

# ESSENTIAL SPACES

## Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Plan



**Duluth Parks  
& Recreation**

September 21, 2022







# LETTER FROM MAYOR EMILY LARSON

From gathering to celebrate our culture and community, to enjoying a quiet walk through the woods or along the water, and cultivating the next generation of Duluth-grown athletes, this is where it all begins—in our parks.

*Green space has intrinsic value.*

This was central to the Imagine Duluth 2035 comprehensive plan, which serves as a guiding framework for all other public planning efforts here at the City of Duluth, and it continues to be a common thread woven through the community input we received during this master planning process.

During the past year, led by the dedicated efforts of a 21-member project advisory committee, this community has made clear once again that our parks, trails, and open space are essential to our lives and our livelihoods. Duluth's park and recreation system is rich with history, heritage, culture, quantity of land and amenities, and a vibrant user-base ready to not only enjoy but to help steward these valuable public resources. The path to building and maintaining the park system we all enjoy today was and is no small task. And, as we look ahead, your engagement and support will continue to influence the future of our park system in support of a healthy, thriving community.

We are excited to share with you this plan, Essential Spaces: Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan. For the next decade, this master plan will shape our park system—from the activities you enjoy in our parks to capital and maintenance improvements that keep these spaces healthy, safe, and vibrant for all to enjoy.

Rooted in equity, dedicated to quality, and serving every neighborhood in Duluth—our park system provides social connections, environmental protections, and economic impacts central to our community.

Thank you for sharing your ideas, asking important questions, and shaping this exciting, equity-driven, thoughtful master plan.

Emily Larson, Mayor of Duluth



Emily Larson, Mayor of Duluth

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 1**

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..... 8**

    PLAN CONTEXT ..... 9

    PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW ..... 13

    DEMOGRAPHIC AND AREA CONTEXT ..... 18

    TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS..... 22

**CHAPTER 2: EVALUATING OUR PARK SYSTEM ..... 29**

    COMMUNITY VISIONING ..... 30

    PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION ..... 37

    PROGRAMS EVALUATION ..... 55

    EVALUATION SUMMARY ..... 59

**CHAPTER 3: PLAN FRAMEWORK ..... 61**

    INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE ..... 64

    ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES ..... 69

    PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY ..... 74

    STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, & VOLUNTEERISM..... 81

    SUSTAIN TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS ..... 87

**CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN..... 94**

    INTRODUCTION..... 95

    ACTION PLAN ..... 96

    LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES ..... 110

    FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES ..... 116

**APPENDIX ..... 119**

    A. STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC INPUT RESULTS

    B. PARK CLASSIFICATIONS AND INVENTORY

    C. RECREATION TRENDS MEMO

    D. PREVIOUS PLAN SUMMARY

    E. DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY, AND EQUITY RESOURCE LINKS

    F. DRAFT PLAN REVIEW PUBLIC COMMENTS



# TABLES AND FIGURES

## TABLES

Table 1: Engagement by the Numbers.....	4
Table 2: Population 2010 to 2020 .....	18
Table 3: Race and Ethnicity Demographics by Percentage (2020).....	20
Table 4: Income Distribution (2020) .....	21
Table 5: Disenfranchised Populations by Percentage.....	21
Table 6: Park Classifications.....	37
Table 7: Park Classification Definitions .....	39
Table 8: Park Acres per 1,000 Residents in Duluth.....	41
Table 9: Park Amenities .....	44
Table 10: Condition Rating of Parks by Subarea.....	47
Table 11: Parkland and Population Comparison to Peer Cities .....	49
Table 12: Park Amenities Benchmark Comparison.....	51
Table 13: Nationwide Resources and Needs Comparison .....	52
Table 14: Park Maintenance Hours Comparison.....	53
Table 15: Distribution of Park Maintenance Comparison.....	54
Table 16: Duluth Parks and Recreation Programs by Type .....	55
Table 17: Total Participants for Programming .....	56
Table 18: Occupancy Rates for Programming .....	57
Table 19: Cancellation Rates for Programming .....	57
Table 20: Programming SWOT Analysis.....	58
Table 21: System-Wide Action Items .....	96
Table 22: Western Duluth Subarea Action Items.....	102
Table 23: Central Duluth Subarea Action Items .....	105
Table 24: Eastern Duluth Subarea Action Items .....	108
Table 25: Guidelines for Distribution of Amenities by Park Classification .....	110
Table 26: Routine Park Maintenance Guidelines.....	112

## FIGURES

Figure 1: Duluth Parklands by Type Map (2022) .....	15
Figure 2: Duluth Park System Funding Categories (2022) .....	16
Figure 3: Population Density Map.....	18
Figure 4: Median Age Distribution Map .....	19
Figure 5: Top Uses of Duluth's Park System.....	22
Figure 6: Priority Equity Areas Map .....	25
Figure 7: Park Classifications .....	38
Figure 8: Walkshed Analysis Map.....	43
Figure 9: Service Area - Sport Courts & Fields Map.....	44
Figure 10: Service Area - Playgrounds Map.....	45
Figure 11: Service Area - Park Restrooms Map.....	45
Figure 12: Service Area - Pavilions Map.....	46
Figure 13: Park Conditions Map.....	47
Figure 14: Park Buildings Map .....	48
Figure 15: Priority Equity Areas Map .....	95
Figure 16: Western Duluth Subarea Park System Map .....	101
Figure 17: Central Duluth Subarea Park System Map.....	105
Figure 18: Eastern Duluth Subarea Park System Map .....	107







# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SECTION CONTENTS:

- Imaging the Future of Duluth's Park System
- The Essential Spaces Plan
- What We Heard From the Community
- Key Initiatives
- Themes and Goals



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF DULUTH'S PARK SYSTEM

Before the City of Duluth was formally established, Indigenous Peoples stewarded this area's natural lands, water bodies, tree covered hills, rock bluffs, and shoreline. Throughout history, the natural setting has continued to attract people and has been at the center of major transformations over time. From neighborhoods forming around communal park spaces, to massive industrial development along the shoreline, to the reimagining of Canal Park and the Lakewalk from old industrial yards and decaying buildings into a lively destination; **parks and natural spaces are essential to the story of Duluth's past and future.**

As Duluth continues to transform, it is imperative that the park system receive the level of investment necessary to meet the social, cultural, and recreational needs of the community, and to ensure long-term sustainability and resiliency of the area's beloved lands.

Duluth has an impressive portfolio of park spaces, including premier destination parks and an abundance of park acreage that far surpasses municipalities of comparable size. The city is alive with diverse events and recreation programming, an activated waterfront, growing tourism, heavily used trails, strong sports and activity clubs, and dedicated community

volunteers and partners. Duluthians use park spaces in a myriad of ways, from swimming and fishing in neighborhood creeks and picnicking with friends and family under covered gazebos, to building skills for individual-based sports and practicing as a team for athletic competitions. Rated Outdoor Magazine's "Best Outdoors Town" in 2014, Duluth's park and trail system is foundational to providing opportunities to recreate outdoors within minutes of one's doorstep. However, this abundance has long experienced a challenge of lacking sufficient and sustainable funding to maintain and improve properties and to provide programmed recreation opportunities.

Input from citizens and community leaders has made clear that this plan must focus on addressing a backlog of maintenance projects and updating recreation amenities in poor condition, while also working to expand meaningful connections between people and natural spaces. As the City looks to the future, its biggest hurdle is obtaining the funding and staff resources needed to care for a large system with a wide variety of parks, recreation, open spaces, and trails. With additional resources, community support, and prioritization of investments, the City can continue to take transformative actions to ensure Duluth's park system is flourishing for generations to come.



Cross-country skiing on one of the many trails in Duluth.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE ESSENTIAL SPACES PLAN

Parks are essential spaces for Duluthians. The Essential Spaces Plan recognizes the important function that parks and recreation serve in Duluth, and honors the robust legacy of resident involvement and partnerships that make the system what it is today. Acknowledging that Duluth's park system is vast and diverse, the Essential Spaces Plan emphasizes caring for the City's current assets, while envisioning a future that is more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. The plan provides localized recommendations for enhancing and right-sizing the park system to create strong, vibrant park spaces that meet the recreation needs of the community.

The Essential Spaces Plan was informed by robust community engagement. Community outreach focused on empowering residents to express their existing and desired uses of park spaces and programming options, as well as informing residents and stakeholders about the inner workings of park planning, funding, and maintenance to highlight the complexities of running an award-winning park system.

## PLAN PURPOSE

This Essential Spaces Plan is a guide for the future of Duluth's parks, recreation, open space, and trails system over the next 10 to 15 years. This plan provides recommendations on how Parks and Recreation can continue to support a healthy and vibrant community, enhance inclusion and equity, and advance environmental protection under a sustainable budget framework.



The Lincoln Park Ground Breaking event demonstrates the community collaboration and support involved in planning the improvement project.

## PLAN FRAMEWORK

Community Visioning

### PLAN THEMES

INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE

ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

19 GOALS

104 STRATEGIES

89 ACTION ITEMS

LEVEL OF SERVICE GUIDELINES

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Workshop participants engage in a map activity that aims to locate community desires.

## WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE COMMUNITY

The following key takeaways were identified through community input and were central to the creation of the Essential Spaces Plan themes and goals:

- Most Duluth residents identify themselves as active users of the park system and value parks for providing spaces to spend time outdoors, connect with nature, and maintain and improve health.
- Collectively, trail use for walking, hiking, running, biking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing is the most common use of the park system, along with enjoying nature and wildlife, and relaxation and contemplation.
- Lack of information was the most frequent barrier that has prevented use of the park system and program offerings, which includes unfamiliarity with programs or activities and insufficient signage and wayfinding.
- Maintenance was identified as a priority among Duluth residents. Most support prioritizing maintenance in parks and trails that are most in need, followed by those that are used the most.
- Duluth residents identified splash pads, restroom facilities, off-leash dog areas, public access points for water and paddling, and designated fishing areas desired amenities to add to the system.

- Responses reflected that the amount of picnic and small group gathering areas, playgrounds and unpaved trails for hiking, snowshoeing, and biking are about right for serving community needs.
- Residents want parks and recreation programming to include entry-level opportunities and skill building for outdoor recreation activities, environmental education and nature exploration, and opportunities to volunteer to support the park system.
- Outside organizations that provide a range of organized sports leagues and programs within park spaces are valued.
- Duluthians value the benefit that park spaces provide in protecting the natural environment and supporting environmental resiliency.

### ESSENTIAL SPACES ENGAGEMENT NUMBERS:

**2,374**  
**PEOPLE**  
PROVIDED INPUT

**Table 1:** Engagement by the Numbers

Survey Responses	1,962
Community-Wide Survey	1,592
Statistically Valid Survey	370
Project Advisory Committee Meetings	6
Focus Group Participants	58
Community Workshop Participants	102
City Staff Workshop Participants	45
Polling Question Responses	170
Social Media Posts	10
Reach of Social Media Posts	28,586
Draft Plan Public Reviews	113
Draft Plan Public Comments	15



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## KEY INITIATIVES

The City of Duluth Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with partners, will use the Essential Spaces Plan as a guiding document to oversee and execute park system infrastructure and programming investments over the next decade. This plan has been created with the intent of upholding Park and Recreation's Vision and Mission Statements.

The following Key Initiatives are fundamental to providing a high quality park system that serves and reflects the diverse needs of the people of Duluth and protects the scenic beauty and health of the area's ecosystem:

- **Ask City Council to authorize a voter referendum on the question of whether to increase the Park Fund levy** by converting it from a fixed amount expressed in dollars and cents to a fixed percentage of taxable property value to provide funding levels that are more consistent with the wishes expressed by Duluth residents in the course of developing this plan.
- **Ask City Council to renew the existing half-and-half tourism tax to support sports tourism citywide** by investing in capital improvements to publicly owned community athletic facilities.

## CITY OF DULUTH PARKS AND RECREATION

### VISION STATEMENT

To promote the health and well-being of our community, environment, and economy by facilitating recreational opportunities and coordinating the enhancement of our parks, facilities, and natural resources now and into the future.

### MISSION STATEMENT

To be the central driving force in strengthening the heritage of a healthy, active community for future generations by continuing on the path of improving and enhancing our parks and facilities; protecting our natural resources; and developing partnerships to deliver recreation programs and services.

- **Maintain and repair assets in parks that are used most**, with special considerations for High-Priority Equity Areas and assets in poor condition.
- **Implement maintenance and operations practices that are environmentally protective and climate-conscious**, such as resiliently rebuilding the public shoreline, allowing for undisturbed spaces that contain native plant species and provide wildlife habitat, and investing in energy efficient and renewable energy infrastructure.
- **Develop stronger connections with water** with projects such as providing clear wayfinding signage, formalizing water access points, and increasing adaptive facilities.
- **Increase community awareness of parks and recreation program offerings** and support programming opportunities that fill gaps in existing local programming options.
- **Promote environmental stewardship for natural areas** through education initiatives, comprehensive trail management, and supporting ongoing efforts of the Duluth Natural Resource Management Program Plan.
- **Invest in indoor and outdoor athletic facilities** to address aging infrastructure and expand recreation options to reflect desires of surrounding neighborhoods and community members.
- **Continue to engage the community when making park improvements** to create park spaces that foster social interactions, promote local pride and inclusivity, and reflect the culture, diversity, and heritage of all Duluth community members.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THEMES AND GOALS

The following summary provides an overview of the plan's five themes and supporting goals. They are described in depth in Chapter 3.

### INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE



#### GOALS

- A. Increase park funding, in line with industry standards, to create and maintain a high-quality, four-season park system that will effectively enhance the health and well-being of our community.
- B. Invest strategically to decrease routine and long-term maintenance requirements, leverage outside funding, and support community-based priorities.
- C. Balance maintenance, reinvestment, consolidation, and new construction of park infrastructure to meet current and future system needs within a sustainable budget framework.

### ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES



#### GOALS

- D. Provide equitable, high-quality outdoor education and programming that encourages meaningful connections with nature in park spaces.
- E. Support opportunities for water-based recreation through managed access.

- F. Support improvements that simultaneously fulfill documented community recreational needs, enhance tourist attraction, and deliver other public benefits such as economic development and resource protection.

### PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY



#### GOALS

- G. Promote inclusion in park spaces, facilities, and programs ensuring that all persons have equitable and appropriate access to our park and recreation system.
- H. Activate park spaces to support local, social, cultural, and economic advancement.
- I. Honor the culture, storytelling, art, and history of traditionally marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and the NQT2SLGBIA community, among others.
- J. Provide equitable, efficient, and effective opportunities for public participation in park planning processes to balance various perspectives and preferences.
- K. Support visitor navigation and engagement through a user-friendly system of trailheads, signage, wayfinding, and interpretive elements.

### STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM



#### GOALS

- L. Strengthen Parks and Recreation's program offerings.
- M. Bolster relationships with partners who provide programming and recreation services, and support opportunities that fill gaps in existing local programming options.
- N. Promote and support strategically targeted volunteerism to efficiently increase the safe use and enjoyment of park spaces.
- O. Increase community awareness of recreational opportunities in park spaces.

### SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS



#### GOALS

- P. Protect and enhance our open spaces to restore and maintain ecological health, build resilience to natural disasters, and preserve the area's natural beauty.
- Q. Increase climate-resiliency throughout our park and trail system through modern design and best management practices.
- R. Complete and maintain a comprehensive trail system offering safe, sustainable, and diverse user experiences.
- S. Promote a culture of respect for public lands, trails, and waterways, as well as other system users, through stewardship education initiatives.









# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## SECTION CONTENTS:

- Plan Context
- Park System Overview
- Demographic and Area Context
- Trends and Special Considerations



# PLAN CONTEXT

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

At the heart of this Essential Spaces Plan are guiding principles. A 12-member Project Advisory Committee oversaw plan development, and these principles reflect the Committee's foundational values and vision for the future of Duluth's park and recreation system. Each plan theme, goal, and strategy was developed and evolved under these guiding principles.

### 1. Indigenous Acknowledgment

Anishinaabe and other Tribal Nations, including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, first settled here and maintained a balanced relationship with the land and the lake for over 10,000 years.

### 2. Inclusion and Equity

Strive to create a plan process and outcomes that improve inclusivity and equity.

### 3. Quality over Quantity

Strike a necessary balance between the quality of parks and community recreation facilities with the overall quantity of facilities.

### 4. Resiliency and Sustainability

Adhere to climate change adaptation strategies and approaches for recreation. Ensure long-term adaptability and provide recreational opportunities that will not compromise environmental quality over time.

### 5. Natural Resource Management

Protect, restore, and preserve natural resources and ecological systems.

### 6. Community Partnerships

Cultivate strategic use of volunteers and community groups to perform mission critical work that would otherwise go undone due to staffing and funding limitations.

### 7. Healthy Community and Family

#### Focus

Support health and well-being. Actively promote access for all to recreation in a clean, safe environment. Advance and maximize health and health equity through investments and policies. Support families and youth.

### 8. Safety

Provide safe, secure, and welcoming park and recreational experiences.

### 9. Cost Recovery

Apply a cost recovery and financial performance model to sustain programs, built assets/facilities, and lands over a 10 year period.



Duluthians value the natural resources and ecological systems within the City. Through effective management, these areas can be protected and preserved.

“The history of land, and who has access to it, tells an enormous amount about the values and priorities of a community. Duluth’s story is based on a resounding value for green space, open space, wild space and free space. Parks are where people gather, families play, and memories are made. And the best part is that parks are for everyone: all neighbors all neighborhoods. No one needs to pay admission or a membership fee. Everyone already belongs.”

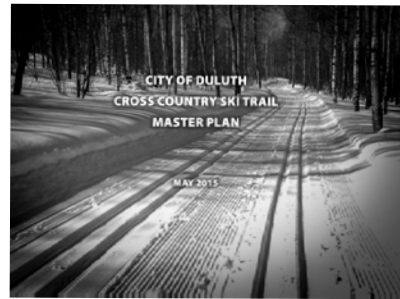
**- MAYOR OF DULUTH, EMILY LARSON**

# PLAN CONTEXT

## FOUNDATIONAL PLANS

The Essential Spaces Plan supports and works in conjunction with the important planning efforts that came before it. Foundational planning efforts include the 2010 Parks and Recreation Plan, 2011 Trail and Bikeway Plan, Cross Country Ski Trails Master Plan, Population Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Adaptation Framework, Imagine Duluth 2035, Natural Resource Management Program Plan, as well as the numerous Mini-Master Park Plans adopted by the City.

Existing recommendations and goals that affect Duluth's park and recreation system, either directly or indirectly, were documented and used to inform this plan. The Essential Spaces Plan builds upon these past planning efforts to ensure the benefits of the park system are distributed, supported, and enjoyed broadly across the community.



## FOUNDATIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS

1. **Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2010):** Centered around implementable recommendations to improve the parks and recreation network. This plan serves to guide future development within Duluth for an increase in the area's parks and recreation. In turn, this will benefit tourism, jobs, and the overall quality of life.
2. **Trail and Bikeway Plan (2011):** Serves as a road map to guide the development and management of Duluth's trails and bikeways. In turn, a comprehensive, connected, and sustainable network to serve the greater community will be created.
3. **Cross Country Ski Trails Master Plan (2015):** Acknowledges the leading issues of each ski trail, as gathered through community input. The plan also contains recommendations to improve trails.
4. **Population Vulnerability Assessment and and Climate Adaptation Framework (2018):** Describes how climate affects the region today and into the future and identifies goals and strategies for Duluth to mitigate those effects.
5. **Imagine Duluth 2035 (2018):** Works towards a people- and nature-oriented city. The plan works to shift away from the past auto- and industry-centric development and instead, helps prepare the city for future transformation. The plan balances preservation and new growth through innovative approaches that align with the community's vision.
6. **Natural Resource Management Program Plan (2022):** Identifies, assesses, and recommends investment in Duluth's publicly owned open space lands in order to preserve their ecological functions and values, enhance the ecosystem services they provide, and reduce impacts of natural disasters.



# PLAN CONTEXT

## DULUTH'S PARK HISTORY

**The City of Duluth is located on lands of the Assiniboine, Gitchee Gumee, Ojibwe, Cree, Cheyenne, and Dakota tribes.**

Duluth is a city of approximately 86,700 people located in northern Minnesota. Situated on the western edge of Lake Superior, the nation's largest fresh water lake, Duluth is a four-season city with cold, snowy winters and mild summers. The city is 150 miles north of Minnesota's largest urban area - the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Humans began to enter the area we now know as Duluth approximately 14,000 years ago. It was first inhabited by various Native Nations, including Assiniboine, Gitchee Gumee, Ojibwe, Cree, Cheyenne, and Dakota<sup>1</sup>. The Dakota, also known as the Sioux, primarily dominated the area until the mid-1600s when Ojibwe people began settling.

The Ojibwe people quickly adapted their lifestyle to the area's seasonal attributes<sup>2</sup>. In spring, families would collect and process the sap of maple trees, fish, and hunt muskrats. Come summer, large bands of the tribe would gather near lakes to plant, fish,

and gather medicinal plants. During the fall, the Ojibwe people would live off of previously harvested crops and rice. Families would return to winter campsites as the season changed again. Winter was a time of hunting, trapping, processing, and drying meat.

In 1767, Jonathan Carver arrived in Duluth, marking the beginning of European migration into the region<sup>3</sup>. Soon after, the infringement of European settlements on the traditions of native lands began. In 1854, the Lake Superior Ojibwe entered the 1854 Treaty of La Pointe with the United States, which ceded their lands, including the Duluth area. Although the treaty displaced the Ojibwe people from lands they had been inhabiting for thousands of years, the Ojibwe retained their hunting and fishing rights in the region.

As Europeans established permanent settlements in Duluth, the area's park system began to develop in a similar fashion to many other park systems established in the 19th century. It started as town squares, or unimproved tracts of land in a central area, which were used as public gathering places. As Duluth began to grow, those residing in the townsite set aside two platted parks: Cascade Square (Park), a four-acre parcel in the heart of town, and Central Park (sometimes called Zenith Park today), a

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledge indigenous land. Eco3 - Energy, Equity, and Economic Vitality. (2021, January 18). Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://www.ecolibrium3.org/land-acknowledgment/lakesuperiorstreams.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Onigamiinsing Dibaajimowinan - Duluth's stories. Onigamiinsing Dibaajimowinan - Duluth's Stories. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <http://www.duluthstories.net/>

<sup>3</sup> Duluth's Park System, 1856 - 1956. Zenith City Online. (2020, January 1). Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <http://zenithcity.com/archive/parks-landmarks/duluths-park-system-1856-1956/7/>

### 2000 - present

Duluth emerges as a premiere outdoor recreation city. Duluth parks funding is drastically reduced and then partially restored. Recreation programs cease and then recommence in new form.

*Story and Play Program*



### 1900 - 2000

Board of Parks Commission is eliminated and the Recreation Advisory Board takes its place. Recreational opportunities are added, including Spirit Mountain, Upper Chester, and the Lakewalk.

*1926 Big Chester Ski Jump  
Image Source: UMD Martin Library*



### 1800 - 1900

Treaty of La Pointe cedes the lands of Duluth as an official city of the United States. Park Commissioners are established. Citizens begin contributing to parks.

*Pavilion and observatory built in  
Cascade Park in 1895  
Image source: Duluth Public Library*



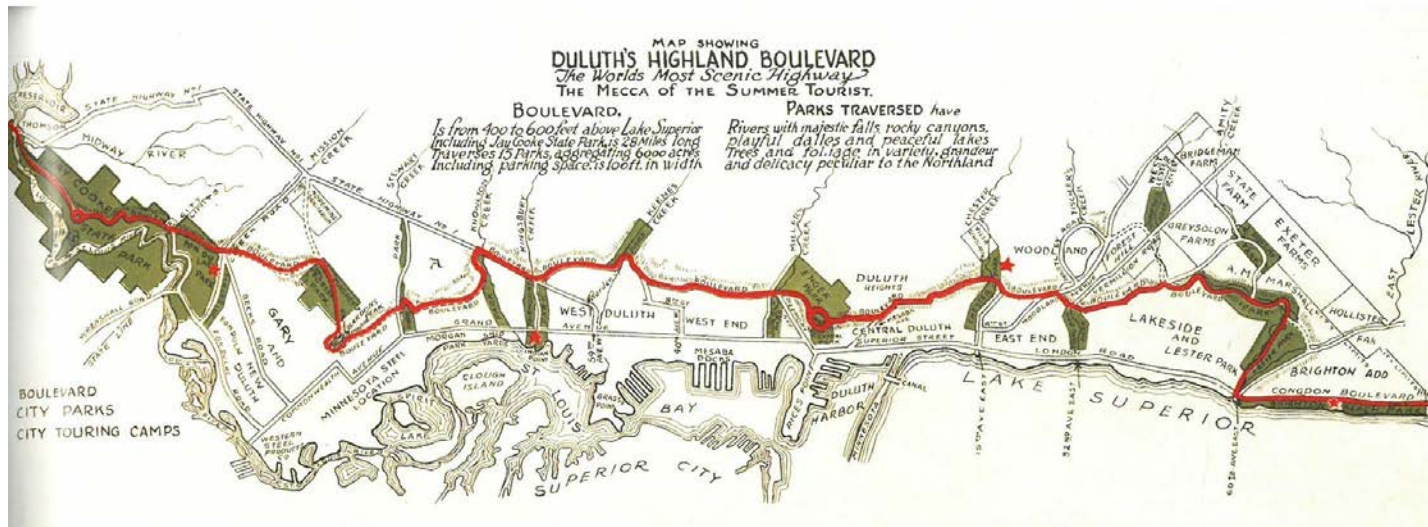
### 1600 - 1800

Duluth is home to Native tribes including the Dakota and Ojibwe people prior to European migration.

*Circa 1900 Ojibwe Indian families  
building birch bark canoes.  
Image source: U.S. Forest Service*



# PLAN CONTEXT



This stylized map calling today's Skyline Parkway "Highland Boulevard" was produced in the 1920s by the Duluth Chamber of Commerce and Mayor's Office. It was intended to be handed out at Duluth's autotourist camps. It included nonexistent unnamed parks along Stewart Creek, Knowlton Creek, and Fond Du Lac that were never built, perhaps indications of Mayor Snively's unrealized vision for the park system.

Source: UMD Martin Library and 'Duluth's Historic Parks' by Nelson and Dierckins

thirty-acre parcel on the rocky hillside west of downtown. William K. Rogers, president of Duluth's Board of Park Commissioners, can be credited for the preservation of much of the lands that make up Duluth's current park system, which includes a scenic hillside parkway and connection to a number of parks along Lake Superior's shoreline. Rogers's park system plan was officially adopted in February of 1888, with Duluth's first Board of Park Commissioners created shortly after in 1889.

