good News

- Great extensive park system; well distributed
- Well loved by residents & visitors alike
- Committed and passionate recreation groups & volunteers
- Excellent nature-oriented parks & city setting
- Parks/trails of state & national significance



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## The Bad News

- Lack of a connected trail system and bikeways
- Budgets, staffing, recreation programs, and maintenance, and have been significantly reduced
- Large annual maintenance commitment and regular replacement requirements
- City resources are needed to maximize benefit of volunteers and partner organizations
- Park maintenance needs exceed budget and staff resources - resulting in reduced maintenance and upkeep of some parks