In the late 1890s, residents of Duluth became actively involved in acquiring and improving land for parks spaces, solidifying the role of the Parks Board in the community. Since then, Duluth has maintained its commitment to parks and natural surroundings,

resulting in a large expansion of the system.

Today the City maintains 9,168 acres of park spaces, excluding golf courses. Approximately 2,500 acres of this is City-managed but county-owned property that the City is seeking to acquire. Parks and Recreation helps to steward these parklands, in cooperation with community partners and other City divisions, through planning and community engagement, grant seeking, project management, programming, events, education, partnerships, maintenance, preservation, and environmental resiliency.

**The history of Duluth's parks and recreation system is a story of remarkable contributions from individuals and groups.** It is also marked by many milestones of funding challenges, which only compounded as the number of parks increased.

A Park Fund levy was established in 2011 to help support the park system. However, the levy was set at a fixed dollar amount of \$2.6 million and cannot grow to keep pace with the increasing cost to operate and maintain Duluth parks. The purchasing power of the fixed \$2.6 million levy dramatically diminished in the ensuing decade and will continue to diminish with each passing year. The decreasing value of the fixed levy has necessitated steep annual cuts to the

parks capital maintenance budget that is the City's only dedicated source of funding for the repair, replacement, and renewal of deteriorated park infrastructure. As of 2022, the parks capital maintenance budget falls far short of the level of funding necessary to maintain Duluth parks over time

As more park assets reach the end of their useful life, the City increasingly lacks the funds to repair, replace, or renew those assets. In order to preserve and maintain Duluth's nationally recognized park system into the future, it is urgently necessary for the City of Duluth to increase and diversify funding for the park and recreation system.



# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

## SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DULUTH'S PARK SYSTEM

Duluth has a significant amount of open space and several types of natural features, which provide both challenges and opportunities for the park system and its users.

**1. Four-season City:** Duluth offers four-season recreation options including a trail system that provides opportunities for year-round hiking and biking. As a northern, lakeside, and forested city, extreme cold and snow are realities of life. While these extremes may, at times, limit outdoor activities, the climate also provides ideal conditions for extensive snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and fat-biking trail systems, as well as skiing/snowboarding at Chester Bowl and Spirit Mountain. Contrastingly, Duluth has long summer days. The average day in June has a sunrise at 5am and sunset at 9pm, which provides many hours of sunlight for outdoor summer activities and events.

**2. Natural Topography and Geology:**

The city is uniquely situated on a steep hill. This allows for scenic views, up- and down-hill biking, and hikes through varied terrain and diverse landscapes. The Superior Hiking Trail and the Duluth Traverse multi-use trail both run the length of the city and offer ridgeline views overlooking Lake Superior. Additionally, the boulders and granite outcroppings scattered

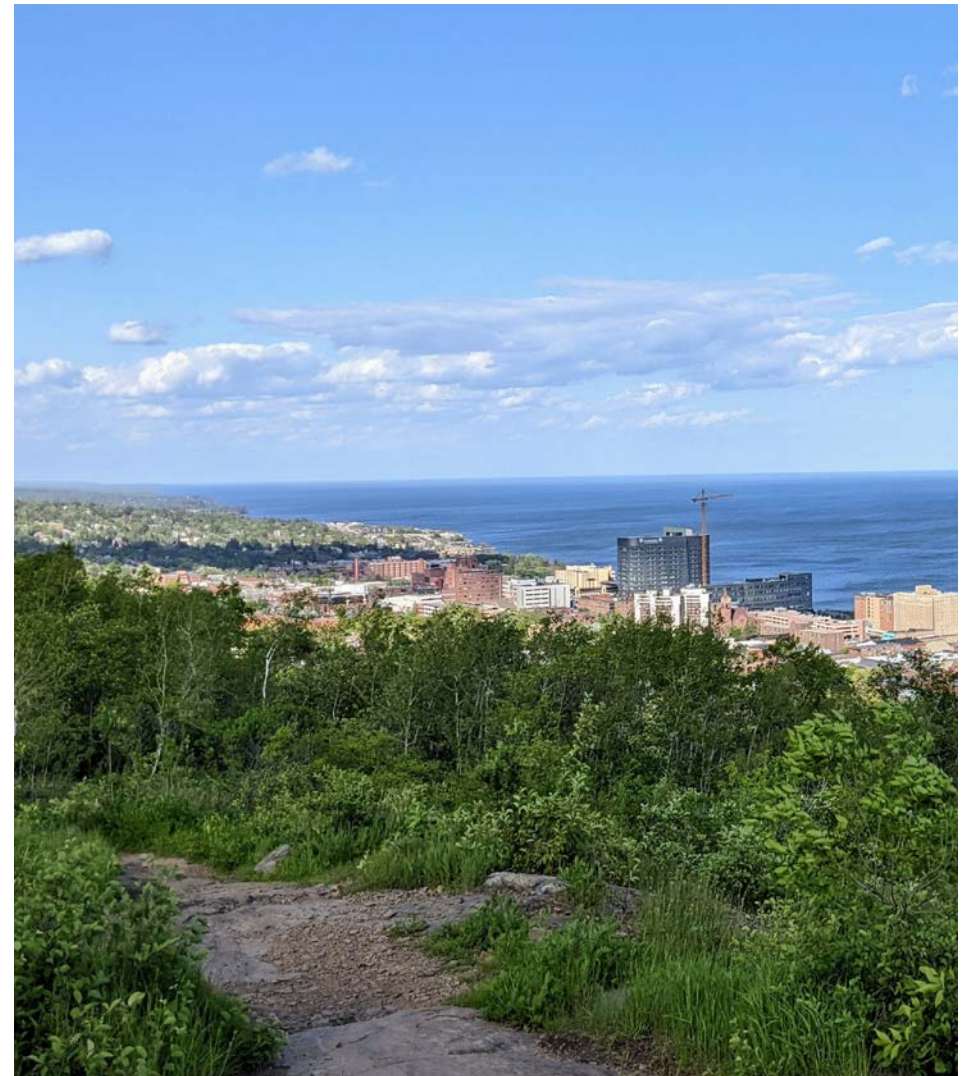
throughout the city provide geologic exploration and attract climbers for bouldering and rope climbing opportunities. The hilly topography also introduces accessibility and development challenges for the City.

**3. Waterfront Location:** The water bodies of Duluth offer many benefits: recreation, environmental, climate change resilience, economic, and wellness/spiritual. Duluth's proximity to many natural waterbodies, including Lake Superior and the St. Louis Estuary, provides a variety of year-round, water-based activities such as boating, ice fishing, ice skating, paddling, swimming, sailing, fishing, and kayaking. Multi-agency restoration efforts have begun to restore wild rice in the St. Louis River Estuary, which will improve the estuary's ecology and contribute to restoring the cultural practice of gathering wild rice each fall.

**4. Woodlands:** Duluth is situated in the Northern Lakes and Forests ecoregion of Minnesota, an area characterized by coniferous and northern hardwood forests and numerous lakes and wetlands. These woodlands offer unique recreational opportunities through hiking, biking, hunting, foraging, fishing, and other outdoor-oriented activities.

"You'll never see another town like Duluth."

Bob Dylan, Rolling Stone #1078, May 14, 2009



Lake Superior and downtown view from the Duluth Traverse at Antenna Farm.

# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

## THE CURRENT PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM

Duluth offers thousands of acres of green space and pristine wilderness alongside the great Lake Superior. The diverse and refreshing landscapes of the region contribute to a high quality of life and are appealing to residents and visitors alike. **People can enjoy over 9,000 acres of green space, including 162 parks, and over 350 miles of trails.** This is a substantially greater amount of green space compared to other cities of Duluth's size. Duluth's profusion of natural/passive green space is similar to that of many cities in the mountain west, with the notable difference that most of Duluth's natural/passive space is owned by local government rather than the federal government.<sup>4</sup>

Duluth's parks, open spaces, and trails offer a broad variety of outdoor recreation activities. Due to the city's proximity to Lake Superior, the St. Louis River, and several smaller creeks, many Duluthians have access to water-based recreation. Private operators in Duluth offer unique water-based experiences such as sailing, charter fishing, rafting, canoeing, and kayaking. City parks and facilities provide space for a variety

of other activities like sports, arts, special events, and clubs.

Trails offer opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowshoeing and nordic skiing, among other activities. Additionally, the city has an array of sports and recreation facilities, including sport courts, ice rinks, athletic fields, disc golf courses, skating rinks, dog parks, golf courses, picnic areas, and community centers. Through partnership agreements with the City, clubs and private organizations are able to utilize these facilities for organized sports and activities and often assist with substantial maintenance of the facilities.

# 21%

of the total land area in the City of Duluth is dedicated to parks, natural/passive land, golf courses, and undeveloped open space.

<sup>4</sup> An inventory of parks and amenities can be found in Appendix B. Figure 1, provides a map of existing parklands, categorized as developed parks, natural and passive lands, golf courses, and undeveloped park properties. Within these broad categories of parklands are more detailed park classifications, which can be found in Chapter 2, Table 7.

## DEVELOPED PARKS

Developed parks are those that have constructed facilities, such as playgrounds, sport courts and fields, and places for gathering. Developed parks include neighborhood and community parks, as well as larger park spaces that have a regional draw.



## NATURAL / PASSIVE LANDS

Natural / passive lands are typically large areas of native landscapes, habitats, ecosystems, and natural features. Natural / passive lands sometimes host active recreation opportunities such as hiking and cross-country skiing as well as opportunities for solitude.



## GOLF COURSES

Golf courses operated by the City are open to the public but require a fee for use. Golf courses offer opportunities for low-impact outdoor exercise and are accessible to multiple generations.



## UNDEVELOPED PARK PROPERTIES

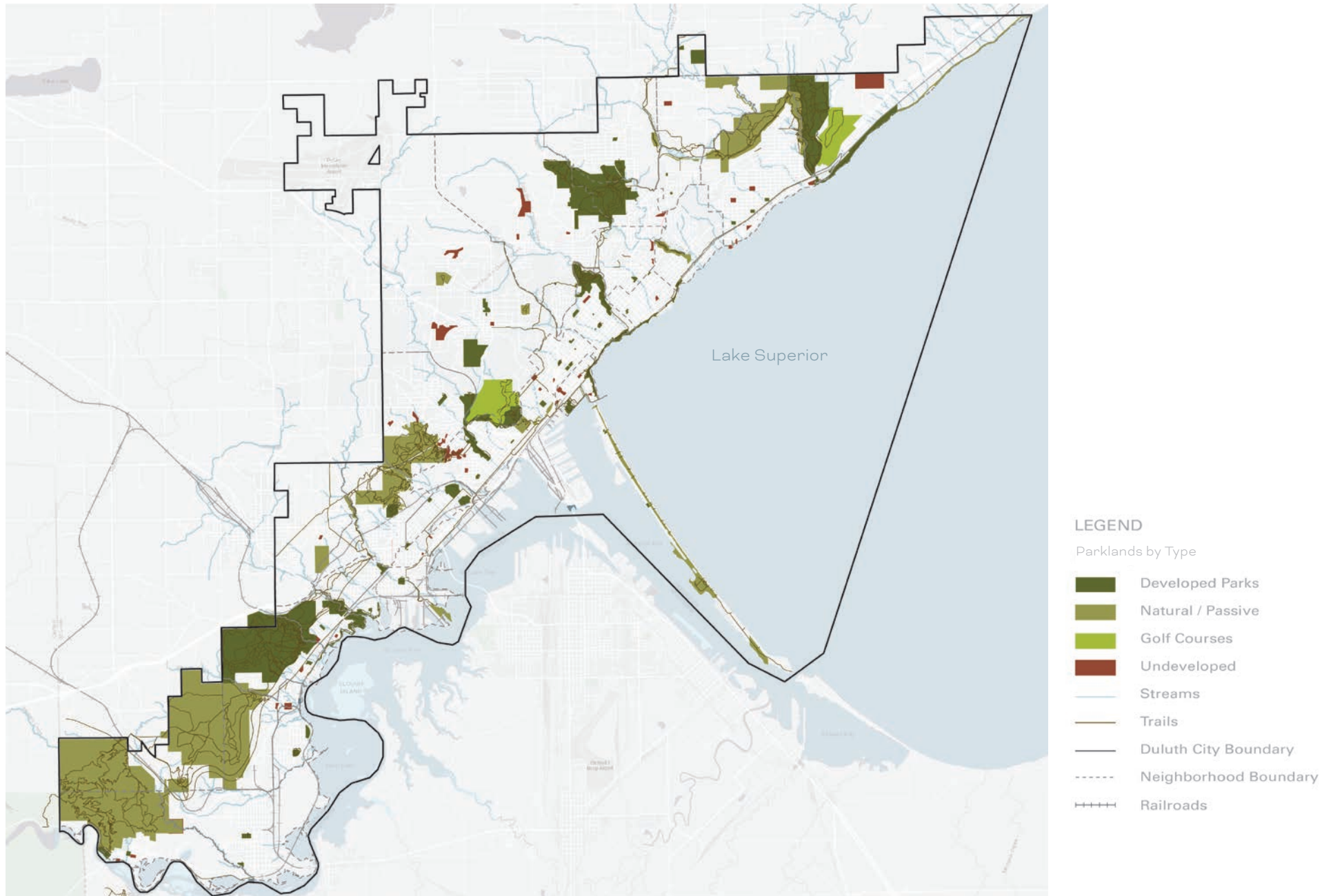
Undeveloped park properties are areas owned by the City that are currently not developed or managed to facilitate public use. These may serve as future parks should there be substantial demand and appropriate funding.





# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

**Figure 1:** Duluth Parklands by Type Map (2022)



# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

## FUNDING THE PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM

Three City divisions work collectively to manage the park system: Parks and Recreation, Park Maintenance, and Property and Facilities Management. Though all three divisions are within the same Property, Parks, and Libraries Department, they are otherwise funded as separate entities with separate operating budgets. Figure 2 expresses this relationship and uses the 2022 budget as an example of how each division's funding is combined to provide revenue for general operating and maintenance of the entire park system.

Parks and Recreation has an operating budget of approximately \$2.49 million. Approximately 95% of the revenue for Parks and Recreation

is derived from three primary funding sources: Park Fund property tax levy (77%), an annual transfer from the General Fund (11%), and Fund Balance (5%), and revenue from parks-related fees (7%).

Park Maintenance has an operating budget of approximately \$3.98 million, of which approximately \$3.39 million is dedicated to the park system. Park Maintenance is funded primarily through the General Fund (78%), the Park Fund levy (17%), and Tourism Tax (5%). The remaining revenue comes from soccer field rentals and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Together, the two divisions support the park system with a combined budget of \$5.88 million.



Parks and recreation funding may be used to update amenities such as playground equipment and safety ground surfaces.

Figure 2: Duluth Park System Funding Categories (2022)

PARKS AND RECREATION		PARK MAINTENANCE		PROPERTY AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT		Total Revenue for General Operating & Maintenance (sum of three budgets)
Property Tax Levy	\$1,915,000	General Fund	\$2,502,100			
General Fund	\$280,000	Property Tax Levy	\$685,000	General Fund (Utilities)	\$670,750	
Revenue & Other	\$171,800	Tourism Tax	\$200,000	Leases, Rentals, Other	\$123,400	
Fund Balance	\$124,200	Other	\$11,000			
TOTAL \$2,491,000		TOTAL \$3,398,100		TOTAL \$794,150		\$6,680,250



# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Property and Facilities Management (PFM) is responsible for upkeep of the park system's many buildings and utilities. Looking at funding that directly supports the park system, PFM receives General Fund dollars to support park building utilities, as well as revenue from leases, rentals, and other sources. In total, PFM contributes approximately \$794,100 directly to the park system, outside of typical property and facility management responsibilities.

Parks and Recreation also receives supplemental funding through external sources, including:

- Community contributions and fundraising
- Local tourism taxes on lodging and food and beverage
- Federal and state grants
- Enterprise Funds
- American Rescue Plan Act

It should be noted that these funds are not guaranteed or committed revenues and often require staff support for applications and coordination. When received, these funds are generally spent on capital maintenance of park assets.

An important note related to the Park Fund property tax levy is that, as currently structured, the levy can collect no more than \$2.6 million per year. As the cost to operate and maintain Duluth Parks continues to

increase, with rising construction and personnel costs, the buying power of that \$2.6 million continues to diminish.

In the absence of a sustained increase in City funding, growth of parks-related revenues will continue to lag increasing operational and capital costs, the financial capacity of the City to operate and maintain parks will continue to diminish, the condition of park infrastructure will continue to deteriorate, and the City will face the increasing necessity to demolish or remove park infrastructure without replacement. If not corrected, inadequate funding would eventually necessitate reductions in community services and staffing.



Parks and Recreation funds are primarily spent on maintenance, capital improvements, and land acquisitions.

Source: Ivy Vainio

# DEMOGRAPHIC AND AREA CONTEXT

## POPULATION

**Duluth stands out as the fifth most populous city in the state and the largest city in the Duluth-Superior, MN-WI Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).** Duluth is the landmark port city in the northeastern portion of the state and is home to approximately 86,700 people, roughly 1.5% of Minnesota's population. Over the past 20 years, Duluth's total population has remained relatively stable and has not seen the fast-paced growth of other locations in the state. Minnesota experienced 7.6% population growth from 2010-2020, while Duluth has only seen an increase of 0.5%, or about 412 people, during the same time period. This rate of population growth is much lower than the state and national average, as shown in Table 2. The population of Duluth is projected to reach approximately 88,430 by the year 2025 and 89,920 by 2030. This is an increase of 1,733 residents, or approximately 1.01% over a decade.

Duluth sits at the confluence of Lake Superior and the St. Louis River, and just across the river from the city of Superior, WI. These two cities are often referred to as the "Twin Ports" and collectively include a population of approximately 116,000 people.

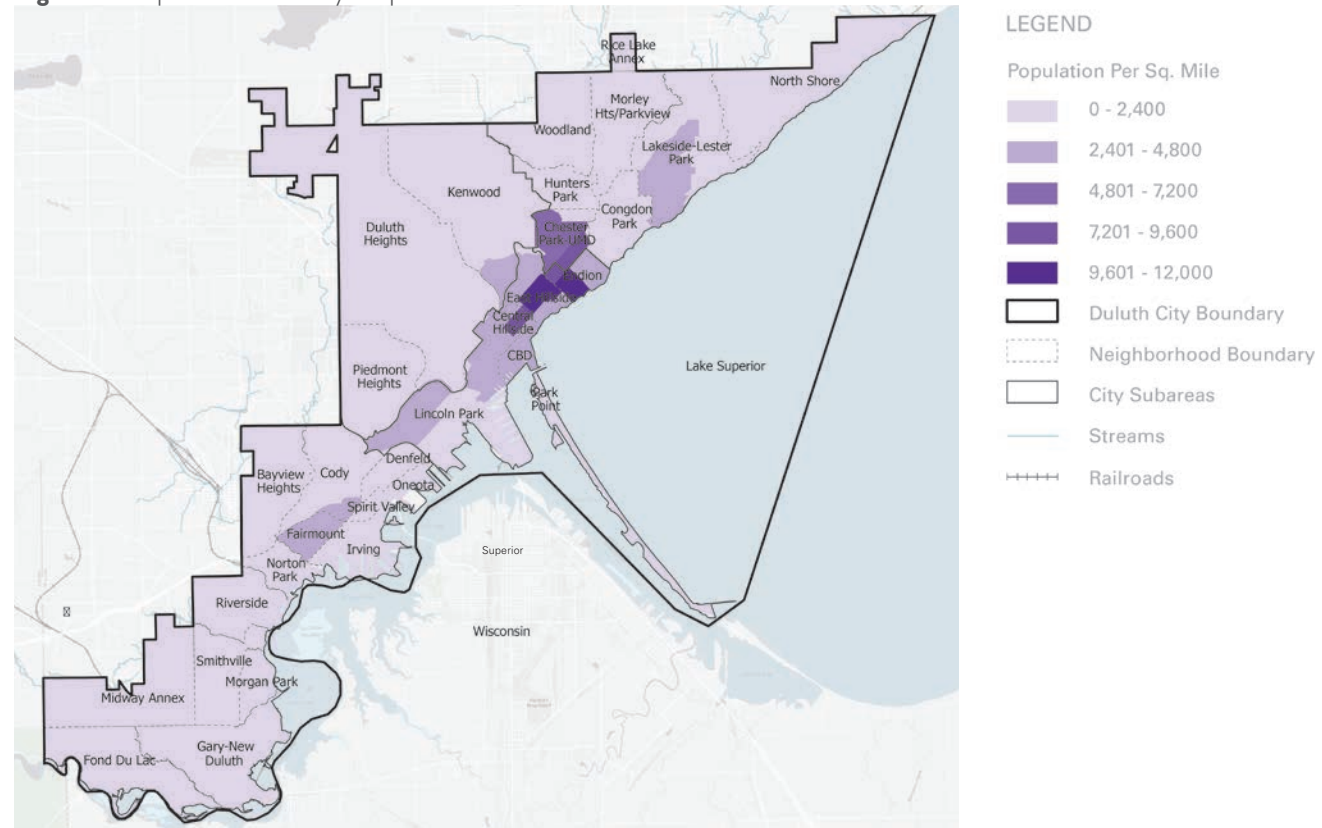
**A majority of Duluth's population is concentrated in central Duluth.** As shown in Figure 3, the most populated neighborhoods are East Hillside and Endion followed by Chester Park-UMD, home to the University of Minnesota – Duluth. Looking west, the Lincoln Park and Fairmount neighborhoods have a higher population density than other nearby neighborhoods. On the more eastern side of the city, the same is true of the Lakeside-Lester Park neighborhood. Generally speaking, population density decreases closer to city boundaries.

**Table 2:** Population 2010 to 2020

	Duluth City	Minnesota State	United States of America
Population April 1, 2020	86,697	5,706,494	331,449,281
Population April 1, 2010	86,265	5,303,925	308,745,538
Population, percent change, 2010 -2020	0.5%	7.6%	7.4%

*Source: US Census 2020*

**Figure 3:** Population Density Map



Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data, American Community Survey Data



# DEMOGRAPHIC AND AREA CONTEXT

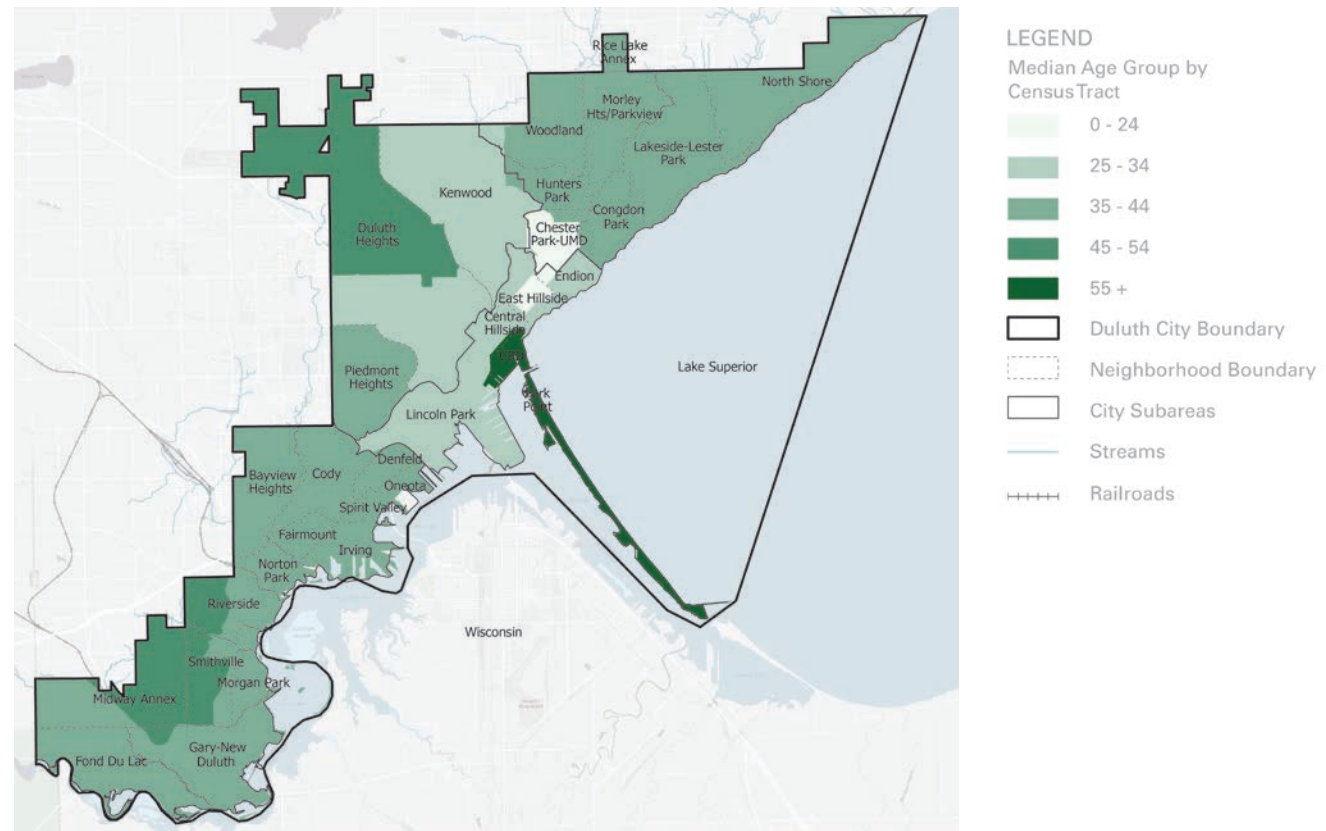
## AGE DISTRIBUTION

**Duluth's population has a median age of 33.7, significantly younger than the nation's median of 38.2 years.** This can likely be attributed to the presence of the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD), with an enrollment of over 10,000 students, as well as the College of St. Scholastica (CSS) and Lake Superior College (LSC). Young adults between the ages of 20-29 account for the largest age group in the city, at 21% of the population.

**The median age group of residents in most Duluth neighborhoods is 35 to 44.** Figure 4 shows the median age group of each Duluth Census tract. A high concentration of those less than 24 years old is centered around the UMD campus in the Chester Park-UMD and East Hillside, and a slightly higher median age of 25-34 in surrounding Central Area neighborhoods. Park Point has the highest median age of 65, and Riverside, Smithville, Midway Annex and Duluth Heights, also have an older median age of 45-54.

Interests in green space and recreation differ among these age groups and should be considered when planning for future park use and programming. Design solutions and recreational offerings that reflect local demographics will support increased accessibility, usability, and safety for park users of all ages.

**Figure 4:** Median Age Distribution Map



Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data, American Community Survey Data

# DEMOGRAPHIC AND AREA CONTEXT



Park and recreation spaces provide opportunities to gather, recreate, and socialize.

Duluth's Diversity Index is  
expected to grow from  
**25.9%** in 2020 to  
**29.1%** by 2025

## DIVERSITY

The population of Duluth is expected to increase in racial and cultural diversity. Table 3 shows that as of 2020, Duluth's White / Caucasian population is the largest racial group (89.1%), followed by Two or More Races (4.8%), Black or African American (2.4%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1.7%), and Asian (1.4%). Much of the city's racial diversity is seen in central Duluth including the Central Business District (CBD), Central Hillside, Duluth Heights, and the areas just east and west of the CBD.

Over 95% of Duluth residents over the age of five speak only English, and 1.7% speak Spanish. The English-only speaking population is higher than the state's 88.7%, and the rate of Spanish speaking residents is lower than Minnesota's 3.4%. Nonetheless, the city is projected to grow in diversity. A Diversity Index, used to understand and describe the racial and ethnic makeup of a specific geography, projects that Duluth's Diversity Index will grow from 25.9 in 2020 to 29.1 by 2025.

**Table 3:** Race and Ethnicity Demographics by Percentage (2020)

	Duluth City	Minnesota State
White	89.1%	81.6%
Black or African American	2.4%	6.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.7%	1.0%
Asian	1.4%	4.9%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%
Two or more races	4.8%	3.9%
Hispanic or Latino	2.6%	5.5%

Source: US Census Bureau Data, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2020



# DEMOGRAPHIC AND AREA CONTEXT

## EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

**Duluth is a city with a diversified job base.** According to ESRI, more than half of the city's residents, about 64%, are those who perform professional, desk, managerial, or administrative work in a typical 9-5 position. These individuals are likely to enjoy Duluth's park spaces during their work day breaks, after the day concludes, and on weekends. Approximately 14.5% of the employees who work in Duluth are employed in manufacturing, industrial and transportation sectors. The daytime population for Duluth totals 98,505 people, reflecting a net increase of approximately 12,000 people who commute into the city.

**Table 4:** Income Distribution (2020)

	Duluth City	Minnesota State
<\$15,000	12.3%	7.5%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	10.8%	7.0%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	10.1%	7.5%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	13.5%	11.5%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	19.0%	17.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	11.3%	14.1%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	13.7%	18.3%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4.2%	8.2%
\$200,000+	5.0%	8.5%
Median Household Income	\$54,084	\$73,382

Source: US Census Bureau Data, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2020

**Duluth's Median Household Income (MHI) is substantially lower than the state.** Duluth's Median Household Income (MHI) is \$54,084 compared to Minnesota's \$73,382. Table 4 shows a large portion of low to middle income households in Duluth. Approximately 23% of households earn less than \$25,000 annually, which is a larger percentage than the state's 14.5%. About 30% of households in Duluth earn \$50,000 to \$100,000 annually. The city has fewer high-income households than the state, with 22.9% of households in Duluth earning more than \$100,000 annually, compared to 35% in Minnesota. Duluth's lower income levels highlights the need for Parks and Recreation to continue providing affordable and accessible recreation opportunities.

## DISENFRANCHISED POPULATIONS

According to ESRI, "disenfranchised population areas" are areas with a high concentration of households that receive food stamps/SNAP benefit, live below the poverty level, do not own a vehicle, are non-English speaking and/or have one or more persons living with a disability. As seen in Table 5, when compared to the state, Duluth has a lower percentage

of its population who does not speak English and less people receiving SNAP benefits, despite higher levels of people living in poverty.

The city also has a slightly larger percentage of residents with disabilities than the state overall. Parks and Recreation should focus on efforts to improve park spaces for all ages, incomes, and abilities using universal design. See page 114 for more information on universal design.

**Table 5:** Disenfranchised Populations by Percentage

	Duluth	Minnesota
<b>Households Below the Poverty Level*</b>	17.3%	9.5%
<b>Households Receiving Food Stamps / SNAP</b>	4.4%	7.9%
<b>Households with 1+ Persons with a Disability</b>	22.8%	21.9%
<b>Population 18-64 That Speaks Only A Language Other Than English</b>	0.1%	0.4%

\*The determination of households living below the poverty level is based on factors that include income in addition to household size and number of children; the percentage reflected in Table 5 is therefore not a parallel comparison to income data presented in Table 4.

Source: ESRI, Business Analyst 2020

OVER ONE-FIFTH  
OF HOUSEHOLDS IN  
DULUTH HAVE ONE OR  
MORE PEOPLE LIVING  
WITH A DISABILITY

THE PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS  
IN DULUTH THAT HAVE AN INCOME  
BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL WAS  
NEARLY DOUBLE THAT OF THE STATE  
IN 2019

Source: ESRI, Business Analyst 2020

# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

## RECREATION TRENDS

Local and national trends highlight the overall direction of parks and recreation, showcasing both sustained and evolving priorities that may affect Duluth's park system.

### DULUTH'S RECREATION TRENDS

Participants in Duluth's Parks and Recreation Survey identified themselves as active users of the park system, with 57% of respondents reporting they visit parks and natural areas at least once a week or more. When asked to identify which recreational or leisure activities in Duluth's park system they participate in most, walking, hiking, and running on trails was the most popular activity,

followed by enjoying nature and wildlife, relaxing and contemplating, and biking on trails (See Figure 5). **These popular activities appeal to all ages and can be done in most environments, and are enjoyed regardless of skill level.** Further adding to their appeal, these activities tend to have minimal barriers to entry, such as being relatively inexpensive, not requiring a set schedule, and having social flexibility, meaning they can be done alone, socially-distant, or in a group setting. Other important trends and takeaways from the Parks and Recreation Survey include the significance of winter sports in Duluth, specifically snowshoeing and cross-country skiing (28%) and ice skating (9%). With a population that enjoys staying active year round, the City

should evaluate options for enhanced indoor athletic and recreation amenities to expand options for staying active during the long winter months. Additionally, 9% of survey takers indicated using natural lands for hunting, foraging, and fishing, which has implications for land protection and a need for management actions that safely facilitate multiple uses. More information about recreation and park use trends can be found in Appendix C.

### MINNESOTA'S RECREATION TRENDS

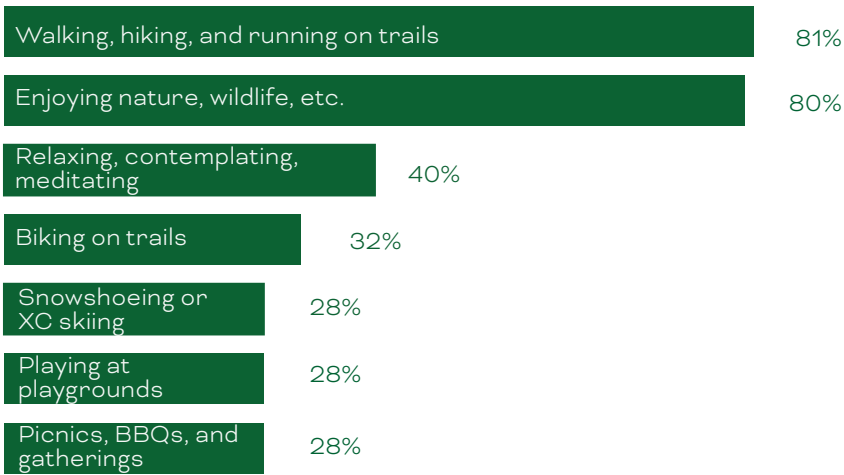
The 2022-2024 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) indicates that in a 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Household Survey, 70% of survey responders think outdoor activities are very important. **This is a 16% increase from the 2004 report, indicating a growing importance of outdoor activities.** The report also contains results from a Local Recreation Provider Survey stating that **a majority of providers**

**(77%) reported increased visitation to their parks and facilities in the past five years.** The trend of increasing visitation has implications for Duluth and Parks and Recreation must consider the challenges associated with a growing number of visitors. While Duluth has an abundance of parkland and trails, some locations experience crowding, conflicts between different uses, and added maintenance challenges due to increased use.

The outdoor recreation industry plays a significant role in the State of Minnesota's economy. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2020 outdoor recreation in Minnesota generated over \$8.4 billion, which accounts for 2.2% of the state's gross domestic product (GDP).

Changing parks and recreation values, as seen through increased parks visitation and growing importance of outdoor activities, coupled with the increasing economic role of outdoor recreation, highlights the importance of supporting diverse park and recreation opportunities in Duluth.

Figure 5: Top Uses of Duluth's Park System



Results derived from question: What are the top 5 ways your household uses Duluth's park system, if you use it at all?

Source: 2021 Duluth Parks and Recreation Survey: Address-Sample Results.

"Minnesotan's favorite activities include relaxing in the outdoors, walking or hiking, relaxing by the water and picnicking outdoors."  
- 2022 to 2024 SCORP



# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This Essential Spaces Plan is shaped by an understanding of the environmental and social challenges that the park system faces. While larger and more complex than those that Parks and Recreation can possibly solve alone, identifying and acknowledging these challenges is important and necessary. Establishing a shared understanding of the broader social and environmental factors at play creates space for considering new ways to operate and maintain the park system to best meet the needs of current times.

As part of this plan process, special considerations were given to long-standing environmental injustices, the growing number of unhoused individuals seeking refuge in park spaces, and the effects of climate change.



**Environmental Justice**



**Homelessness in Park Spaces**



**Climate Change**



A coastal resilience and mitigation study is underway to find solutions to shoreline collapses on the North Shore from Brighton Beach to Knife River.

# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (EPA). Many of the environmental injustices faced by communities today are direct results of discriminatory policies of the past, including segregation and redlining, among others. These policies led to the formation of historically underserved neighborhoods, which were more likely to suffer from industrial pollutants and less likely to receive financial investments.

An area's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), as determined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), is a meaningful tool for exploring environmental justice<sup>1</sup>. On a scale from 0 to 1, the SVI measures the level of support an area may need before, during, or after disasters. Variables such as poverty, access to transportation, and crowded housing are factored into determining an area's social vulnerability. Other factors to consider when analyzing environmental justice include access to high quality parks, climate change, exposure to pollutants, water quality, flood plains, zoning, and proximity to hazardous areas.

The Priority Equity Areas Map displayed in Figure 6 utilizes the SVI, along with other environmental and health data, to determine high, medium, and low priority areas for equity-focused projects and investments in Duluth. Neighborhoods considered high-priority equity areas are those with the greatest concentrations of:

- Low income households
- People of color
- Populations with poor mental health
- Populations with low levels of physical activity
- Air pollution
- Populations with a disability
- People aged 65 and over
- People aged 18 and under
- High population density
- Zero-car households
- Impaired water quality zones

A body of water is considered to be impaired if it fails to meet one or more of the water quality standards as measured by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

This data is used to illustrate that proximity to water does not always allow for safe access and utilization. Although residents may live near water, there may be physical barriers preventing access or the water may be unsuitable for recreation due to poor quality or contamination.

In Duluth, significant progress has been made in regards to sediment remediation and habitat restoration within the St. Louis River Estuary. It is anticipated that the remaining beneficial use impairments will be removed by the goal year of 2030.

After examining these factors, it is apparent that **Duluth's densest neighborhoods have higher social vulnerability scores and are experiencing greater environmental injustices than other neighborhoods.** Neighborhoods experiencing the disproportionate impacts of lower water quality, higher urban temperatures, and greater levels of air and noise pollution include the Central Business District, Central Hillside, East Hillside, Lincoln Park, Duluth Heights, Denfeld, Irving, Gary-New Duluth, and Fond du Lac.

Notably, the youngest and most diverse portions of the population are also the residents who have the lowest incomes. More than 60% of people in the Central Business District, as well as those in and around the UMD campus, are living with incomes that fall below the poverty line. The intersections between population density, income, and experiences of environmental injustice in Duluth are significant for park planning purposes, and highlighting priority areas for equity-focused projects and investments is very important for the future success of the system.



Areas with higher SVI scores are more susceptible to natural disasters and have less ability to recover.

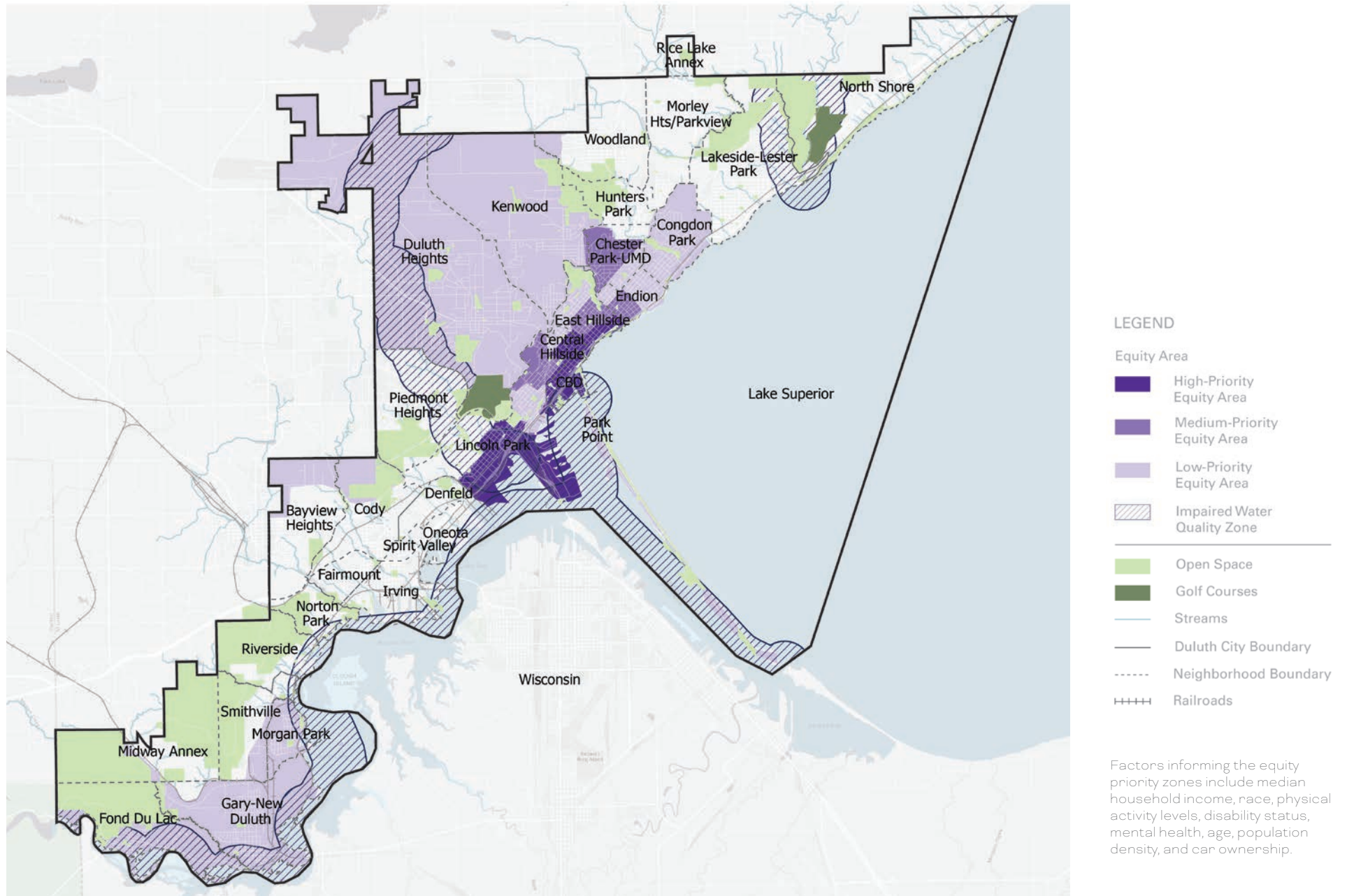
Source: MPRnews.org, Derek Montgomery

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). CDC's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://svi.cdc.gov/map.html>



# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Figure 6:** Priority Equity Areas Map



Source: Design Workshop Analysis, CDC SVI Data 2021

# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Parks can play a vital role in promoting environmental justice and counteracting inequitable decisions of the past in the following ways<sup>2</sup>:

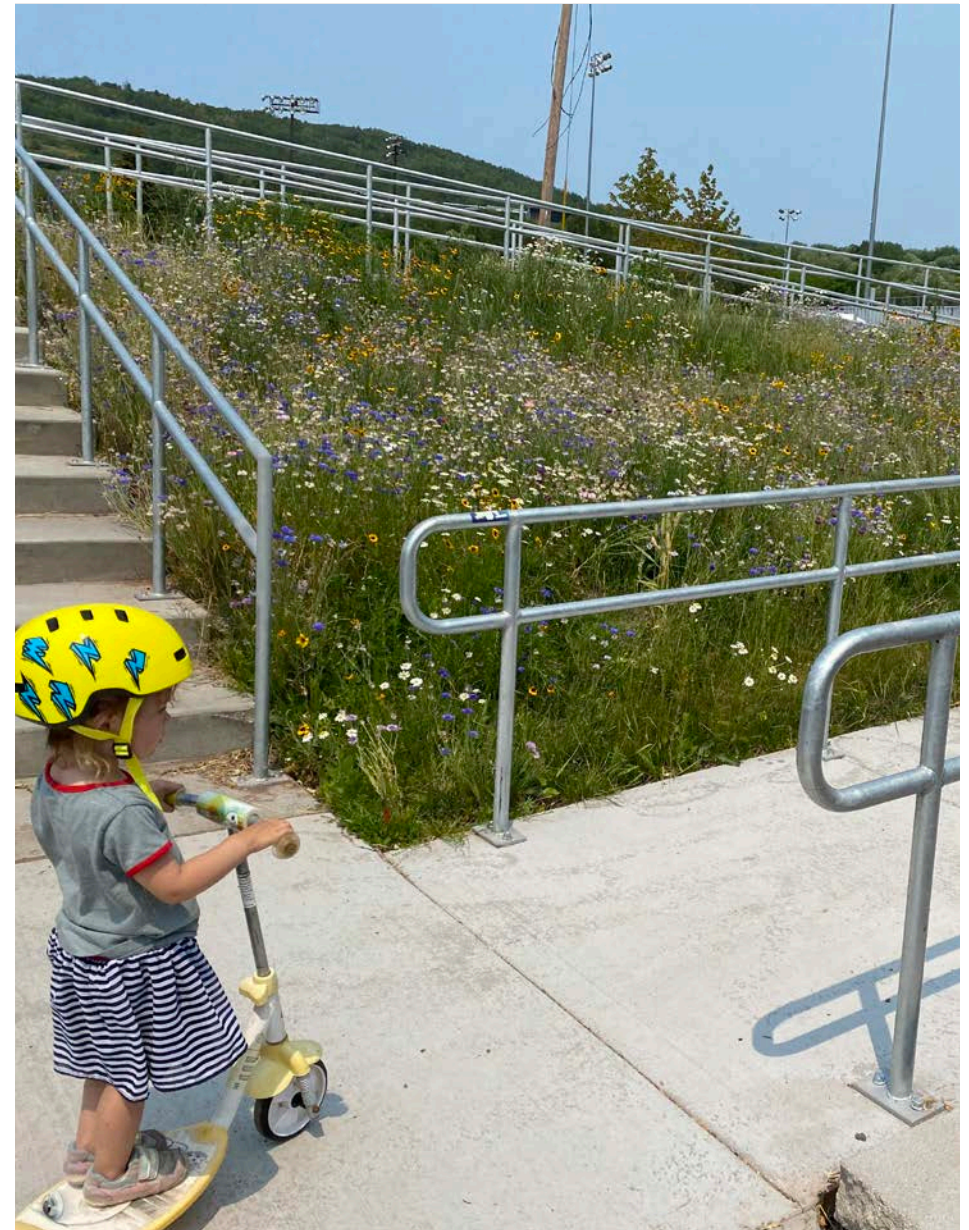
1. **Decreasing Urban Heat Islands:**

Parks and open spaces can be utilized to reduce heat. The Central Business District is a dense, urban area. This creates an urban heat island effect that makes central Duluth more vulnerable to human health hazards and environmental impacts. The City should strategically utilize parks and open space to reduce heat. This can be done through increasing trees and providing more shade in the area, or increasing the amount of green space downtown.

2. **Managing Stormwater:** Green infrastructure can be utilized to filter and absorb stormwater. Examples of green infrastructure include rain gardens and bioswales, green roofs, permeable pavement, and water catchment systems. The areas in western Duluth along the St. Louis River Estuary and areas near Lake Superior have high flood risks and low water quality. Decades of industry, dumping of waste and materials, pollution, etc. have harmed the ecosystem in the estuary and reduced residents' ability to enjoy the recreational and leisure offerings typical

of healthy waterways. Several community partners, including those involved with the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and Area of Concern efforts, have made an impact with clean-up efforts along the St. Louis River Estuary. Efforts at multiple sites along the river are contributing to restored healthy ecosystems that in turn will increase citizens' access to higher quality water.

3. **Improving Air Quality:** Urban tree canopies act as natural filters for air quality. They can absorb or dilute particles, odors, and pollutants from the air. Gary-New Duluth has been historically dominated by industrial buildings which contributes to poor air quality. Trees and open space should be used to counteract these impacts and decrease the high vulnerability of these areas.



A low-mow pollinator habitat paired with an accessible ramp at Wheeler Athletic Complex.

<sup>2</sup> Schottland, T. (2019, April 5). Parks as a solution to climate change. *National Recreation and Park Association*. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/april/parks-as-a-solution-to-climate-change/>



# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

## HOMELESSNESS IN PARK SPACES

Homelessness is a growing and complex crisis in cities throughout the country, compounded by other systemic issues related to affordable housing, social service needs, and access to quality healthcare. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, approximately 30% of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered, or living on the street, at a park, in an abandoned building, or other locations not suitable for human health.

According to the 2022 St. Louis County Continuum of Care Point in Time Count, which is an annual census of all individuals and families experiencing homelessness (unsheltered, in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or domestic violence shelter), there are 606 individuals experiencing homeless in St. Louis County<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 20% of these individuals are those under the age of 18; 39% of all individuals experiencing homelessness are unsheltered.

As the homelessness crisis grows, the strain felt by parks and recreation departments also increases. It's not uncommon for persons experiencing homelessness to use park spaces for resting and passing time, refuge, storing personal property, engaging

in solicitation activities and, in some cases, establishing unofficial camps lacking safe water and waste facilities. Many communities ban and criminalize these types of activities in public spaces. The American Society of Landscape Architects has stated that, "the exclusion of those experiencing homelessness from public parks is often based on fear of crime and the discomfort from others at viewing the circumstances of unhoused individuals."

In Duluth, 19% of Parks and Recreation Survey respondents identified security concerns and not feeling safe as a barrier to their park usage. Written responses and focus group discussions revealed that these feelings of concern were, in part, due to the presence of trash, drug use, poor lighting, conflicts with other users, and encampments of unhoused people throughout the city's park system. While these issues are challenging to address, community input also made clear that Duluthians value compassionate and humane treatment of persons experiencing homelessness, and believe that parks should be inclusive of all people, regardless of economic condition.

**The on-going challenge for City administration and staff is to find the appropriate balance between the rights of all people to exist in public spaces, while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for all park users.**

City staff is regularly interfacing with unsheltered citizens and, in early 2022, Duluth opened its first permanent warming center in the Lincoln Park neighborhood.

Park facilities and Parks and Recreation staff support community health and well-being as integral components of the community fabric. Parks and Recreation will continue to collaborate with City leadership to fully address the complex challenges associated with homelessness in Duluth.

**"[Park] Agencies uniquely serve as community wellness hubs, trusted gathering places that connect every member of the community to essential programs, services and spaces that advance health equity, improve health outcomes, and enhance quality of life."**

- National Recreation and Park Association

<sup>1</sup> <https://cocstl.org/data/>

# TRENDS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

## CLIMATE CHANGE

The effects of climate change and the pressures it will place on the park system are inevitable. For the Midwest specifically, increased heat, intense rain events, flooding, large wind events, drought, and late spring freezes threaten to negatively affect agriculture, forest composition, and public health<sup>1</sup>. According to the National Climate Assessment's findings, consequences across the Midwest can already be seen in substandard air quality for more than 20 million people, three times as many major heatwaves from 1900 to 2010, and an increase of extreme rainfall and flooding events over the last century<sup>2</sup>. Many of Duluth's existing park spaces have been adversely impacted by flooding, and the changing temperatures of Lake Superior continue to alter plant and wildlife habitats.

All places will feel the effects of climate change, but according to data from ProPublica, St. Louis County will be far less critically impacted than other locations<sup>3</sup>. **Duluth is uniquely positioned to become a climate refuge city**, which is defined as a place that implements strategies to make it

attractive to persons fleeing from detrimental impacts of climate change. The City of Duluth Climate Action Work Plan 2022 - 2027 is one of many indicators that the City is actively strategizing for climate resiliency. Duluth's moderate climate, proximity to fresh water, potential for growth, and pro-active approach to climate change resiliency make it a prime candidate as a climate migration hub.

**Duluth's vast park system can be further enhanced and managed to provide climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.** A significant portion of Duluth is made up of green space, with parks and natural lands accounting for 21% of the city's land area. The Trust for Public Land's Climate-Smart Cities program recommends four objectives for parks to provide multi-benefit climate solutions<sup>4</sup>:

1. **Cool:** Shady green spaces reduce the heat island effect to protect people from high temperatures.
2. **Absorb:** Green infrastructure practices can be utilized for parks and streetscapes to absorb rain, reduce flooding, and recharge drinking water.
3. **Protect:** Strategically placed and managed parks and natural lands buffer cities from rising

water levels, extreme storms, and wildfires.

4. **Connect:** Trail links between park spaces provide more sustainable transportation opportunities and connect destinations.



Flooding and extreme snow storms are examples of weather events in Duluth that can increase due to climate change impacts.

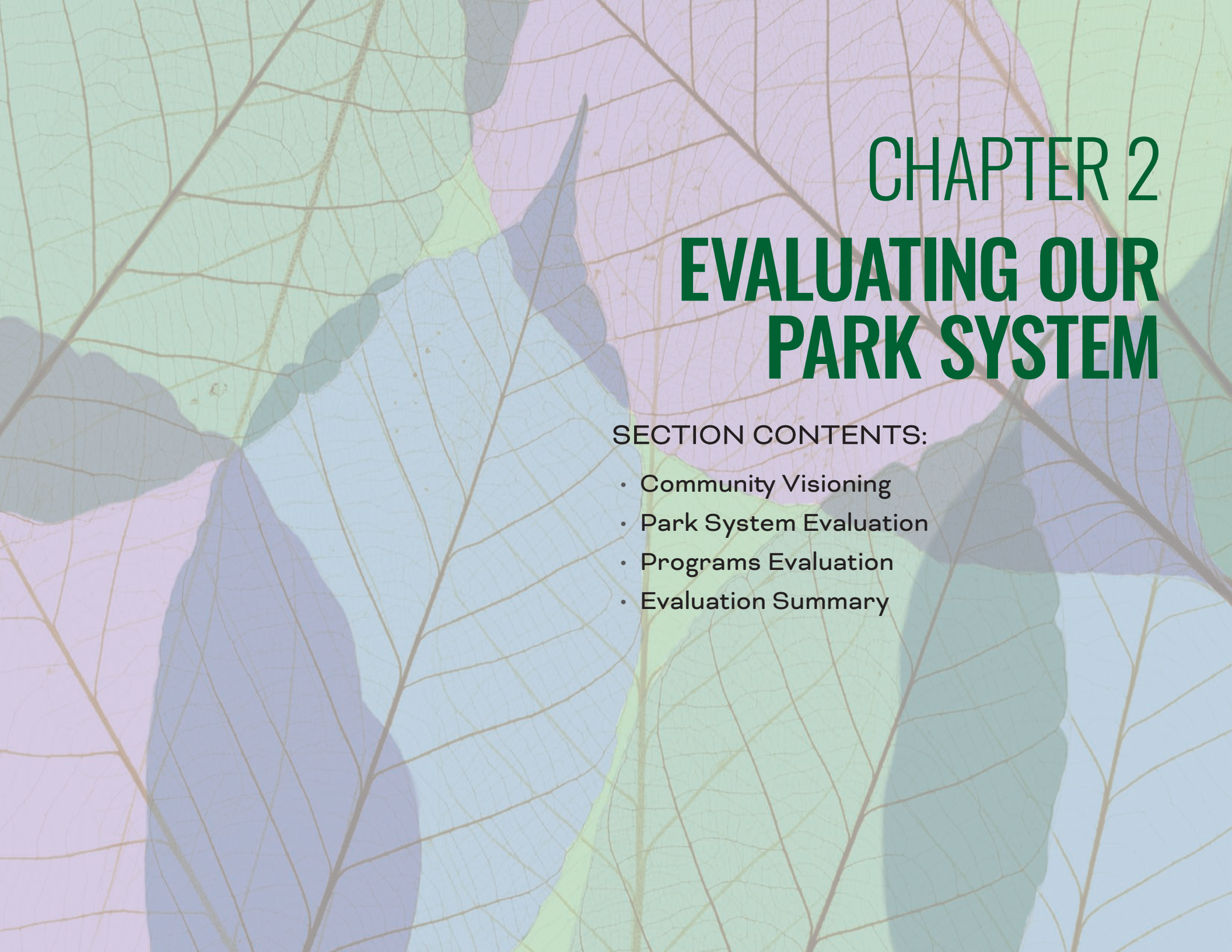
<sup>1</sup> Population Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Adaptation Framework (May 2018)

<sup>2</sup> How will climate change affect the Midwest? - environmental defense fund. EDF.org. (n.d.). Retrieved May 25, 2022, from [https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/regional\\_releases\\_midwest.pdf](https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/regional_releases_midwest.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> ProPublica. New Climate Maps Show a Transformed United States, accessed on February 12, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://projects.propublica.org/climate-migration/>

<sup>4</sup> Schottland, T. (2019, April 15). Parks as a solution to climate change: Health & Wellness: Parks and Recreation Magazine: NRPA. National Recreation and Park Association. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/april/parks-as-a-solution-to-climate-change/>





# CHAPTER 2

## EVALUATING OUR PARK SYSTEM

### SECTION CONTENTS:

- Community Visioning
- Park System Evaluation
- Programs Evaluation
- Evaluation Summary



# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Extensive input from community members, technical stakeholders, advisory committee members, and staff informed the development of this Essential Spaces Plan. Engagement opportunities and efforts to involve community members in the plan process included six focus group meetings, multiple pop-up events, an online survey, and three community workshops. Appendix A provides a full report on public engagement findings.

### Acknowledged Gaps in Engagement

- University and college students
- Indigenous population
- Youth



Community workshop participants discuss desires for park system improvements throughout the city, indicating their input by placing stickers on a map.

**6**  
PROJECT ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE MEETINGS



**58**  
FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANTS



**8**  
COMMUNITY  
POP UP EVENTS



**1,962**  
COMMUNITY SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS



**102**  
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP  
PARTICIPANTS



ESSENTIAL SPACES  
TOTAL ENGAGEMENT:

**2,374**  
**PEOPLE**

PROVIDED INPUT



# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## VISIONING PROCESS

The Essential Spaces Plan process wove together technical analyses with input from the community to create a shared vision for the future of Duluth's park system.

### Taking Stock of Existing Conditions

- Develop an inventory of amenities, facilities, and parks
- Analyze gaps in the system
- Classify and analyze the parks based on system standards analysis
- Analyze local, state, and national demographics and recreation trends
- Benchmark peer communities
- Conduct equity analysis
- Convene focus groups for targeted input

### Creating A Shared Vision

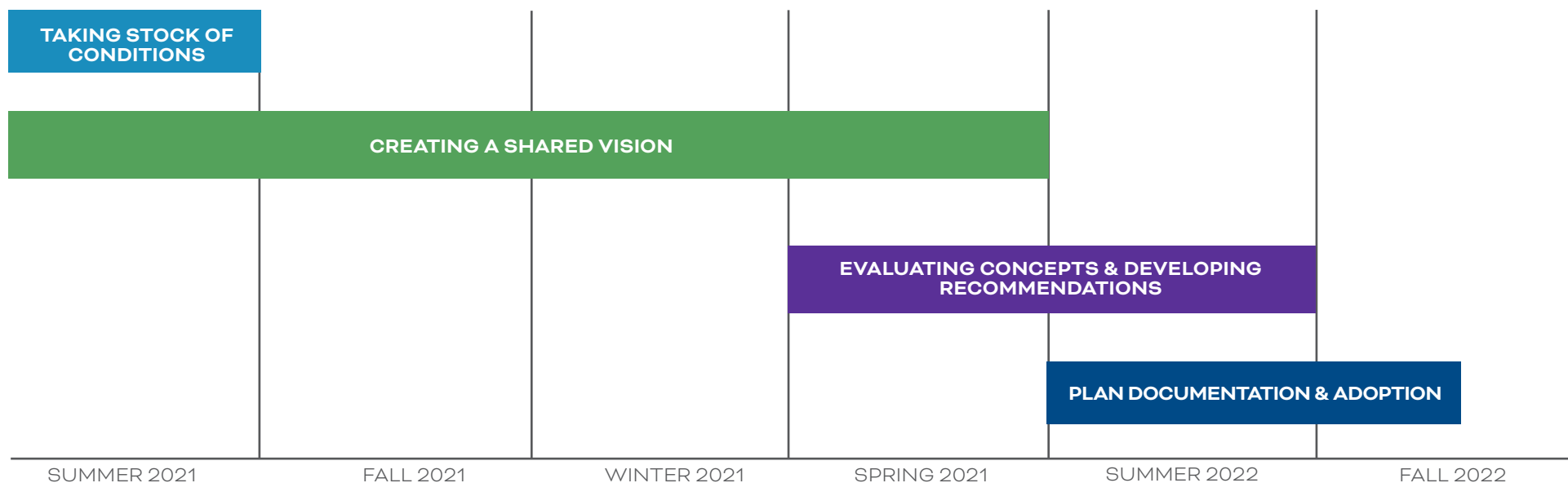
- Conduct community surveys and pop-up events to understand residents' perspectives on values, current park use, recreational needs and opportunities for improvement
- Conduct statistically valid community survey to develop vision for the future
- Facilitate community workshops to actively engage residents and clarify specific area needs

### Evaluating Concepts and Developing Recommendations

- Develop an inventory of amenities, facilities, and parks
- Develop vision and themes
- Assess programming needs
- Evaluate opportunities

### Plan Documentation and Adoption

- Create draft plan with action steps for implementation over next 10 years



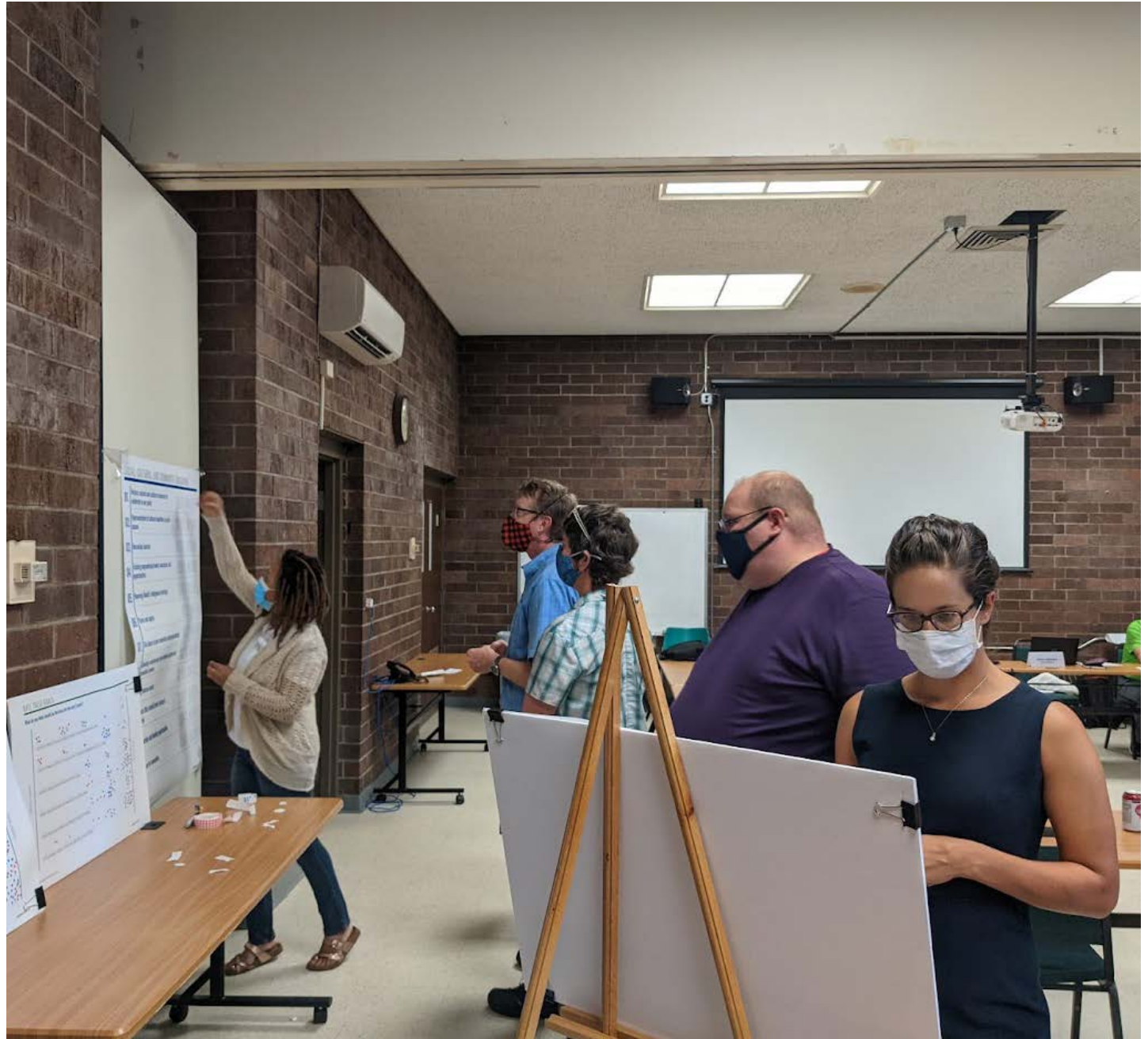
# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## FOCUS GROUPS

Six, 90-minute focus group meetings were hosted August 9 - 10, 2021. Over 130 individuals representing different organizations, interests, clubs, and groups in Duluth were invited to attend. The meetings were topical in nature and centered on specific areas of interest related to parks and recreation. Participants were selected and invited to attend based on their in-depth knowledge of the specific topics. Focus Groups were organized around topics of:

- parks and environmental stewardship;
- youth recreation and programming;
- outdoor recreation;
- social, cultural, and community education;
- events and activities support; and
- organized sports and leagues.

Focus group discussions highlighted a variety of perspectives, user group experiences, and priority areas for consideration. Maintenance, equity, and funding levels came up in nearly every discussion, regardless of the group's topic area. Input from these conversations laid the foundation for creating a shared community vision and for formulating community survey questions.



Focus groups provided their thoughts on the plan objectives and had in-depth discussions of the six topics.



# COMMUNITY VISIONING



Community engagement efforts included workshops, pop-up events, and surveys. Participants were encouraged to provide input using interactive methods, written feedback, and group discussions.

# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## STATISTICALLY VALID COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community-wide survey process helped establish a collective vision and understanding of park spaces according to Duluthians. Two survey efforts took place simultaneously. The first survey effort was considered statistically valid in which 3,200 households in Duluth were randomly selected and asked to participate in the online survey through a mailed invitation. An open participation version of the survey was also available. The City took concerted efforts to invite all residents to complete the open participation survey, including sharing it widely with community partners and on social media, and promoting the survey at eight community events with diverse audiences. The open participation outreach effort likely reflects those more engaged with the park system, as they were more likely to have heard of the survey through messaging from Parks and Recreation and were more likely to be active users of the system.

Both survey efforts utilized the same set of questions. A total of 370 residents completed the address sample survey, while the open participation survey received a total of 1,592 responses. Both sets of results were considered throughout the creation of the plan.

## WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Community responses to the survey drove the creation of five plan themes which are focused on sustaining and strengthening the existing system while nurturing opportunities for new and deeper connections to Duluth's parks and recreational spaces.

## INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE

- 51%** Of residents support or strongly support an increase to the property tax levy.
- 62%** Of residents prioritize maintaining the existing system over adding new facilities.
- 55%** Of residents support prioritizing maintenance of parks and trails most in need.

## ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

- 75%** Of residents said there were too few splash and spray water pads.
- 65%** Of residents said there were too few programs that provide skills building for outdoor recreation activities.
- 57%** Of residents said there are not enough off leash dog trails.
- 54%** Of residents said there were too few designated fishing areas.
- 54%** Of residents said there were too few water and paddling public access points.

## PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

- 74%** Of residents said providing space to interact with other community members was essential or very important.
- 61%** Of residents said opportunities to appreciate and preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the community are essential or very important.
- 69%** Of residents said there were too few restroom facilities.

## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

- 69%** Of residents prefer the Parks and Recreation to provide spaces for organized sports and leagues provided by other organizations.
- 57%** Of residents expressed a desire for the department to focus on diverse activity opportunities to reflect evolving outdoor recreation interests.
- 35%** Of residents identified unfamiliarity with programs or activities as one of the top barriers for using Duluth parks and recreation program offerings.

## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

- 89%** Of residents said opportunities to spend time outdoors and connect with nature are essential or very important.
- 81%** Of residents chose walking, hiking, or running on trails as one of their top 5 uses of Duluth's park system.
- 60%** Of residents said there are the right amount of unpaved trails for hiking and snowshoeing in the system.



# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

A series of three community workshops took place April 13 – 14, 2022 at various locations across the city. A combined total of 102 participants attended these events. Participants were presented with information on proposed plan themes and goals, and were asked to provide feedback on their preferences, priorities, and opinions to further shape the Essential Spaces Plan. Workshop participants provided input using a variety of engagement methods, including interactive exhibit boards, an instant polling response to questions, and a small-group mapping exercise. For those unable to attend the in-person workshops, an online version of the polling questions was available from April 13 – May 10, 2022 that received 170 responses.



Residents participating in a mapping exercise to identify opportunities and needs.

## POLLING TAKEAWAYS

### Key takeaways from the combined in-person and online polling include:

1. Improving the quality and maintenance of existing parks and facilities was consistently among the top priorities of respondents.
2. Respondents recognized additional funding and resources as a critical need for the park system.
3. Participants conveyed approval of the five plan themes, as evidenced by most respondents selecting “completely agree” or “agree” when asked the level to which they agreed with each proposed theme.

The list to the right highlights the top five responses from the total participants in response to each topic area.

### CRITICAL ITEMS FOR THE PLAN TO ADDRESS

21%	Park and facility condition/quality
19%	Funding and resources
15%	Environmental sustainability and resilience
10%	Access, inclusion, and mobility to parks
8%	Adding parks and natural lands

### IMPORTANT ACTION FOR SPORTS COURTS GOING FORWARD

30%	Better care and maintenance
18%	No opinion
15%	Add indoor facilities
11%	Upgrade or replacement
10%	Managing for more use and access

### IMPORTANT ACTION FOR SPORTS FIELDS GOING FORWARD

22%	Better care and maintenance
19%	Design for multiuse
13%	No opinion
11%	Add indoor facilities
10%	Managing for more use and access

### PROGRAMS THAT DULUTH PARKS AND RECREATION SHOULD PROVIDE

18%	Free programs
16%	Outdoor skills building programs
16%	Outdoor educational programs
14%	Youth day camps
12%	Partner for arts, history, and culture programs

# COMMUNITY VISIONING

## MAP EXERCISE TAKEAWAYS

In-person workshop attendees also participated in a small-group mapping exercise. Participants were provided with a set of maps displaying Duluth's park system and a sheet of stickers containing different park amenities or improvements. They were instructed to place stickers on the maps at the locations they wished to see future park investments or enhancements.

### Key takeaways from the mapping exercise include:

1. Restrooms were chosen by the largest amount of respondents. The percentage of restroom stickers was significantly larger than other categories.
2. Out of the top five stickers selected, four of them were related to maintenance and capacity additions rather than additional activities or recreation items. These included restrooms, parking, maintenance, and safety.
3. Residents have a lot of great ideas about the future re-use and activation of Lester Park Golf Course.

## SUMMARY OF STICKERS BY TOP CATEGORIES

47	Stickers indicated a need for restrooms. The most common placement of restroom stickers were associated with the Piedmont Trail System, Kitchi Gammi Park (Brighton Beach), and Magney/Snively Park.
----	--



29	Stickers related to mountain biking. Stickers were placed within Enger Park, Chester Park, Lester Park Golf Course, and Spirit Mountain Recreation Area.
----	--



29	Stickers indicated parking needs. Common locations included Piedmont/Brewer Trailhead, Hartley Park, Piedmont Neighborhood Trailhead, and Magney/Snively Park.
----	--



## SUMMARY OF STICKERS BY TOP AREAS

1

Lester Park Golf Course: As the community begins to imagine the future re-use of this space, common stickers were camping, mountain biking, golf, community gardens, disc golf, and indoor gathering space.

2

City-wide, general comments: Top items include restroom facilities, enforcement, beer gardens, and mountain biking.

3

Piedmont Trail System: Parking and restroom facilities were the top selected stickers.



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK INVENTORY

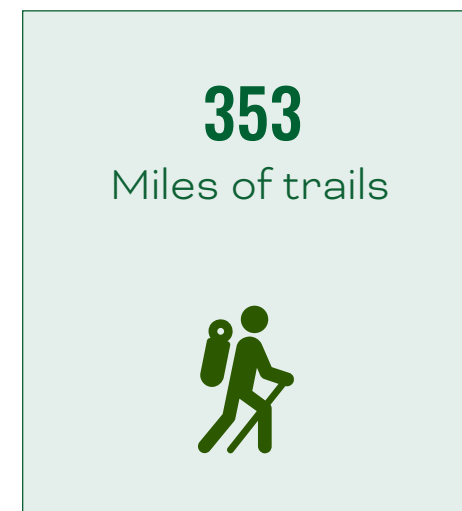
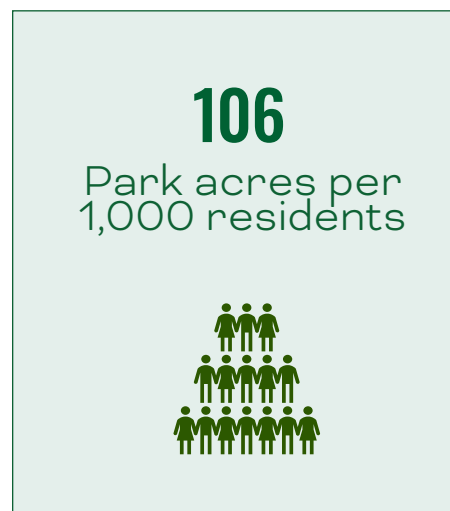
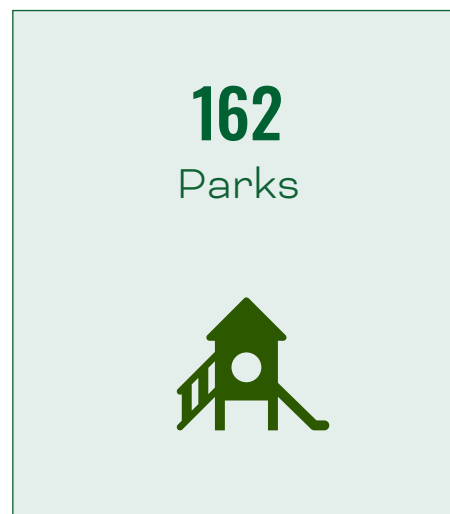
Duluth's extensive and all-season park system is a critical component of the city's physical, environmental, social, and economic well-being. Maintaining and improving such a vast park system, while challenging, is vital for ensuring a high quality of life for Duluth residents.

Duluth parks have been grouped into nine classifications, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 7. Park classifications were developed based on the characteristics of the park, such as size, amenities offered, access, and intended duration of use. A detailed description of each park classification can be found on the following pages (see Table 7). Duluth boasts 162 parks, 9,168 park acres (which equates to a whopping 106 park acres per 1,000 residents), and over 350 miles of trails! Natural/passive lands make up the largest classification at about 5,540 acres.

**Table 6:** Park Classifications

Classification	Acres
Destination Park	2,840
Community Park	118
Neighborhood Park	123
Special Use	266
Plaza	5
Parkway	6
Natural / Passive Park	5,540
Trailhead / Water Access	13
Undeveloped	256

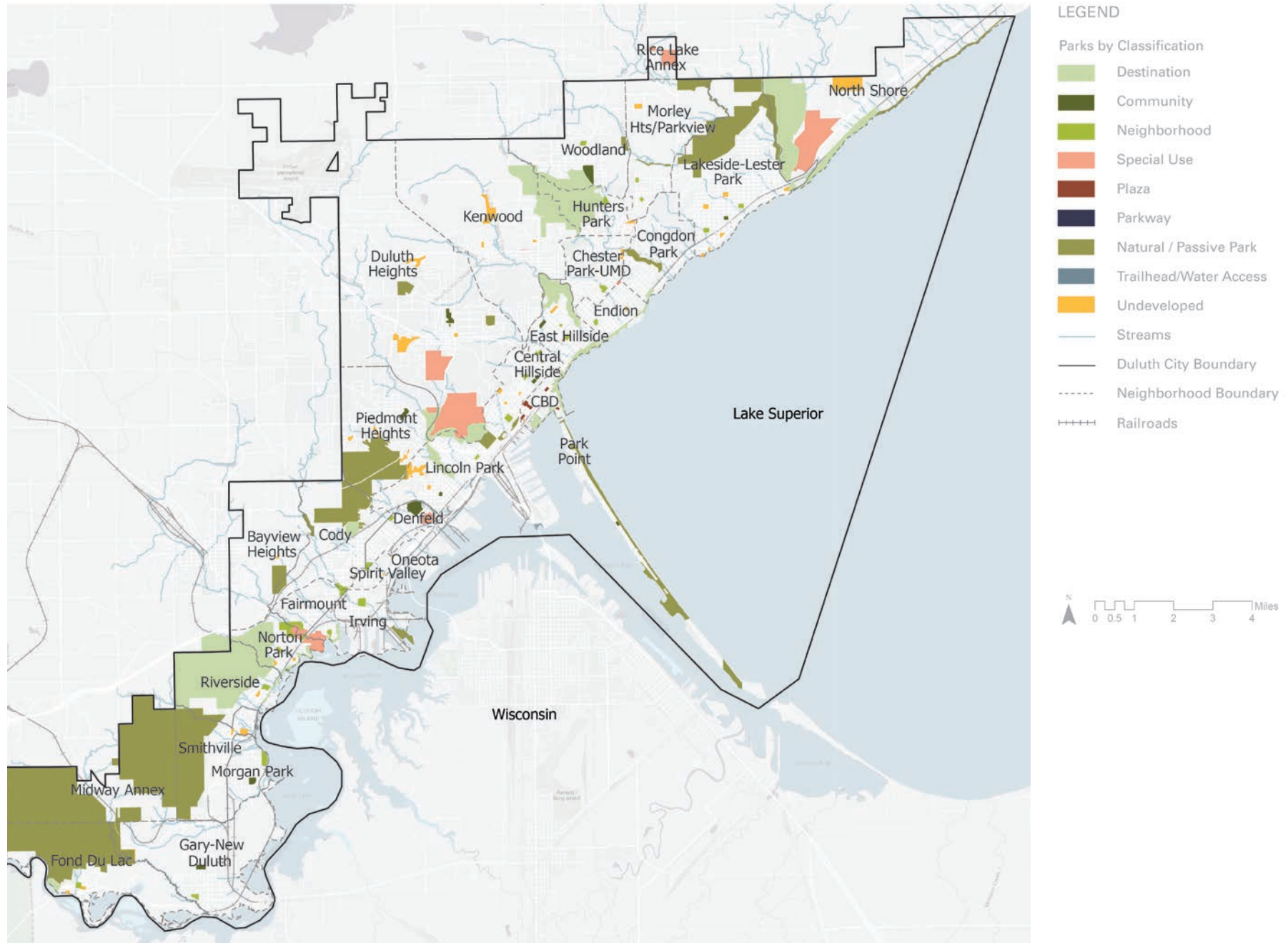
\*Golf Courses are not included in total park acreage



Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

**Figure 7:** Park Classifications Map





# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

**Table 7:** Park Classification Definitions

TYPE OF PARK	DESCRIPTION	INVENTORY
Destination	Large, multi-use parks that provide facilities and recreational amenities intended to serve city residents and the surrounding region, and which may serve as a tourist destination. Destination parks protect large expanses of land with natural resource values of regional significance. These areas typically provide recreational opportunities for nature-oriented, outdoor recreation and may include features such as playgrounds, shelters, restrooms, and athletic facilities.	<div>2,840 acres</div> <div>19 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, Bayfront Park, Lester Park</div>
Community	Serves as a focal point for community-wide activities and provides facilities that serve a broad purpose, balancing active and passive recreation needs. May include programmed sports facilities, such as athletic complexes or fields, and playground equipment. These parks are centrally located and attract residents from multiple neighborhoods.	<div>118 acres</div> <div>13 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Central Hillside Community Park, Evergreen Community Center</div>
Neighborhood	Intended to provide both active and passive recreation for residents for short daily leisure periods, such as court/field games, skating, sports play, leisure activities, and small gatherings. Should provide for most intensive use by children, family groups, and senior citizens. Accessible to neighborhood population and geographically centered with safe walking and bicycle access.	<div>123 acres</div> <div>28 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Riverside Park, Washington Square</div>
Special Use	Purpose built to serve a specific community or regional need, which may attract locals and visitors alike. Examples include campgrounds, golf courses, and other specialized-use facilities such as baseball/softball, soccer, basketball, pickleball, tennis, rock climbing, golf, and skateboarding amenities.	<div>266 acres</div> <div>13 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Arlington Athletic Complex, Indian Point Campground</div>

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

Continued...Table 7: Park Classification Definitions

TYPE OF PARK	DESCRIPTION	INVENTORY
Plaza	Provides opportunities for recreation close to home, particularly where access to larger parks is limited/not feasible. These parks are comprised of large proportion of hard surfaces suitable for events but do not contain restroom facilities, their own parking, play areas, or sport fields and courts. Plazas are typically easily accessible and are found in the urban setting, usually near downtown or commercial area. Typically 2 acres or less.	<div>5 acres</div> <div>7 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Civic Center</div>
Parkway	Generally located adjacent to city streets, parkways are landscaped areas with turf, trees, planting, and enhanced naturalistic landscape located adjacent to public right of way.	<div>6 acres</div> <div>11 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Railroad St. Parkway</div>
Natural / Passive	Open areas and natural areas typically used for passive recreation. May include paths, mature trees, nature areas, gardens, hiking and biking trails, foraging, gathering, and areas for observing nature. They do not always provide recreation opportunities and are designed to protect environmentally sensitive features.	<div>5,540 acres</div> <div>29 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Magney / Snively Park, Frederick Rodney Paine Forest Preserve</div>
Trailhead / Water Access	<p>Trailheads are paved or unpaved surface that serve as an access point to a designated open space corridor allowing for pedestrian and bicycle commuting and recreation use.</p> <p>Water Trail Access Points are boat launch or landing pads and generally found along Lake Superior or the St. Louis River Corridor.</p>	<div>13 acres</div> <div>4 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Munger Landing</div>
Undeveloped	There are two different types of park properties that fall within the “undeveloped” park classification. 1) Undeveloped green space in a neighborhood or urban area that may be used actively by residents but has no amenities. Some might be considered “excess” due to parcel or right-of-way divisions, be irregularly shaped, and have no redevelopment or resale potential while others may be candidates for disposal. 2) Dedicated park space in a recently built subdivision that has yet to be built out. These properties will be reclassified as their planning evolves.	<div>256 acres</div> <div>38 properties</div> <hr/> <div>E.g., Moose Hill Park</div>



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK ACREAGE

### PARKLAND TO POPULATION ANALYSIS

Table 8 details the number of acres for each park classification per 1,000 people. Duluth's 9,168 acres of parkland equates to 106 acres per 1,000 people (or roughly 4,605 square feet of parkland per person). The significant amount of natural/passive land in Duluth aligns with the community's desire to protect the natural environment and support environmental resiliency.

The Duluth park and trail system encompasses approximately 2,500 acres of parkland that are county-owned, tax-forfeited land, which are not permanently protected as parkland but are, nonetheless, improved and maintained by the City, and used and perceived by residents as if they were City parks. The City of Duluth's Imagine Duluth 2035 Comprehensive Plan directs the City to acquire these lands to protect and preserve their value for outdoor recreation, ecological health, and flood hazard mitigation. It is important that the City continue to acquire such lands to ensure that existing recreational amenities are formally protected and remain available for long-term public use. Future parkland acquisitions should also serve to fill system gaps, connect existing park spaces, and support environmental protection efforts.

**Table 8:** Park Acres per 1,000 Residents in Duluth

Parks	Number of Properties	Number of Property Acres	Acres / 1,000 Population in 2020 (86,697)
Destination	19	2,840	32.8
Community	13	118	1.4
Neighborhood	28	123	1.4
Special Use	13	266	3.1
Plaza	7	5	0.1
Parkways	11	6	0.1
<b>Total Developed Parks</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>3,356</b>	<b>38.8</b>
Natural / Passive	29	5,540	63.9
Trailheads / Water Access	4	13	0.2
<b>Total Natural Lands, Trailheads, &amp; Water Access</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5,553</b>	<b>64</b>
Undeveloped	38	256	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>9,168</b>	<b>105.7</b>

\* Golf Courses are not included in total park acreage.



Observation Dog Park



Chambers Grove water access

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK ACCESS

### 10 MINUTE WALK ANALYSIS

Park access and utilization are determinants of public health. More time spent in parks and green spaces can help individuals fight against mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress. Park access and utilization also encourages physical activity, whether it be a moderate stroll or an intense hike.

The walkshed analysis, shown in Figure 8, identifies areas in Duluth that are within a 10-minute walk from parks or natural lands. **70% of Duluth's households are within a 10-minute park walk.** The analysis was conducted by calculating the proximity of Duluth's residential address points to city-owned parks. Using GIS, the analysis determines how far one can travel on foot from each City-owned park (excluding golf courses and undeveloped parks) within 10 minutes using the street and trail network. The walkshed accounts for large barriers that might impede access, including railroad tracks, rivers, interstates, and roads with a speed limit higher than 45 mph. Park access points are also considered to account for gates and other barriers that impede entry. Layering residential address points on this walkshed reveals homes that are not within a 10-minute walk of a green space. These households are

considered “underserved” for the purposes of this analysis.

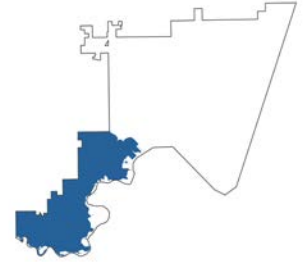
### WHO CAN(NOT) ACCESS PARKS?

A deeper look into the walkshed analysis gives a clearer understanding of park access gaps in the city. A majority of the households located outside a 10-minute park walk are in centralized areas of Duluth, particularly Duluth Heights and Kenwood. Though both neighborhoods contain parks, accessibility is limited by the presence of the Duluth International Airport and more intensive commercial development.

Closing park gaps and increasing the perception of safety are vital components in addressing social inequities. The following provides a summary of residential clusters by city subareas highlighting neighborhoods that do not have access to a park or natural land area within a 10-minute walk. While Chapter 4 combines Central Duluth and Duluth Heights as the central geography for Duluth, the walkability gaps were significantly different and deserved separate callouts in this section of the gap analysis.

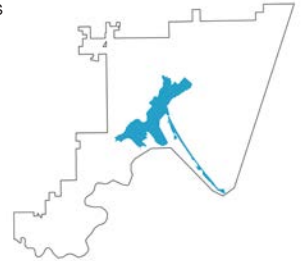
### WESTERN DULUTH

Western Duluth is home to some of the largest open spaces in the city including the Fredrick Rodney Paine Nature Preserve, Magney/Snively Park, and Spirit Mountain Recreation Area. However, barriers such as I-35, waterways, and the railroad system prevent some residents and households from accessing these parks easily within a 10 minute walk.



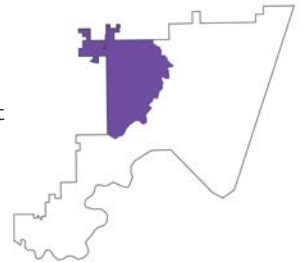
### CENTRAL DULUTH

Central Duluth has the highest residential park access when compared to other areas in the city. As shown in Figure 8, neighborhoods such as Park Point, Central Hillside, East Hillside, the Central Business District, Endion, and Lincoln Park have few gaps. However, throughout community engagement efforts, parks in this subarea were most likely to be noted for safety concerns. A lack of safety, whether real or perceived, can contribute to social, rather than physical, barriers to access.



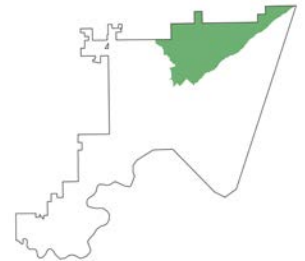
### DULUTH HEIGHTS

Duluth Heights sees the most park gaps. This city subarea is comprised of the Piedmont Heights, Central Duluth, and Kenwood neighborhoods. This area of Duluth has a more suburban style development with auto-oriented destinations such as the shopping mall and airport. These development patterns can create barriers to walking as destinations tend to be separated by larger distances and require driving.



### EASTERN DULUTH

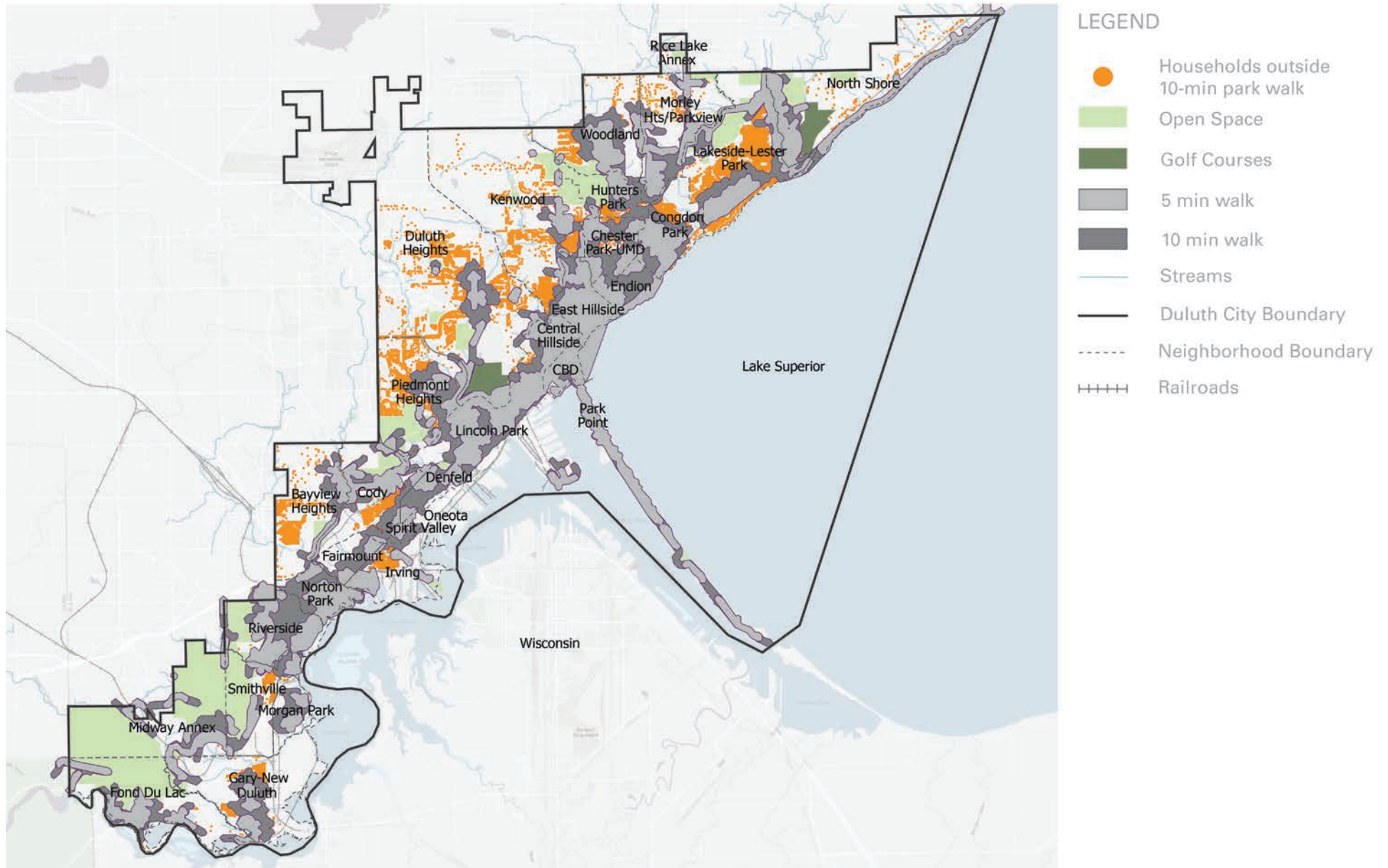
Neighborhoods in eastern Duluth that are adjacent to central Duluth and closer to the downtown core, such as Chester Park-UMD and Congdon Park, have parks within walking distance to many households. Neighborhoods along the north edge of the city boundary and adjacent to golf courses, which were excluded from this study, have fewer households with parks within walking distance.





# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

**Figure 8:** Walkshed Analysis Map



Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK AMENITIES

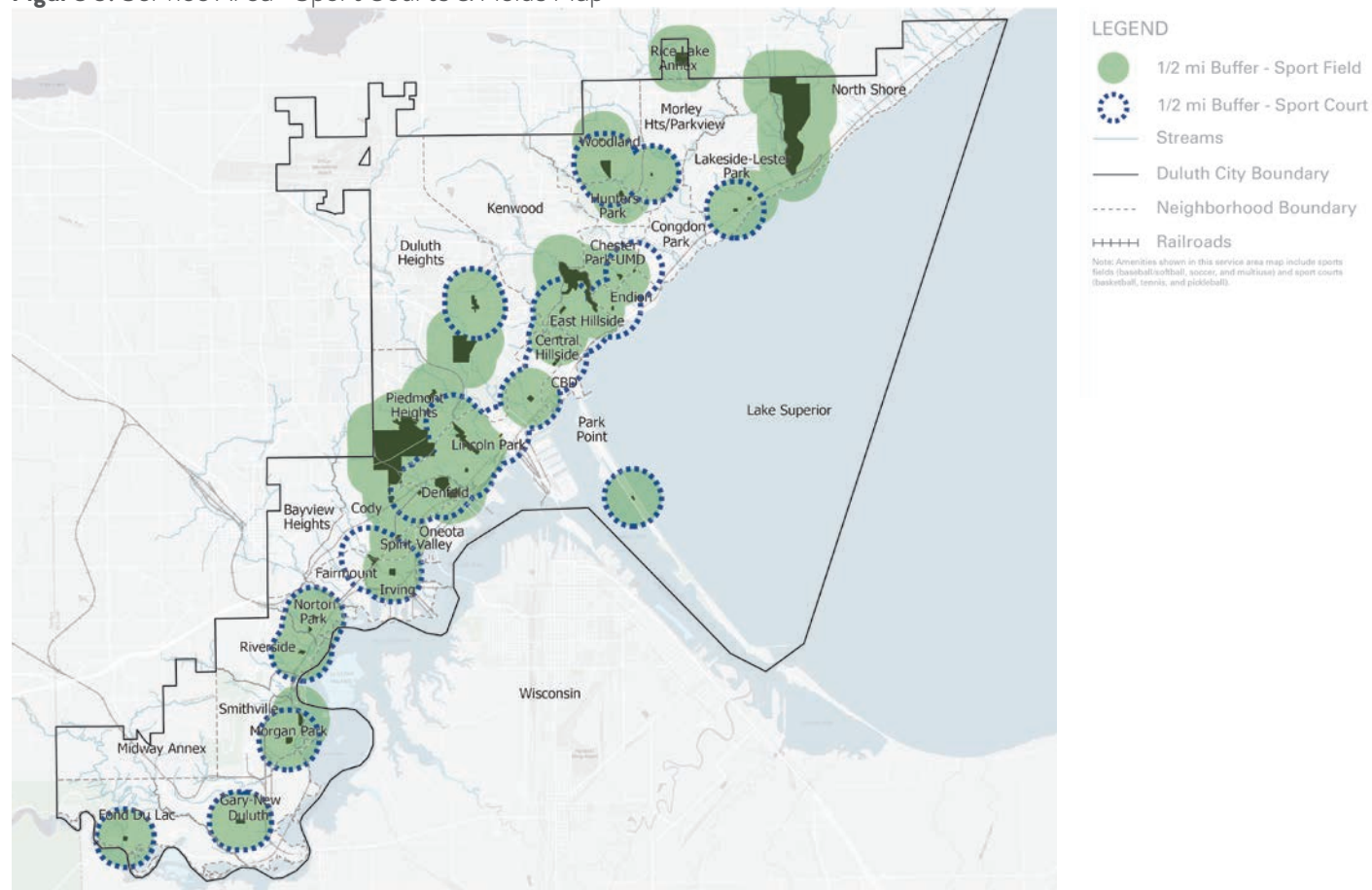
Duluth offers a broad array of park and recreation amenities (see Table 9), including playgrounds, sport courts, hockey and pleasure rinks, athletic fields, pavilions, and restroom facilities.

**Table 9:** Park Amenities

Amenity	Quantity
Park Pavilions & Gazebos	18
Soccer Fields	11
Baseball / Softball Fields	18
Multiuse Fields	23
Basketball Court Sites	24
Tennis Court Sites	8
Pickleball Court Sites	3
Multiuse Court Sites	2
Playgrounds	39
Toddler Playgrounds	5
Accessible Playgrounds	9
Hockey Rinks/Pleasure Rink Sites	7
Pleasure Skating Only Sites	2
Skate Parks	6
Restrooms	11

Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data & inventory assessment

**Figure 9:** Service Area - Sport Courts & Fields Map



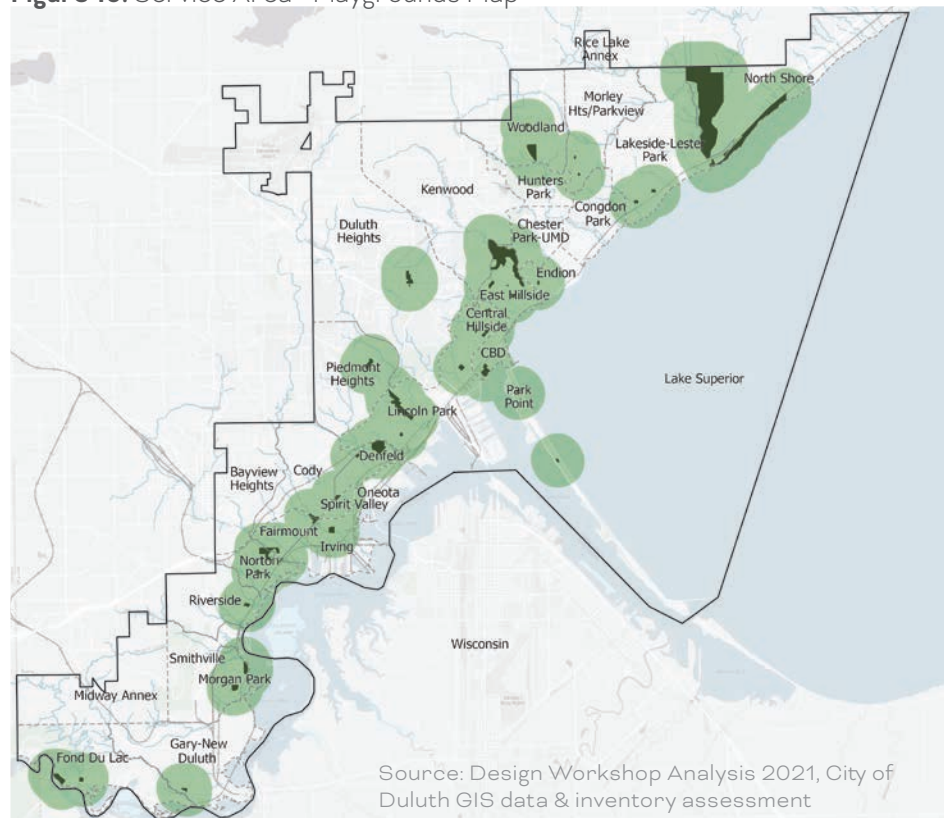
Source: Design Workshop Analysis 2021, City of Duluth GIS data & inventory assessment

Duluth's park system provides 18 baseball/softball fields, 11 soccer fields, and 23 multi-use fields. The system also includes 24 basketball courts sites, eight tennis court sites, three pickleball court sites, and two multiuse court sites. Service area coverage for both sport courts and fields is comprehensive throughout the city, as shown in Figure 9. However, with the exception of the gym at Washington Center, these are all outdoor facilities, which limits recreation opportunities during winter months. The service area for sport fields is slightly more extensive than that of sport courts, most notably in central Duluth.



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

**Figure 10:** Service Area - Playgrounds Map



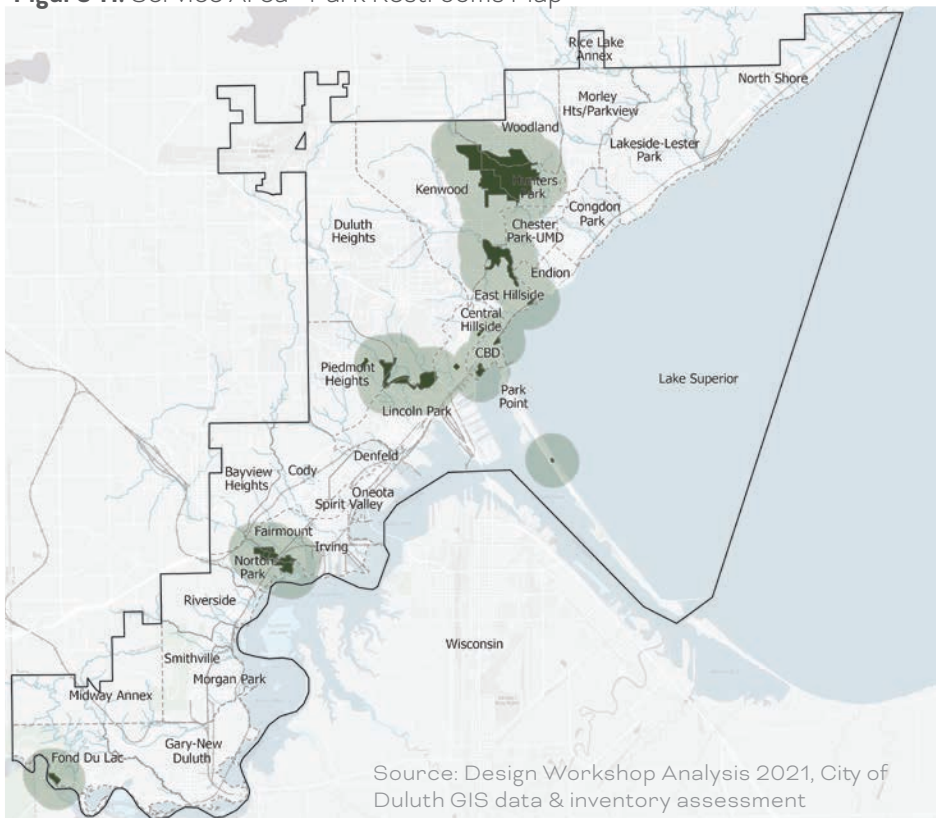
The park system provides 39 playgrounds throughout the city, as shown in Figure 10, creating extensive half-mile service area coverage. With such strong coverage, there may be room for consolidating playground facilities in some locations to minimize service area overlaps and to reduce long-term maintenance burdens and replacement cycles. Future playground replacements should consider universal access and sensory play equipment, as needed.

## LEGEND

- 1/2 mi Buffer - Playgrounds
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- ++++ Railroads

Note: Amenities shown in this service area map include playgrounds, accessible playgrounds, toddler playgrounds.

**Figure 11:** Service Area - Park Restrooms Map



Permanent restroom are most appropriate in destination and special use parks, and more limited provisions are appropriate at community parks, trailheads, and at water access points. It is uncommon to provide restrooms abundantly in neighborhood parks, as these parks generally serve residents within a half-mile of their home. Thus, as seen in Figure 11, the service area coverage for permanent restrooms is not as broad as other amenities. It should be noted that this map does not reflect a number of portable restroom made available seasonally or planned restroom facilities. Brighton

## LEGEND

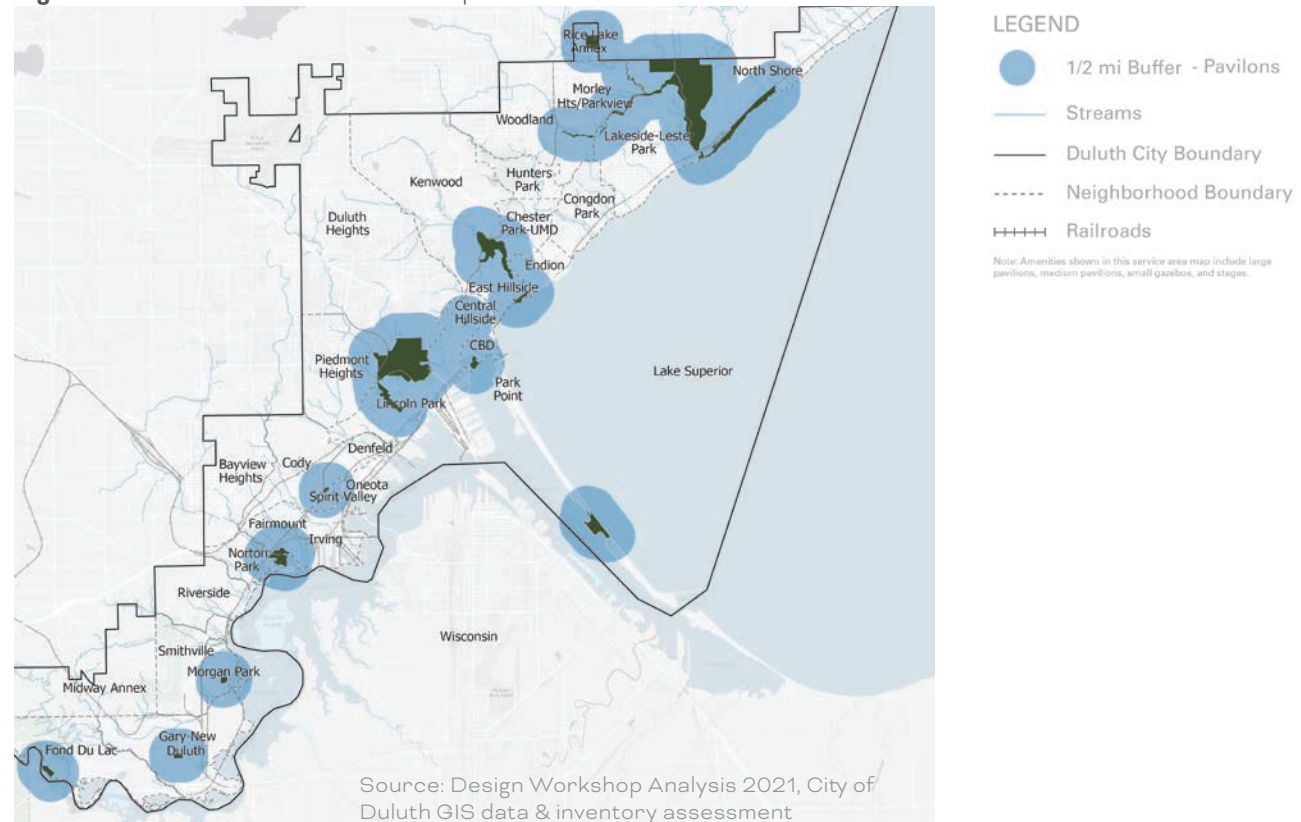
- 1/2 mi Buffer - Restrooms
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- ++++ Railroads

Beach and Lincoln Park have planned improvements and permanent restrooms will be included at both locations. Future analysis should study restroom facilities across the park system to evaluate gaps, equity, and opportunities for consolidating, adding, or improving restroom facilities, as needed and as financially feasible.

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

Park pavilions and associated amenities, such as picnic tables, benches, stages, and grills serve the important community functions of providing spaces for small and large group gatherings, and offering shade and cover from natural elements. Duluth's inventory includes small pavilions, medium pavilions, and large pavilions. Pavilions are most abundantly found in destination, community, and neighborhood parks, as well as some special use parks, trailheads, and water access points. As shown in Figure 12, the service area is comprehensive with pavilions spaced throughout the city. A more detailed analysis of gaps and distribution by size and condition should be conducted to identify opportunities for consolidating, adding, or improving pavilion facilities, as needed and as financially feasible.

**Figure 12:** Service Area - Pavilions Map





# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK CONDITIONS

City staff conduct and document park conditions as being in good, fair, or poor condition based on the following definitions:

**Good:** System is functioning well, though it may have minor cosmetic deficiencies;

**Fair:** System has deficiencies, but functionality is not affected and safety is not a concern;

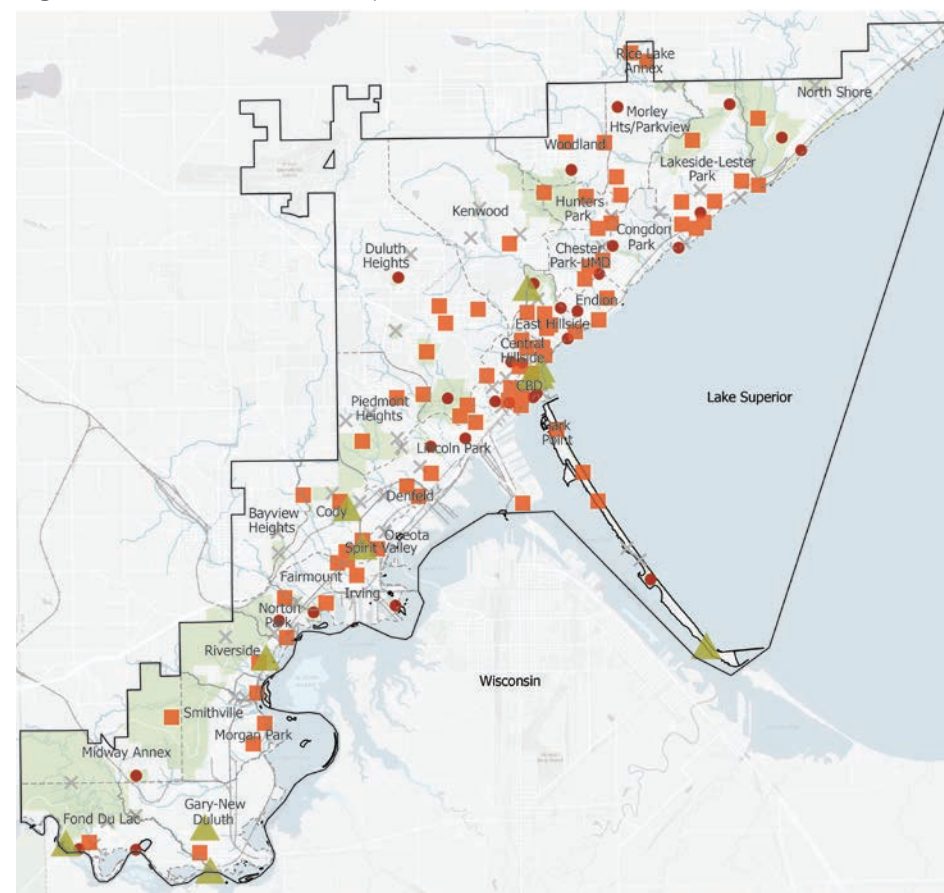
**Poor:** System has passed its useful life, does not perform its duty, and/or poses a safety risk.

Based on a 2021-22 conditions assessment, **20.7% of Duluth's parks are in poor condition, 51.4% are in fair condition, and 7.9% are in good condition.** Figure 13 displays the outcomes of this assessment across the city. (Note: 20% of parkland, particularly natural lands and undeveloped park properties, were not included in this evaluation.)

To understand how park conditions differ across the city, Table 10 groups parks into four subareas: western, central, and eastern Duluth, and Duluth Heights. Table 10 also provides the comparative number of parks within each subarea.

Western Duluth has the highest number and relative proportion of parks in good or fair condition when compared to other subareas. This reflects work completed under the direction of the 2010 Parks Master Plan and the St. Louis River Corridor Initiative, which identified investments in western Duluth parks as a community priority. Conversely, central Duluth has the highest number and relative proportion of parks that are in poor condition. Duluth Heights contains the fewest total number of parks, but also has a lower relative population. Notably, none of eastern Duluth's parks are in good condition, but eastern Duluth has the highest relative proportion of parks in fair condition.

**Figure 13:** Park Conditions Map



### LEGEND

#### Park Condition Ratings

- × Not Available
- Poor
- Fair
- ▲ Good
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- ++++ Railroads

**Table 10:** Condition Rating of Parks by Subarea

	WESTERN		CENTRAL		DULUTH HEIGHTS		EASTERN	
Condition	No. of parks	Percent of total	No. of parks	Percent of total	No. of parks	Percent of total	No. of parks	Percent of total
Not Evaluated	15	31%	10	19%	8	38%	10	25%
Poor	6	13%	14	26%	2	10%	8	20%
Fair	21	44%	25	47%	10	48%	22	55%
Good	6	13%	4	8%	1	5%	0	0%
Total	48		53		21		40	

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK BUILDINGS

As displayed in Figure 14, Duluth has a large number of parks-related buildings. These buildings are diverse in use, age, character, and condition ranging from golf clubhouses and community centers to nonprofit outdoor education centers and specialized sports facilities. As a set, these buildings do not comprise a coherent system of recreational facilities. Rather, Duluth's portfolio of parks buildings is a mish-mash of more than 100 years of evolving community priorities. Which buildings have been retained and maintained appears to have been guided as much by historical inertia as by contemporary community needs.

Many of the City's parks buildings were constructed as traditional community centers sited within small, intensively developed parks known as community recreation areas. Traditional community centers often include indoor gathering spaces, restrooms, locker rooms, kitchens, meeting rooms, and warming houses. Their original purpose was to host daily City-staffed recreational programs and provide access to restrooms and basic services for park users.

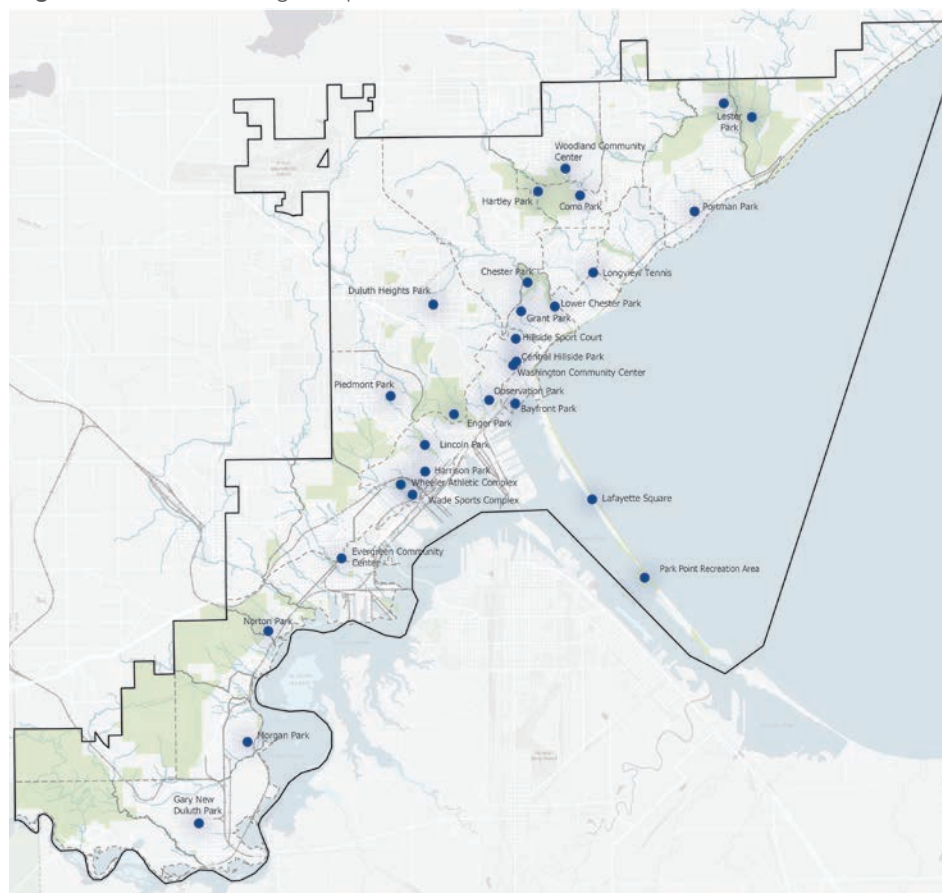
The City no longer has the personnel to staff all of its community centers. In a small number of priority park buildings, the City and nonprofit partners continue to provide regular

programming that attracts intensive daily use. Most parks buildings have limited public access and programming. Some of these less than fully utilized buildings are managed by the City for rental, events, and Parks and Recreation program offerings. Others are managed by nonprofit partner organizations under formal lease agreements. A handful of buildings have been shuttered due to disrepair and disuse.

Sufficient funding to adequately invest in the maintenance of parks buildings has been lacking for decades. As a result, the condition of many parks buildings is poor. At least seven buildings have been assessed in poor condition and are inoperable or nearly so. The City of Duluth's 2010 Parks and Recreation Master Plan called on the City to determine the relative priority of parks buildings, reinvest in high-priority buildings, and eliminate low priority buildings. The plan called for transition to a smaller system of more relevant, better used, and better maintained parks buildings that would be sited to equitably serve west, central, and east Duluth. Since 2010, the City has made progress toward eliminating low priority parks buildings, demolishing a total of six. For lack of funds, the City has made less progress toward reinvesting in higher priority parks buildings.

To align needs, resources, and facilities, the City should develop a

**Figure 14:** Park Buildings Map



separate park building reinvestment and consolidation plan aimed at producing a smaller system of better used, better maintained community centers that are designed, located, and programmed to meet contemporary recreational needs within the limits of the City's financial capacity. The plan should be founded on systematic assessments of community recreation needs, building conditions, and the City's capacity to maintain parks buildings.

### LEGEND

- Park Building
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary
- Neighborhood Boundary
- ++++ Railroads



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

**Table 11:** Parkland and Population Comparison to Peer Cities

Parks	Duluth, MN	Bend, OR	St. Cloud, MN	Fayetteville, AR	Bozeman, MT
Population	86,697	100,421	68,001	87,590	48,330
Park Acres per 1,000 Population					
Destination / Regional	32.8	21.2	N/A	36.1	N/A
Community	1.4	6.5	N/A	2.5	1.4
Neighborhood	1.4	1.6	N/A	2.1	2.9
Special Use	3.1	0.6	N/A	1.6	2.3
Plaza	0.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.7
Parkway	0.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.7
<b>Total Developed Parks</b>	<b>38.7</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>7.3</b>
Natural / Passive	63.9	0.8	16.4	1.7	2.1
Trailheads / Water Access	0.2	0.1	0.0	2.0	.07
<b>Total Natural Lands, Trailheads, and Water Access</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>
Undeveloped	3.0	1.0	0.0	2.9	0.6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>105.7</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>10.6</b>

## PEER CITIES ANALYSIS

Comparing local metrics to those of similar communities provides an understanding of how Duluth's system compares and contrasts to its peers. The communities of Bend, OR, St. Cloud, MN, Fayetteville, AR, and Bozeman, MT were selected for comparison to Duluth due to similarities in population size, the presence of a university, climate, and/or recreational interests. Additionally, based on National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) national averages, comparisons between Duluth and other communities with

populations of 50,000 - 99,999 are used for benchmarking. While no two communities are exactly alike, such comparisons provide additional context and can help frame conversations for future decision making.

## PARKLAND TO POPULATION COMPARISON

As shown in Table 11, **Duluth ranks highest among comparable cities in total park acreage per 1,000 people.** Duluth has a vast network of natural lands, making it the leading city in natural / passive park provision (Note: some other cities benefit from

natural/passive lands owned by other agencies). The significant amount of natural/passive land in Duluth aligns with the community's desire to protect the natural environment and support environmental resiliency. Duluth ranks average in terms of developed park acres per 1,000 residents, with slightly lower figures for community and neighborhood parks when compared to peer cities.

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## 10-MINUTE WALK COMPARISON

Although the amount of park acreage in Duluth's system surpasses that of its peer communities, when evaluating park access, Duluth ranks in the middle. 70% of households in the city are able to reach a park within a 10-minute walk. This figure is likely attributed to a combination of factors, including the oversized geographic coverage of Duluth's city boundaries spanning 26 miles from east to west, slightly lower provisions of developed community and neighborhood parks in certain neighborhoods, the exclusion of school park spaces from this analysis, and other barriers as outlined on page 42.

### PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN A 10-MINUTE PARK WALK COMPARISON

**70%**  
Duluth, MN

**84%**  
Bozeman, MT

**85%**  
St. Cloud, MN

**54%**  
Fayetteville, AR

**66%**  
Bend, OR

Source: Trust for Public Lands, 2021



Parks and open spaces may be in close proximity to where people live but not be accessible within a short walk due to barriers such as rivers and highways. Pathways, bridges, and additional park entry points can increase accessibility.



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## AMENITIES COMPARISON

Table 12 provides a comparison of the number of recreation amenities provided on average in communities with a population of 50,000 to 99,999, according to the NRPA. This benchmark serves as a tool for Duluth to evaluate the current mix of amenities within the park system, as well as highlighting potential opportunities for adding, removing, consolidating, or upgrading amenities by type.

Overall, Duluth provides a roughly average number of athletic fields of all types. Duluth should prioritize completion of a comprehensive athletic facilities needs assessment and reinvestment plan to better inform pending reinvestment decisions.

It is worth noting that Duluth has just one artificial turf field – a baseball diamond. Artificial turf fields can support up to five times as much play as a comparable natural turf field. Rather than constructing new natural turf fields, the City may wish to convert some existing natural turf fields to artificial turf fields. Converting natural turf to artificial turf requires a substantial investment upfront, but in the long-run, may produce better return on investment measured in terms of hours of additional quality play.

**Table 12:** Park Amenities Benchmark Comparison  
NRPA Comparison of Communities with a population of 50,000 - 99,000

Component	National Average	NRPA Level of Service	Duluth	Surplus of Deficit	Duluth Community Values**
Playgrounds	1 per 3,807	22.5	40	17.5	- *
Diamonds - Youth*	1 per 8,095	10.6	18	7.4	/
Soccer - Youth*	1 per 8,224	10.4	22	11.6	/
Outdoor Basketball Courts	1 per 8,477	10.1	23	12.9	/
Softball - Youth*	1 per 11,688	7.3	18	11.7	/
Soccer - Adult*	1 per 16,231	5.3	22	16.7	+
Softball - Adult*	1 per 17,228	4.9	18	13.1	/
Diamond - Adult*	1 per 25,097	3.4	18	14.6	/
Football	1 per 30,599	2.8	1	-1.8	/
Lacrosse	1 per 37,763	2.2	0	-2.2	+
Community Gardens	1 per 49,351	1.7	21	19.3	+
Synthetic Field	1 per 34,104	2.5	0	-2.5	+
Dog Park	1 per 56,084	1.5	4	3.5	+
Outdoor Ice Rink Sites	1 per 28,000	3	8	5	/
Multi-use Fields	1 per 13,151	6.5	25	18.5	+

**Key:** + = add more, - = remove, -\* = consolidate and upgrade, / = maintain.

\*Note that while the NRPA averages differentiate amenities by youth use versus adult use, Duluth's park system inventory is not classified similarly. The count of soccer, baseball, and softball fields in Duluth's system are therefore "double-counted," meaning the number is the same for both youth and adult use.

\*\*Duluth Community Values are provided to guide the removal and addition of facilities. Upgrades are expected to occur for all maintained facilities as needed.

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## FUNDING COMPARISON

Table 13 identifies metrics related to the park system, financial resources, and staffing for Duluth and U.S. cities of a similar population size, based on data from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Comparing operating budgets alongside park acres is important for showing total monetary resources available and the quantity of park space that funding must support.

While Duluth's operating budget is less than the national average, the vastness of Duluth's park system and the acreage these funds must support far exceeds the national average. **The average park acres per 1,000 residents for cities of a similar population size is 9.2 acres, compared to Duluth's 105.7 acres. Likewise, the average miles of trails for cities of a similar size is 14 miles, while Duluth has over 350 miles of trails requiring support.**

When comparing the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, Duluth has approximately 17 fewer FTEs to support parks and recreation than the average for cities of a similar population size. This means that parks and recreation-related staff in Duluth are working with a smaller budget than other communities to support far more park spaces, which in turn, leaves few resources to support much needed increases in staffing levels. Given the extensiveness of the park

system and the value of deferred maintenance in Duluth, increasing park funding to better align with national averages, based on park acreage, is vital for the future of the park system.

“...the minutes of park board meetings [1892] paint a picture of a city whose enthusiasm and desire for parks always outstripped its ability to pay for them.”

– Duluth's Historic Parks, The First 160 Years , N. Nelson &

T. Dierckins, p. 5

**Table 13:** Nationwide Resources and Needs Comparison

NRPA Benchmark Comparison with Communities 50,000-99,000 population		
Metrics	NRPA	Duluth
Median # of Parks and Recreation FTE	64.1	47.2
Residents per park acres	1,235	9.5
Park acres per 1,000 residents	9.2	105.7
Miles of Trails	14	353
Budget	\$7,330,336	\$6,680,250
Cost recovery	25.3%	3%
Value of deferred maintenance	\$200,000	\$113.6M



Park funding can be used to maintain park amenities and provide more community events in park spaces, such as the successful Bayfront Festival.



# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

## PARK MAINTENANCE COMPARISON

Duluth's total number of FTEs to support parks and recreation is lower than average based on data from the NRPA (see Table 13). These staff are responsible for recreation programming, parks planning, and park maintenance. Identifying the level of staffing needed for park system maintenance, specifically, is more challenging for comparison amongst cities due to variations in park systems and data availability.

Based on available information from cities with a population size similar to Duluth, general guidelines representing the preferred minimum number of FTEs for park maintenance have been developed (see Table 14). Factors influencing the number of FTEs recommended for maintaining each park classification include the level of development, amenities present, and intensity of use.

Duluth has 9,168 acres of parkland (excluding golf courses), of which Park Maintenance is responsible for maintaining 7,248 acres. The remaining 1,920 acres are managed by third-party operators. Table 14 reflects the minimum FTEs and staff hours suggested for maintaining the Duluth park system to a high standard. While the guidelines suggest Duluth should have over 106,000 hours of park maintenance, staff capacity in 2021 allowed for approximately 43,000 hours of park maintenance,

nearly 2.5 times fewer hours. These figures suggest the need for approximately 30 additional FTEs in Park Maintenance to be in alignment with park maintenance guidelines.

The shortage of park maintenance staff resources has prompted Duluth to forge partnerships with nonprofit partners and user groups who engage community volunteers to perform specific park maintenance duties.

While such partnerships are quite common nationally, the City of Duluth may be more dependent on nonprofit partners to perform basic park maintenance services than is typical.

While achieving the suggested park maintenance hours is currently beyond Duluth's financial and staff capacity, analyzing the percentage of staff hours dedicated to each park type is useful for determining if the

overall distribution of maintenance efforts aligns with the guidance found in Table 14.

**Table 14:** Park Maintenance Hours Comparison

Park Classification	Minimum Guideline for FTEs per Park Acres	Number of Park Acres in Duluth	iCMA Minimum Guideline for Park Maintenance FTEs in Duluth	Minimum Guideline for Park Maintenance Hours in Duluth	Actual Park Maintenance Hours for Duluth (2021)
Destination Parks	1 per 40	1,039	26.0	54,051	22,491
Community Parks	1 per 20	118	5.9	12,272	10,144
Neighborhood Parks	1 per 20	121	6.1	12,584	2,592
Special Use Parks	1 per 20	146	7.3	15,204	4,579
Plaza Areas	1 per 20	5	0.3	520	1,049
Parkways	Contract	6	N/A	N/A	646
Natural/Passive Areas	1 per 1500	5,540	3.7	7,682	1,127
Trailheads/Access Points	1 per 20	13	0.7	1,352	229
Undeveloped Parks	1 per 200	259	1.3	2,694	149
Third-Party Operated	Third-Party	1,920	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total		9,168	51.1	106,358	43,008

1. These figures are based on FTEs at 2,080 hours and includes seasonal staff hours. Duluth's figures include time spent maintaining City-owned parks, as well as the approximately 2,500 acres of City-managed, but county-owned property that the City is seeking to acquire and permanently protect. Duluth's figures do not account for tree work, which takes place both inside and outside of park spaces throughout the city. This is one snapshot in time for the purposes of this analysis; Duluth's Park Maintenance staff hours and distribution of time varies year by year based on numerous factors. In 2021, in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing shortages affected staff hours.

2. Total acreage of third-party operated parks excludes golf courses.

# PARK SYSTEM EVALUATION

Table 15 shows that Duluth's Park Maintenance staff time is generally distributed in accordance with the guidelines. Neighborhood parks appear to be receiving a smaller percentage of park maintenance hours than recommended. This is consistent with community feedback received as part of this Essential Spaces Plan process, in which a lack of maintenance for neighborhood parks was frequently cited as a concern.

Conversely, community parks appear to be receiving a higher percentage of park maintenance hours than recommended. Given that the total number of hours dedicated to community parks is already less than the guidelines suggested in Table 14, taking hours away from community parks is not necessarily the most appropriate approach for aligning time distribution with the guidelines. The City should first explore opportunities for increasing the number of FTEs and ensure that those new hours are prioritized for neighborhood parks. If additional staff is not an option, then the City should consider practical options for redistributing existing park maintenance hours to be more in line with the recommended guidelines and community input.

For destination parks and other heavily used tourist areas, the City should consider creating dedicated enterprise funds to provide direct financial support for these maintenance-heavy spaces. Supplemental park maintenance funding, additional Park Maintenance FTEs, and increasing park maintenance efforts in neighborhood parks would not only bring the City closer to recommended maintenance levels, but would also support specific, localized needs voiced by community members.

**Table 15:** Distribution of Park Maintenance Hours Comparison

Park Classification	Recommended Percent of Park Maintenance Staff Hours by Park Type	Actual Percent of Park Maintenance Staff Hours by Park Type in Duluth	Difference Between Recommended and Actual Percent of Park Maintenance Staff Hours
Destination Parks	50.8%	52.3%	1.5%
Community Parks	11.5%	23.6%	12.0%
Neighborhood Parks	11.8%	6.0%	-5.8%
Special Use Parks	14.3%	10.6%	-3.6%
Plaza Areas	0.5%	2.4%	2.0%
Parkways	N/A	1.5%	1.5%
Natural/Passive Areas	7.2%	2.6%	-4.6%
Trailheads/Access Points	1.3%	0.5%	-0.7%
Undeveloped Parks	2.5%	0.3%	-2.2%



# PROGRAMS EVALUATION

## RECREATION PROGRAMMING

Parks and Recreation experienced substantial budget cuts during the Great Recession in 2008/2009, resulting in significant reductions to program offerings. The voter-approved Park Fund referendum in 2011 restored base-level funding to Parks and Recreation, but remained substantially lower than previous funding levels in the absence of General Fund contributions. In 2019, a mayoral initiative, “Program Your Park: Reimagining Duluth Recreation” called for Duluth Parks & Recreation to reinstitute their space alongside leaders in community-based recreation. This initiative allowed Parks & Recreation to hire additional recreation specialists and to expand community recreation opportunities through a mobile recreation model. Continual evaluation and refinement of program offerings is ongoing and great strides have been made over the last several years, despite challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parks and Recreation has a long history of working with community recreation service providers, defined here as youth sports organizations, adult sports associations, non-profit groups, social service organizations, the school district, and/or private sector entities that provide recreation services. These community recreation service providers deliver a large

share of the community’s recreation programs, often in partnership with the City. Partnerships take many forms and may include single-time permits, formalized agreements between the City and the recreation provider to allow for controlled public access of park facilities, collaborative delivery of programs, and more.

## PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Programming offered by Duluth Parks and Recreation is reasonably comprehensive and meets a broad range of interests and needs in the community. The City’s recreation programs are summarized in Table 16.

Duluth’s natural landscape allows for a variety of outdoor recreation programming opportunities that may not be typical for many other park and recreation departments, and these types of programs are highly desired by the community. Fitness programs, adult sports, youth sports, and special needs programs may not be as widely offered by Duluth Parks and Recreation when compared to other park and recreation departments. Instead, the City relies on their community recreation service providers to deliver many of these activities to the community. This is both a reflection of limited programming resources, but also of the community’s desire to maintain park space for third-party organized sports leagues.

**Table 16:** Duluth Parks and Recreation Programs by Type

Recreation Type	Focus	Programs
Outdoor Recreation	Youth and Families	Full Moon, Nature Knowledge, Outdoor Game Night, Intro to Archery, Open Archery, Stargazing Hike, Date Night, Guided Hikes, Orienteering, Intro to Geocaching, Family Hike, Family Canoeing, Intro to Fly Casting, S'more Scavenger Hunt, Birding 101, Disc Golf, Snowshoeing, Bayfront Skating
	Youth	Summer Day Camps, Outdoor Rec Club, After School Adventures, Outdoor Education Day, Outdoor Rec Club, Bug Catching Adventures, Hawk Ridge Summer Fun, Nordic Skiing, Snowshoeing, Ice Skating, MEA Break Fun
	Adult	Intro to Mountain Biking, Disc Golf, Women Hike Duluth, SHT Guided Hikes, Nordic Skiing, Snow Stompers, Sailing, Stand Up Paddleboarding
Arts, Crafts, and Culture	Youth	Craft and Creativity, Teen Night, Friday Fun, Young Makers Knitting, Storytelling & Imagination, Art in the Park, Family BINGO
	Adult	Trivia, Painting in the Parks, Bayfront Winter Crafts, Intro to Tabletop Role-Playing Games
Sports and Fitness	Youth	Soccer shots, Floor Hockey, Sports of all Sorts, Hunter Basketball, Flag Football, Youth Open Gym, Sports Sampler, Intro to Lacrosse, Learn-to-Skate, Play Gym, Jazz & Hip Hop Dance, Develop Skills to Skate, Kickball, Ninja Skills, Pickleball, Toddler Skate, Heritage Open Skate
	Adult	Kickball, Ultimate Frisbee, Softball, Pickleball, FloorCurl
Seniors		Ghost, Ghouls & Grandkids, Autumn Hike, River Lunch Cruise, Chanhassen Theatre, Morgan Park Holiday Party, Portman Holiday Party, Evergreen Holiday Party, Senior Appreciation Day, 100 Year Birthday Party, Movies, Senior Hike, Activity Clubs, All Senior Picnic, Senior BINGO, Bone Builders, Cribbage, Mahjong, Seniors Get Savvy, Bridge, Ely Wolf Center Day Trip, Aquarium Day Trip, Taylors Falls Boat Cruise, Driver Safety Classes
Community Events		Story and Play, Edible Duluth Celebration, Pumpkin Palooza, Boobash, Gobble Glide Skate, Skate with Santa, Champions Build Champions, Sand Modeling Contest, Community Fishing Night, Pop Up Play, Skate the Heart, Cold Front, Chester Creek Concert Series, Pop Up Splash Pads, Luminary Hike, Busker Stroll
Self-Directed		Agents of Discovery, Egg Hunt, Joke Trail, Trivia Trail, Halloween Hike, Turkey Search, Yeti Hunt, Lark in the Park, Holiday Walk, Shamrock Hunt, Snowman Kits, Sled Sheds, Snow-Building Pop Up, Art Kits, Yeti Hunt, Equipment Rental

# PROGRAMS EVALUATION

## COMMUNITY RECREATION SERVICE PROVIDERS

Community recreation service providers are valuable community resources. Their continued efforts reduce the City's financial burden to provide recreation programming, while increasing activated use of Duluth's park spaces and facilities. This list represents a sampling of the types of activities offered by community service providers and is not intended to be all inclusive:

- Softball
- Boxing
- Cross-country skiing
- Disc golf
- Ultimate frisbee
- Football
- Gardening
- Golf
- Hockey
- Figure skating
- Lacrosse
- Pickleball
- Soccer
- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Sailing
- Swimming

## PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAMMING BY THE NUMBERS

Parks and Recreation's mobile recreation model enables staff to activate parks, trails, and green spaces in neighborhoods all across the city. In this way, the programming team can reach a wide range of residents and bring people together in new and exciting ways. However, as with many newly established operations, Parks and Recreation faces challenges related to optimizing program offerings, increasing participation, and expanding community awareness of program offerings.

Before exploring these metrics in-depth, it is worth noting that 2019 was first year of program rejuvenation for Duluth Parks and Recreation. Programming progress stalled in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced recreation providers across the country to close and/or modify offerings. Even as recreation facilities began to re-opened, many community members felt a general unease towards attending in-person group activities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, occupancy rate and cancellation rate data are not available for 2020. While interest, comfort, and confidence for public gatherings has improved, the newness of Duluth's expanded programming and the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic are important contextual elements when considering documented occupancy and cancellation rates.

Despite the slow start to community gathering in 2021, Table 17 shows that over 18,500 people participated in Parks and Recreation programming activities in 2021. As community gathering becomes more consistent and the programming unit further defines its foothold, the growth trajectory for Parks and Recreation programming participation is promising.

**Table 17:** Total Participants for Programming

Total Participants		
2019	2020	2021
15,617	4,590	18,518

Source: City of Duluth Parks and Recreation Division

## Occupancy Rates

When evaluating the effectiveness of programming efforts, two useful metrics to consider are occupancy rates (see Table 18) and cancellation rates (see Table 19). Typically, lower occupancy rates indicate that programs have substantial room for growth in participation. While it's not unusual for newer, lesser-known programs to have lower occupancy rates initially, individual programs should be monitored to determine if those with consistently low participation should be eliminated. Conversely, programs with consistently high occupancy rates may be prime for expansion. Given the young age of Parks and Recreation's revitalized programming and interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and early 2021, clear and steady occupancy patterns have not yet emerged. However, as seen in Table 18, the data shows an increase in occupancy rates from 2019 to 2021 for both summer and fall programming periods. It is anticipated that these rates will continue to improve over time.

**Table 18:** Occupancy Rates for Programming

Occupancy Rates				
Time Period	2019	2020	2021	2022
Jan - May	-	-	3%	37%
June - August	30%	-	41%	-
Sept - Dec	25%	-	38%	-

Source: City of Duluth Parks and Recreation Division



# PROGRAMS EVALUATION

## Cancellation Rates

Cancellation rates may provide insight into whether there are too many or too few program offerings available. A typical cancellation rate ranges from 10% to 20%. Cancellation rates below 10% may indicate that there are not enough new programs. Conversely, cancellation rates over 20% may indicate there are too many new programs or that program participation is declining and could be considered for elimination. Table 19 shows that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were still strongly influencing cancellation rates in 2021, particularly at the beginning of the year. While clear patterns have yet to emerge, a newly established operation like the City's programming unit can anticipate higher than average cancellation rates over the next three years, as the appropriate mix of program offerings comes into focus.

## FACILITY NEEDS

The City of Duluth faces an immense challenge to maintain its expansive system of park spaces and amenities, including a high number of community centers that are degrading or inoperable. While community centers are dispersed throughout Duluth and have offered a space for community members to recreate and gather for decades, the budget, staff resources, and third-party support for their upkeep and care is scarce. Parks and Recreation lacks adequate funding to support much needed capital replacements and improvements, which affect use and programmability of community centers. Additionally, these centers are often not right-sized nor designed for current trends, which call for larger spaces equipped with indoor sports facilities, rather than traditional community center gathering spaces.



Women Hike Duluth, a monthly hiking group, at Congdon Park.

**Table 19:** Cancellation Rates for Programming

Cancellation Rates				
Time Period	2019	2020	2021	2022
Jan - May	-	-	77%	24%
June - August	40%	-	26%	-
Sept - Dec	29%	-	33%	-

Source: City of Duluth Parks and Recreation Division

# PROGRAMS EVALUATION

## PROGRAMMING SWOT ANALYSIS

The analysis in Table 20 provides an evaluation of Parks and Recreation's programming and facility Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT). The SWOT analysis is derived from a review of program offerings, as well as input from focus group participants, and feedback from the 2021 Parks and Recreation Community Survey.

Parks and Recreation is actively building a strong foundation of recreation programs and services. Duluth's unique outdoor recreation opportunities, strong community values around health and connections to nature, talented and passionate recreation specialists, and highly engaged volunteers, user groups, and community recreation service providers offers a hopeful outlook for the future of Parks and Recreation programming. However, an aging inventory of existing facilities, a lack of indoor facilities, and limited financial resources places a challenge on City programming operations. These SWOT analysis factors and considerations helped to formulate strategic next steps, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, for further strengthening recreational programming and facilities in Duluth.

**Table 20:** Programming SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich natural resources with ample park and open space inventory</li> <li>Waterfront opportunities</li> <li>Diverse recreation, education, and leisure program offerings, including utilizing community partnerships</li> <li>Duluth is a popular location for tournaments and special events</li> <li>A significant number of special interest classes offer strong community-led programs and support</li> <li>Growing participation numbers and community recognition as a recreation provider</li> <li>Mobile recreation model allows a variety of programs to reach neighborhoods across the city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited financial resources</li> <li>Facility maintenance needs</li> <li>Inconsistent maintenance in parks</li> <li>Overuse of some amenities</li> <li>Lack of senior programs focused on younger, more active seniors</li> <li>Inadequate marketing of programs; community has lack of familiarity with programs or activities</li> <li>Lack of programs for people with disabilities that are specialized to serve all ages and abilities</li> <li>Limited teen programming</li> <li>Limited fitness and wellness programming</li> <li>Limited cultural program offerings</li> <li>Limited buildings and facilities means programs do not always have a weather back up, therefore risk cancelation</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indoor and outdoor (turf) multi-use fields</li> <li>Donor and sponsorship opportunities through naming rights</li> <li>Site-specific programming for outdoor recreation; opportunities for skills building</li> <li>Multi-use sport courts</li> <li>Use of park spaces for community events</li> <li>Community interest in volunteer opportunities</li> <li>Community interest in cultural, history, and wellness programs</li> <li>Investment in quality indoor space that meet current trends to allow for program expansion</li> <li>Continue to build community name recognition and trust as recreation leader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budgetary resources</li> <li>Competing with others for program offerings rather than filling in gaps</li> <li>Deterioration of community centers and inability to maintain or replace in the future</li> <li>Partner frustration with maintenance and upkeep due to resource capacity</li> <li>Sense of safety</li> <li>Community members feeling unwelcome and/or unsafe in spaces and programs</li> <li>Inadequate indoor program spaces for seeking shelter and year-round programming</li> </ul>



# EVALUATION SUMMARY

The system analyses and community engagement findings reveal the many strengths of Duluth's park and recreation system. The network of parks and trails is vast in its number of properties and overall acreage. Park spaces offer unique opportunities for recreation that reflect the city's geography and culture. Duluth continues to attract tourists and newcomers, in part due to the abundance of natural spaces and opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout all four seasons. Parks and Recreation benefits from strong civic involvement and partnerships for program offerings that enhance and diversify recreation opportunities. Duluth's citizens appreciate their park spaces and acknowledge the value that natural spaces provide to personal and environmental health.

The system analyses and community engagement findings also reveal opportunities for utilizing existing assets while further strengthening the park and recreation system. With these opportunities in mind, the following chapters present Themes, Goals, Strategies, Action Items and Level of Service Standards and Guidelines to direct Parks and Recreation efforts to support a healthy community, enhance inclusion and equity, and advance environmental protection under a sustainable budget framework.



Riverside Park reflects an updated, well-maintained playground.





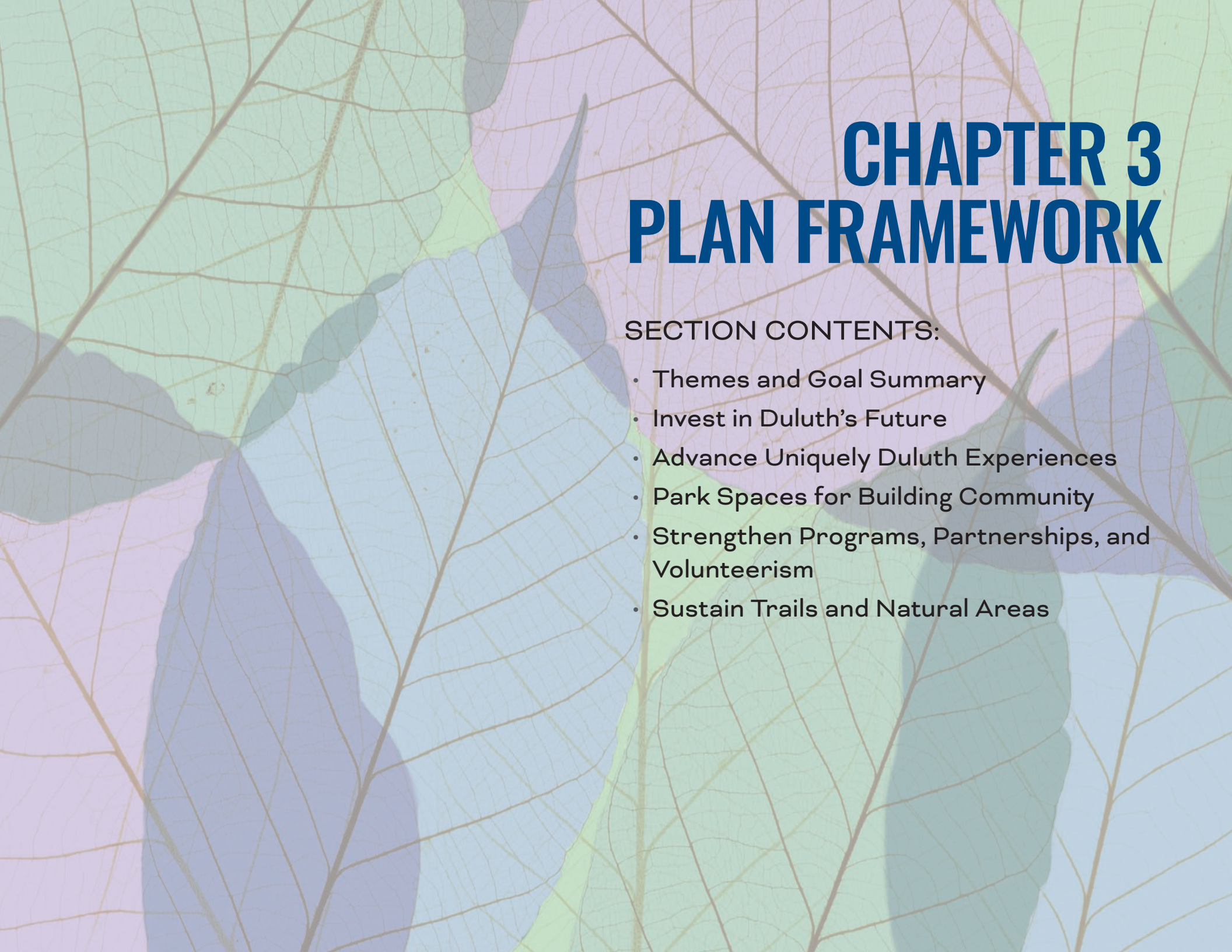
Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan

Public Workshop #1  
April 13 and 14, 2022

Presented by  
DESIGNALMA-2011

warming





# CHAPTER 3

## PLAN FRAMEWORK

### SECTION CONTENTS:

- Themes and Goal Summary
- Invest in Duluth's Future
- Advance Uniquely Duluth Experiences
- Park Spaces for Building Community
- Strengthen Programs, Partnerships, and Volunteerism
- Sustain Trails and Natural Areas

## THEMES & GOALS SUMMARY

### INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE



Goal A	Increase park funding, in line with industry standards, to create and maintain a high-quality, four-season park system that will effectively enhance the health and well-being of our community.
Goal B	Invest strategically to decrease routine and long-term maintenance requirements, leverage outside funding, and support community-based priorities.
Goal C	Balance maintenance, reinvestment, consolidation, and new construction of park infrastructure to meet current and future system needs within a sustainable budget framework.

### ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES



Goal D	Provide equitable, high-quality outdoor education and programming that encourages meaningful connections with nature in park spaces.
Goal E	Support opportunities for water-based recreation through managed access.
Goal F	Support improvements that simultaneously fulfill documented community recreational needs, enhance tourist attraction, and deliver other public benefits, such as economic development and resource protection.

### PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY



Goal G	Promote inclusion in our park spaces, facilities, and programs ensuring that all persons have equitable and appropriate access to our park and recreation system.
Goal H	Activate park spaces to support local, social, cultural, and economic advancement.
Goal I	Honor the culture, storytelling, art, and history of traditionally marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and the NQT2SLGBIA community, among others.
Goal J	Provide equitable, efficient, and effective opportunities for public participation in park planning processes to balance various perspectives and preferences.
Goal K	Support visitor navigation and engagement through a user-friendly system of trailheads, signage, wayfinding, and interpretive elements.





## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, & VOLUNTEERISM

Goal L	Strengthen Parks and Recreation's program offerings.
Goal M	Bolster relationships with partners who provide programming and recreation services, and support opportunities that fill gaps in existing local programming options.
Goal N	Promote and support strategically targeted volunteerism to efficiently increase the safe use and enjoyment of park spaces.
Goal O	Increase community awareness of recreational opportunities in park spaces.



## SUSTAIN TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS

Goal P	Protect and enhance our open spaces to restore and maintain ecological health, build resilience to natural disasters, and preserve the area's natural beauty.
Goal Q	Increase climate-resiliency throughout our park and trail system through modern design and best management practices.
Goal R	Complete and maintain a comprehensive trail system offering safe, sustainable, and diverse user experiences.
Goal S	Promote a culture of respect for public lands, trails, and waterways, as well as other system users, through stewardship education initiatives.



“Duluth’s parks and open spaces brought me here 26 years ago, and with increased funding to improve them, they will draw even more people to our community to enjoy for generations to come.”

-Britt Rohrbaugh

Project Advisory  
Committee Member

## INVEST IN DULUTH’S FUTURE

The funding available to support Duluth’s park system is not sufficient to properly operate and maintain all of the system’s infrastructure, not today and, certainly, not in the long-term. There was a time when Duluth had a much larger population and was growing at a more rapid pace. Park infrastructure was constructed, perhaps excessively so, to meet the demands and expectations of a continually growing community. However, as Duluth’s economy and population dwindled, so did the collective resources available to maintain park infrastructure. With decades of inadequate funding for park operations and maintenance compounded, the park system is now facing more than \$100 million of deferred maintenance challenges.

The most significant immediate obstacle to improved maintenance of Duluth’s park system is the shrinking value of the Park Fund levy – the primary source of funding for repair, renewal, and replacement of deteriorated park infrastructure. When established in 2011, the levy was capped at \$2.6 million with no provision for future growth. The result has been an ever-increasing

gap between the inflated cost to maintain park infrastructure and the funds available to pay for that work.

Park users have made it clear that they feel the weight of these challenges. Residents surveyed and interviewed for this Essential Spaces Plan consistently cited inadequate maintenance of park infrastructure as a top concern.

In order to reclaim, restore, and maintain an appropriate level of park infrastructure in Duluth, the goals identified in this plan theme focus on three primary efforts, which should take place simultaneously over the years to come. First, the City should identify and reinvest in high-priority park infrastructure. Second, the City should identify and consolidate low-priority park infrastructure. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the City must find ways to increase funding to support reinvestment, maintenance, and consolidation efforts in the park system. The most effective and dependable sources of additional funding are increases in the Park Fund levy, the General Fund, tourism tax, and earned income.

This plan recommends asking the City Council to authorize a voter

referendum that would give residents an opportunity to directly decide whether to restore the value of the 2011 Park Fund levy and allow the proceeds of the levy to grow over time. This plan also reaffirms the call in the preceding 2011 Parks and Recreation Master Plan to reinvest in critical park infrastructure and consolidate other park infrastructure, where appropriate. With increased and diversified support, a smaller and more modern portfolio of park infrastructure, and reductions in short- and long-term maintenance requirements, the City can provide its residents with a park system that is of a higher-quality and maintained to a better standard.

The Invest in Duluth’s Future plan theme gives focus to strategic park system investment and consolidation goals over the next ten years, as well as other approaches for decreasing maintenance costs and opportunities for seeking increased and diversified funding resources.





## WHAT WE HEARD...

### RESIDENT PRIORITIES

**48%** of survey respondents identify maintenance as the most important issue to address over the next ten years.

**Over half** of survey respondents support prioritizing maintenance of parks and trails most in need, followed by parks and trails that are used the most. Few felt that maintenance efforts should be spread out evenly.

**62%** of residents favor Parks and Recreation giving focus to maintaining and taking better care of established amenities over adding new amenities.

**28%** of survey respondents cite “quality” as an issue preventing their use of the park system, including insufficient maintenance or lack of cleanliness, lack of equipment or amenities of interest, and insufficient recreation programs.

When asked to prioritize between the quality of parks (fewer, larger, destination-quality parks) or the quantity of parks (more, but smaller, and lower-amenity and less maintained parks), **residents show a slight preference for quantity over quality, at 54% and 46%, respectively.** With a relatively even split between the two options, residents’ strong call for a better maintained park system should also be considered.

### SUPPORT FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES

**Just over half** of residents support increasing the parks property tax levy from the current level to better support the park system. This figure was higher for the Open Participation respondents, at 63%.

More than **8 out of 10** survey respondents support or strongly support strategies to increase funding through corporate contributions.

**Over 95%** of residents support or strongly support creating a Parks Foundation to solicit donor funding.

Source: 2021 Parks & Recreation Survey Report



## INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE

### GOAL A. Increase park funding, in line with industry standards, to create and maintain a high-quality, four-season park system that will effectively enhance the health and well-being of our community.

Duluth's park spaces are essential to the well-being of the community and most Duluth residents are active users of the park system. The statistically valid community survey indicated that 57 percent of respondents visit Duluth's parks and natural areas once a week or more. Further, survey responses show that Duluth residents feel that connecting with nature, protecting natural environments and wildlife, and maintaining health are essential or very important purposes of the park system. Given the vast size of Duluth's park system and the value it brings to the community, it is critical to have robust resources available for planning, construction, and maintenance activities to keep spaces functioning at an acceptable level of service.



Park funding allows for improvements and maintenance for the park system, such as the Hartley Nature Center building expansion.

### STRATEGIES

- A1. Pursue increased allocations of internal City funding sources including, but not limited to, the property tax levy, half-and-half tourism tax, and general fund dollars.
- A2. Diversify external funding sources, starting with the opportunities outlined in the Funding Opportunities section of this plan. Continue to use existing funds to leverage additional support from external sources.
- A3. Expand revenue generating activities in park spaces by creating a coordinated marketing strategy and utilizing staff resources to promote activities, park space events, and activity rentals.
- A4. Provide annual reporting on investments and projects completed to inform the public on progress in the park system.
- A5. Collaborate with other City departments to leverage, increase, and diversity funding sources through revised legislation and more cohesive project planning processes.





With the system's budgetary constraints, it is crucial to prioritize the upkeep of current amenities within the system.

### GOAL B. **Invest strategically to decrease routine and long-term maintenance requirements, leverage outside funding, and support community-based priorities.**

Because Duluth's park and recreation system is so expansive, yet resources to maintain it are modest compared to cities of a similar population size, it is imperative that the City be strategic with investments, including evaluating how short-term actions may lead to long-term savings. This goal aims to prioritize park system maintenance, improve efficiency, and set realistic standards and expectations to better serve the community.

#### STRATEGIES

- B1. When possible, replace heavily manicured and cost inefficient landscaping with durable, low-maintenance and native landscaping.
- B2. Consider transitioning some parks to a minimum maintenance/passive status with few facilities.
- B3. Evaluate the potential for adding artificial turf fields to increase use and decrease mowing maintenance.
- B4. Resiliently rebuild public shoreline by, in order of priority, removing infrastructure from the shoreline without replacement, relocating infrastructure away from the shoreline, stabilizing the shoreline using vegetation and natural materials, or hardening the shoreline.
- B5. When possible, invest in energy efficient and renewable energy infrastructure and equipment within the park system to decrease energy dependence over the long-term.
- B6. When creating tree management plans for park spaces, consider species selection and succession timelines and follow sustainable forestry management practices and policies.



## INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE

### GOAL C. **Balance maintenance, reinvestment, consolidation, and new construction of park infrastructure to meet current and future system needs within a sustainable budget framework.**

The City has a significant backlog of deferred maintenance liabilities throughout the entirety of its park system. Many of these park assets are beyond their useful life and require reinvestment or consolidation. Likewise there are evolving and unmet recreational needs in Duluth, which require new investments and amenities be added to the system. With limited funding, staff, and equipment resources, there is a need to find a balance between the provisioning of routine maintenance and the need for new investments, consolidation, and removal of outdated or underutilized assets. A sustainable budget framework will require consideration of the maintenance capacity for supporting and maintaining new or improved park assets in the context of the system as a whole. The City must administer a parks maintenance program that is flexible enough to accommodate shifting priorities and patterns over time.



Community feedback emphasized the importance of parks maintenance.

### STRATEGIES

- C1. Identify, prioritize, and plan for parks capital improvement activities by considering intended uses and amenities, existing conditions, and community priorities against the required resources for routine and on-going capital maintenance.
- C2. Implement systems with long lifecycles and low maintenance requirements wherever possible throughout the park system.
- C3. Prioritize bringing park amenities into operating condition or, where necessary, removing or consolidating amenities.
- C4. When prioritizing improvements to parks and trails, consider Priority Equity Areas, safety, available funding sources, and system-wide distribution of park amenities and services.
- C5. Increase staffing for parks capital maintenance focusing on project planning, grant administration, and construction project management.
- C6. Maintain investment in the asset management system and continue to integrate internal systems to track and develop plans to address deferred maintenance and capital improvement goals.





“The most unique part about Duluth is that you can do almost every single outdoor activity inside the city limits, literally, without ever having to leave town.”

- Terrance Lovejoy Sr

Project Advisory  
Committee Member

## ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

Duluth's natural amenities, culture, and northern climate offer an abundance of unique park, trail, and recreation experiences. Sitting on the western edge of Lake Superior, the lakefront and the many waterways leading to it provide for picturesque landscapes and water-based recreational opportunities. The city's park system offers an extensive trail network, which is activated by a wide range of users for both warm-weather and cold-weather activities. Trail use, along with enjoying nature and wildlife, were among the top ways people said they use Duluth's park system. Notably, the value of these recreational opportunities extends beyond individual enjoyment, as promoting outdoor experiences is a key component of Duluth's economic strategy to attract tourists and new residents.

Advance Uniquely Duluth Experiences focuses on reducing real or perceived barriers to recreational experiences in Duluth. For example, despite the area's abundance of water, water-related facilities were included in the top five amenities residents identified as having too few of, including formalized water and paddling access points and

splash pads. Removing barriers to water access is not only important for recreational and economic purposes, but also for increasing equitable and safe water access for residents broadly, and in response to climate change. Similarly, while the extensiveness of the park system and the recreational opportunities it provides are highly valued by the community, these opportunities may be intimidating or out of financial reach to some users. The cold-weather climate and the lack of indoor recreational facilities further limits recreational participation for some users.

Parks and Recreation is uniquely positioned to provide entry-level, affordable, and diverse experiences to those who may not otherwise have access to or feel comfortable starting such activities. Through focused recreation and educational opportunities, intentional placemaking and design efforts, and supporting improvements that enhance both local and tourist-based recreational activities, the City can nurture connections to nature and advance uniquely Duluth experiences.



Duluth offers water and shoreline activities that are not available to the public in other communities.



### WHAT WE HEARD...

#### PARK VALUES

**8 in 10** respondents placed walking, hiking, running on trails and enjoying nature in their top 5 uses of Duluth's park system.

**4 in 10** respondents placed biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, playing, or gathering in their top 5 uses of Duluth's park system.

#### THERE ARE TOO FEW...

Respondents with an opinion were most likely to say there are **too few splash pads, restroom facilities, off-leash dog areas, public access point for water and paddling, and designated fishing areas.**

When assessing Duluth Parks and Recreation programming, respondents were most likely to say there are **too few** programs that provide **entry-level opportunities** and skill building for outdoor recreation activities, environmental education and nature exploration, and opportunities to volunteer to support the park system.

#### PARK VALUES

**89%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for providing opportunities to spend time outdoors and connect with nature.

**80%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for providing space to maintain and improve health.

**71%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for enhancing economic vitality by creating a more attractive place to live and work.



There is great variety of outdoor activities available within the city throughout the seasons.

Source: 2021 Parks & Recreation Survey Report





## ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

### GOAL D. **Provide equitable, high-quality outdoor education and programming that encourages meaningful connections with nature in park spaces.**

Parks and Recreation can provide opportunities for learning and enjoying natural outdoor spaces through programming and park design. Connections with nature and wildlife can have profoundly positive effects on individual health and well-being, and community input highlighted the importance and value that Duluth residents place on such connections. Through both active and passive programming opportunities, Parks and Recreation can play an important role in fostering the relationship individuals have with nature and the outdoors. Further, Parks and Recreation is well suited to support equitable programming goals, to help increase diversity in outdoor recreation, and to practice targeted outreach to individuals and groups who may not otherwise have the opportunity to make such meaningful connections with nature.

#### STRATEGIES

- D1. Cultivate introductory recreational experiences and opportunities to create positive connections with the outdoors, designed with inclusivity and equity at the forefront.
- D2. Engage with those underrepresented in outdoor education to learn how different people would most prefer to be welcomed and included to participate in nature-based activities.
- D3. Support the efforts of community recreation partners to reach diverse populations and expand participation in nature-based recreation and education activities.
- D4. Foster relationships with and between community education centers and community recreation providers to increase opportunities to experience the outdoors.
- D5. Explore untapped environmental educational opportunities in Duluth Natural Areas.
- D6. Host educational community events that encourage learning about and stewarding Duluth's unique natural qualities.



Ely's Peak Naturalist Program provides educational programming for purposeful outdoor connections.



## ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

### GOAL E. **Support opportunities for water-based recreation through managed access.**

Lake Superior and the St. Louis River Estuary create numerous opportunities for water-based recreation in Duluth, including swimming, fishing, kayaking, sailing, surfing, and more. However, some Duluth neighborhoods experience greater barriers to accessing water-based recreation opportunities than others. Public access points for water recreation activities and splash pads were among the top amenities Duluth residents identified as having too few of in the community survey and written comments further described residents' feelings of being cut-off from the lakefront. Infrastructure that supports shore fishing, waterfront trail use, canoeing/kayaking, swimming, waterfront parks, and viewpoints are elements that provide low-barrier access to water. Additionally, while Lake Superior acts as a major tourist attraction, options for how and where to best experience water-based recreation activities may be unclear to visitors. Through creative and thoughtful design, Duluth can offer improved and managed water access opportunities for locals and visitors alike.

#### STRATEGIES

- E1. Develop a clear and systematic plan for water access in Duluth, built on safety and promoting connections to the St. Louis River National Water Trail and Lake Superior Water Trail.
- E2. Increase programming and services that encourages both passive and active connections with waterways and increases water education and safety.
- E3. Formalize and increase recreational water access points, designated fishing areas, and splash pads. Where possible, consider options for incorporating adaptive facilities, equipment rental hubs, vessel access points, and parking.
- E4. In neighborhoods where formalized access to clean, natural water bodies is not possible, consider alternate methods to support water-based experiences, such as transportation provisions or installing splash pads.

- E5. Continue to support collaborative restoration efforts of the St. Louis River Estuary to provide safer and cleaner opportunities for water-based recreation.



There are extensive opportunities to explore Duluth by kayak.  
Source: Hansi Johnson





## ADVANCE UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES

**GOAL F. Support improvements that simultaneously fulfill documented community recreational needs, enhance tourist attraction, and deliver other public benefits such as economic development and resource protection.**

Duluth's unique landscapes and expansive park system can make the city feel, at times, like one big natural playground. Promoted as an outdoor recreation destination, both locals and tourists are attracted to the extensive opportunities for experiencing the outdoors in Duluth. It is important to consider and reflect upon the diverse set of recreational, cultural, environmental, and economic purposes that the park system serves when planning and prioritizing investments. It is wise to invest where the direct recreational benefits are greatest and the indirect benefits for economic development, tourist attraction, environmental health, and cultural resources are most extensive.

### STRATEGIES

- F1. Invest in facilities that address community-based priorities, support recreation trends, and fill system gaps.
- F2. Evaluate the development of a financially sustainable indoor recreation facility with amenities such as artificial turf, ice, and sport courts to accommodate a range of recreation activities year-round. This is most likely to occur through public-private efforts.
- F3. Collaborate with Duluth's planning and economic development teams to identify strategies for promoting and investing in park spaces that benefit both tourists and local residents.
- F4. Engage the community in a planning process regarding athletic fields and amenities to determine appropriate locations, types, and quantities.
- F5. When redeveloping athletic facilities, implement multi-use design as much as possible to expand usability, reduce duplication of maintenance needs, and create greater opportunity for tournament-like events.



The Busker Stroll along the Lakewalk brings music to visitors and community members while they gather and recreate near Lake Superior.





## PARK SPACES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

“A thriving park has its own energy. An energy that is inviting for family, friends, and visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

It can spark joy and conversations, and deepen connections with nature and the community. When we embody that energy, we can create positive and meaningful memories that last a lifetime.”

- John Staine

Project Advisory  
Committee Member

Park spaces can foster social interactions and interpersonal connections, promote community pride and inclusivity, and uplift one's sense of belonging and well-being. Park spaces play a role in building community and, with some intentionality, can help create an environment that is more equitable, inclusive, respectful, and responsive.

With 70% of Duluth households located within a 10-minute walk of a park, opportunities to use park spaces to strengthen community ties are abundant. However, the City must also work to expand such opportunities to the remaining households located outside of a 10-minute walk to a park. Further, while many existing park spaces and amenities encourage social interaction and connection, Parks and Recreation can utilize best practices for enhancing and promoting more thoughtful and intentional experiences. Park spaces in which neighbors can see a unique reflection of themselves and their community needs will attract more use, encourage stronger community connections, and establish a stronger sense of responsibility and care towards park spaces.

Individuals of all ages, incomes, abilities, genders, and cultural identities must

feel safe, welcomed, and included in park spaces. Factors that may enhance feelings of general safety include cleanliness, well-maintained facilities, lighting, and clear signage. Factors that may enhance feelings of inclusion and welcoming include targeted events and programs, multiple languages on signage, adaptive equipment and facilities, public art, interpretative elements, diversity in promotional materials and parks-related leadership roles, scholarship programs, and clear and friendly direction on how to best activate park spaces.

The Park Spaces for Building Community theme focuses on enhancing community connections, promoting a sense of place, and encouraging inclusivity of all residents. Through a strategic focus on community building, the park and recreation system will acknowledge the needs of community members, break down barriers to accessibility, and work towards increasing the overall health of the community.



Use of parks for celebratory events indicates a park is well-loved and has amenities to support group gatherings.





## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

### WHAT WE HEARD...

#### THERE ARE TOO FEW

**32%** of residents with an opinion feel there are too few picnic and small group gathering spaces.

**46%** of residents with an opinion feel there are too few cultural and historic facilities.

**52%** of residents with an opinion feel there are too few community gardens.

**55%** of respondents would like to see improvements for parks and trails most in need of maintenance prioritized.

**69%** of residents with an opinion feel there are too few indoor restrooms within the system.

#### PARK VALUES

**61%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for appreciating and preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the community.

**62%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for providing space to gather and host community events.

**66%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for providing recreation and programming activities to historically under-served communities.

**74%** of residents feel parks are essential or very important for providing safe public spaces to interact with other community members.

#### PARK BARRIERS

**5%** of residents said that not feeling welcome or a lack of belonging was a reason why they didn't use parks, facilities, or programs.

**18%** of residents feel that there is insufficient maintenance or lack of cleanliness in the parks.

**20%** of residents experience challenges with locations or facilities being overcrowded.

Source: 2021 Parks & Recreation Survey Report



## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

### GOAL G. **Promote inclusion in our park spaces, facilities, and programs ensuring that all persons have equitable and appropriate access to our park and recreation system.**

An equitable park system aims to ensure as many residents as possible have access to park spaces, and that those spaces are maintained at a standard level of quality across all neighborhoods. An inclusive park system is one that considers the physical, cultural, social, and economic needs of various groups and works to reflect the diversity of those needs in park facilities, amenities, and programming opportunities. Community engagement and relationship building will be central to Duluth's pursuit of an equitable and inclusive park system.

#### STRATEGIES

- G1. Invest in park spaces that are in poor condition or where system gaps have been identified, starting with those located in High Priority Equity Areas.
- G2. When replacing elements in poor condition or at the end of their life cycle, explore options that follow Universal Design Guidelines.
- G3. When creating a park plan, continue engaging community members to understand the features and amenities that will best serve particular neighborhoods.
- G4. Collaborate with City leadership to clarify staff roles and responsibilities for addressing unhoused populations in park spaces.
- G5. Work interdepartmentally to develop collective learning opportunities for staff and City leaders that educate on appropriate practices for Indigenous acknowledgment, gender inclusion, and racial and socioeconomic equity.
- G6. Incorporate diverse cultural and historical education opportunities in both new and existing programming, where appropriate.



Quarry Park accessibility improvements create more opportunities for inclusive family programming.





## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

### GOAL H. **Activate parks spaces to support local, social, cultural, and economic advancement.**

As the responsible party for permitting park spaces, it is important that Parks and Recreation have sound policies, procedures, and communication channels that allow events and programming to bring people together with relative ease. Park activation can occur through city- or partner-led programming that is well-planned and marketed, supervised, and helps people feel comfortable in park spaces. Park activation should be tailored to neighborhood demographics and cultures. Activities may range from exercise and fitness classes to social events that include vendors. Activation should benefit residents through the support of social and cultural advancements and may also benefit Duluth's economy through supporting local entrepreneurs and welcoming visitors.

#### STRATEGIES

- H1. Collaborate with the public to better use and improve park spaces for building a sense of community and togetherness, including consideration of resources, policies, volunteer availability, maintenance, and activating different park types.
- H2. Work to develop appropriately scaled event infrastructure for neighborhood and community parks throughout the system, including, as appropriate, seating, power, lighting, etc. As part of the planning process, design for flex spaces that further encourage and support community events.
- H3. Collaborate with local organizations to expand and strengthen opportunities for third-party entities to provide small-scale, pop-up park amenities that invite social interactions.
- H4. Promote park spaces and the programs and services available at each location through collaborating with localized community partners and businesses.
- H5. Review and revise plans, policies, and ordinances to better facilitate commercial operations and activate community spaces, including operations for food trucks, market vendors, e-mobility, beer gardens, and entertainment providers.
- H6. Review existing park and facility rental/permit fees against industry standards, use patterns, and considerations of equity.



The Lincoln Park Farmers Market at Harrison Park is one example of a use that can be established in parks to support local social, cultural, and economic advancement.



## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

### GOAL I. Honor the culture, storytelling, art, and history of traditionally marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and the NQT2SLGBIA community, among others.

Many locations that were once used for hunting and gathering, ceremonies, burials, and permanent shelter by Indigenous Peoples are recognized today as places of leisure, recreation, and natural habitat and contribute to Duluth's network of essential park spaces. Community feedback revealed that some residents, particularly people of color, do not feel welcome within the park system and reported unjust treatment from other park users. With both history and recent community feedback in mind, this goal seeks to emphasize park design and programming to reflect and celebrate the identity and histories of all people, particularly those of traditionally marginalized communities. Highlighting and recognizing histories and diverse cultures within park design and cultural activities is shown to increase diversity of users, foster civic identity, and attract new audiences to the parks.

#### STRATEGIES

11. Provide a platform for uplifting programming that recognizes diverse cultures, such as festivals and performances.
12. Ensure consideration and intentionality of interpretative signage, where appropriate, as part of the park planning process.
13. Honor Indigenous stories and language through partnerships, programming, ceremonies, land management, signage and interpretation, and proactive community engagement.
14. Actively engage boards and commissions representing diverse populations, such as the Duluth African Heritage Commission, Duluth Human Rights Commission, Duluth NQT2LGBIA Commission, and Indigenous Commission.
15. Encourage increased diversity within the Parks and Recreation Commission and staff through emphasizing the importance of having representation of diverse backgrounds in Duluth.
16. Ensure that diversity is reflected in advertisements of parks and park programming through images and text choice.
17. Strengthen the relationship between Parks and Recreation and the Duluth Public Arts Commission to explore financially sustainable options for the creation and enjoyment of public art in park spaces that honors the diverse heritages and histories of the community.



Park renaming ceremony for Gichi-Ode' Akiing, which means "a grand heart place" in Ojibwe.





## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

**GOAL J. Provide equitable, efficient, and effective opportunities for public participation in park planning processes to balance various perspectives and preferences.**

When investments in park spaces occur, incorporating feedback from community members is vital for a successful planning process. Efforts to increase input from traditionally underrepresented groups is of particular importance. Effective public participation practices help ensure that planned investments will meet community needs, bolster feelings of welcomeness and inclusion, enhance park usage, and allow for greater enjoyment of park spaces.

### STRATEGIES

- J1. Diversify the methods used to engage with members of the public, increasing the efficiency of communications via Boards and Commissions and traditional forms of communication. Use creative engagement strategies such as pop-up events, meeting community members where they are and 'on their terms', and lean on collaborative relationships with community leaders.
- J2. Expand engagement of young people and older adults that caters to a wide range of interests and fosters connection across age groups.
- J3. Work to expand awareness of and support for underrepresented communities with the Parks and Recreation Commission.
- J4. Expand partnerships with community organizations to broaden the reach of public participation.
- J5. Utilize a Community Engagement Plan for Parks and Recreation planning efforts.



Various perspectives from diverse community members were brought forth during this planning process.



## PARK SPACES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

### GOAL K. **Support visitor navigation and engagement through a user-friendly system of trailheads, signage, wayfinding, and interpretive elements.**

Directional elements are important aspects of park branding and placemaking. Signage helps define and orient users to a space. Wayfinding combines signage and map design, trail markers, symbols, color, and typography to help users or visitors easily navigate through a space. With such an extensive park and trail system, users can easily become disoriented without proper directional signage. Community input indicated that insufficient signage and wayfinding was a barrier that prevented some residents from using Duluth's park and trail system. The need for improved signage was made clear, particularly at trail intersections, areas where trails have gaps in connectivity, and places where various types of users may occupy the same space.

#### STRATEGIES

- K1. Continue to support and implement adopted plans related to signage, wayfinding, and trailhead amenities.
- K2. Ensure signage and wayfinding supports clear and safe navigation through the park system, includes interpretative signage where appropriate, and incorporates wayfinding standards of community partner groups as needed.
- K3. Evaluate level of service options for trailheads to define when certain services are provided, such as signage and maps, trash receptacles, maintenance tools, foot brushes, etc.
- K4. When planning park spaces, trailheads, and interpretive elements, follow principles of context sensitive design, which call for designs that are tailored to preserve, enhance, or respond to the local community and environment.
- K5. Streamline various citizen reporting tools for documenting community needs, safety, concerns, issues, and ideas.



Consistent trailhead features such as gates, maps, and signage creates a more cohesive park system and improves user experiences.





## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

“We have a responsibility to make outdoor recreation opportunities available to those who otherwise do not have the resources. With more people in the community stepping up to say, “How can I help?”, I’m hopeful for the future of programming in Duluth.”

-Eric Larson

Project Advisory  
Committee Member

Organized recreation programs and activities are foundational to park usage, enjoyment, and appreciation of park spaces, influencing the way people interact with the outdoors and with one another. Introductory recreational programming, in particular, supports skills-building and can help establish lifelong habits that improve fitness, wellness, and health among community members.

As a public agency, Parks and Recreation is well-positioned to be a leader in recreation programming and to help bridge the growing divide between those who have the ability to pay-to-play and those who do not. Under a mobile recreation model, Parks and Recreation has reemerged as a provider of diverse recreational experiences for a wide range of participants all across the city. However, as a relatively young programming unit, Parks and Recreation is actively working to find the right mix of program offerings and to raise community awareness of these new opportunities. As Parks and Recreation’s program offerings become more popular and well-known, ensuring equitable access will become increasingly important.

As a community partner, Parks and Recreation can play a central role in collaborative efforts related to the support and care of the park and recreation system. Parks and Recreation can help identify community-wide programming gaps, strengthen and formalize relationships with and among other community recreation service providers, and help increase awareness of all recreational programming in park spaces. Similarly, Parks and Recreation can continue to support, formalize, and celebrate relationships with volunteer groups to more effectively foster a culture of stewardship in Duluth. While maintaining collaborative and effective relationships requires significant time and resources, the return on investment is invaluable. The Duluth park and recreation system would not be what it is today without the commitment and dedication of generations of community recreation service providers and volunteer groups.

The Strengthen Programs, Partnerships, and Volunteerism theme focuses on bolstering the offerings of Parks and Recreation, standardizing partnership agreements across the system, and creating a culture of recognition and excitement for stewardship.



## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

### WHAT WE HEARD...

#### FOCUS FOR PROGRAMMING

**57%** of residents preferred that the Parks and Recreation programming focus on diverse and evolving outdoor recreation trends.

**7 in 10** residents preferred that outside organizations, rather than the City, provide a range of organized sports leagues and programs.

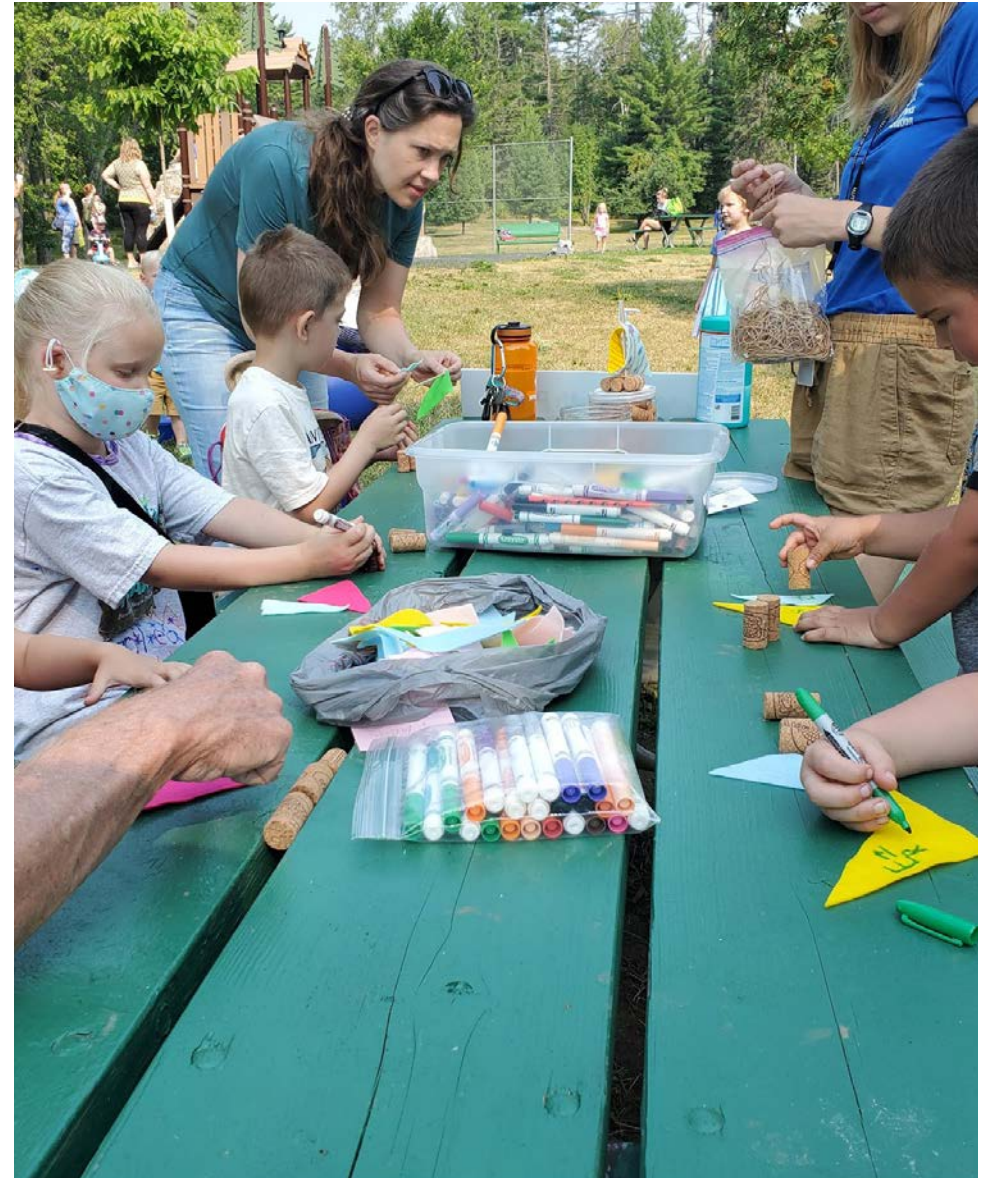
Residents were most likely to say Parks and Recreation offered too few programs for: **entry-level opportunities for recreational activities; skill building for outdoor recreation activities; environmental education and nature exploration; and volunteer opportunities.**

#### BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

When asked whether there were too many or too few of specific Parks and Recreation program offerings, **half or more of residents said they did not know** for a majority of the listed programs.

**35%** of respondents identified unfamiliarity with programs or activities as an issue preventing usage of Duluth's recreation facilities, programs, parks, or natural lands.

Source: 2021 Parks & Recreation Survey Report



Parks and Recreation's Summer Story and Play program at Lester Park is a weekly partner program with the Duluth Public Library.





## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

### GOAL L. Strengthen Parks and Recreation's program offerings.

As a re-emerging recreation program provider, Parks and Recreation faces challenges related to optimizing program offerings, increasing participation, and expanding community awareness of these offerings. While it is important for Parks and Recreation to fill gaps in programming, it is imperative to find the right mix of services to offer the community. The following strategies focus on the operational and policy aspects of Parks and Recreation programming to add transparency, increase efficiency, and improve responsiveness to community needs.

#### STRATEGIES

- L1. Support a dynamic programming evaluation process for all program offerings and options for adjusting programs and/or resources, as needed, based on evaluation outcomes.
- L2. Formalize a comprehensive policy manual that provides a framework for program administration, development, and implementation.
- L3. Apply consistent program metrics and benchmarks, such as a minimum number of registrants, to ensure enrollment, attendance, budget, and cost recovery are meeting established goals.
- L4. Monitor program trends against regional and national offerings to ensure that programs are current and reflect evolving recreational interests.
- L5. When planning park spaces and facilities, advocate for recreational amenities that meet current recreational trends, align with community interests, and improve programmability of the space.
- L6. Foster professional development of staff to ensure Parks and Recreation is well-positioned to provide meaningful, high-quality recreational opportunities for the community.



Parks and Recreation hosts an archery program for youth at Morgan Park Community Center and in other park spaces.



## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

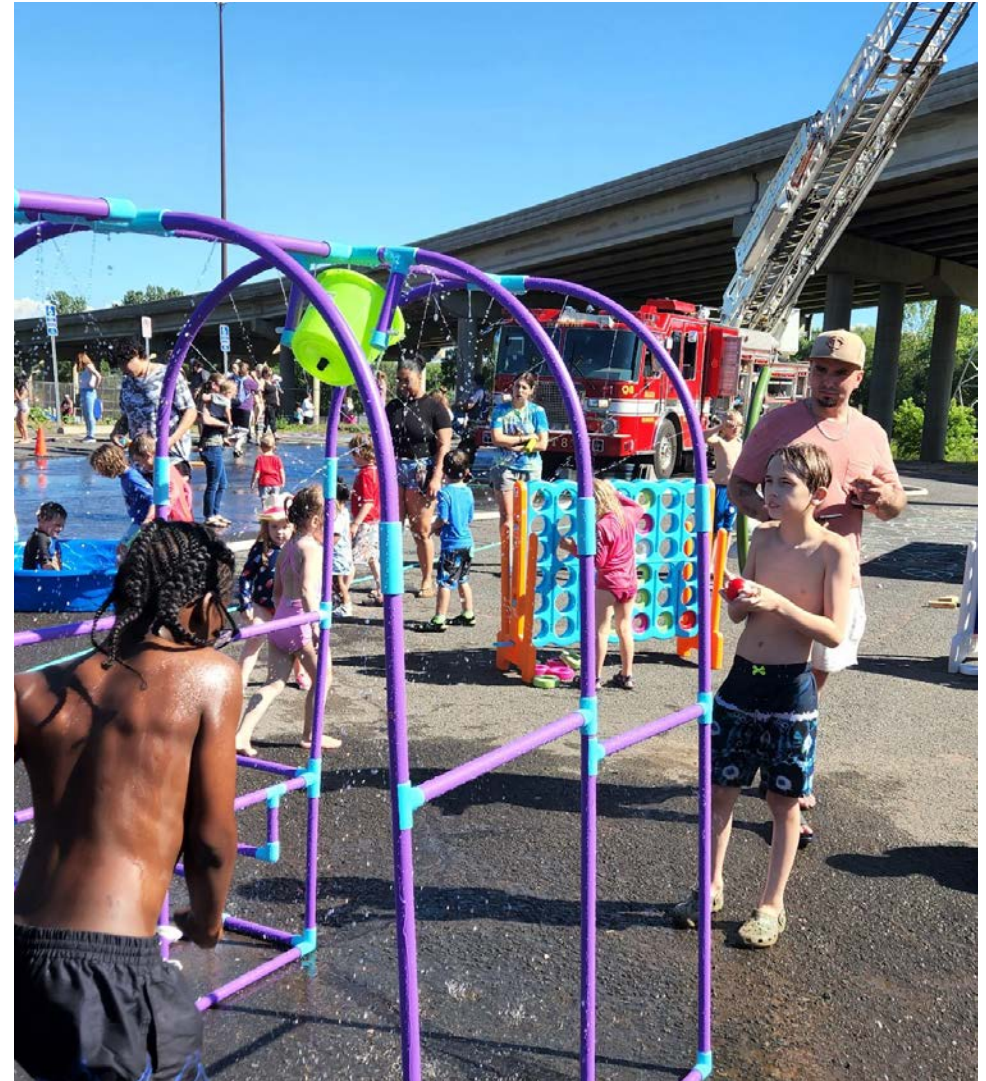
### GOAL M. **Bolster relationships with partners who provide programming and recreation services, and support opportunities that fill gaps in existing local programming options.**

The City of Duluth is fortunate to have strong community recreation service provider partners. As Parks and Recreation continues to build its programming, it should consider opportunities, both internally and through fostering external partnerships, to fill gaps in services. Many community recreation service providers use the City's facilities to provide programming. These partnerships bring multiple opportunities for mutual benefits, such as sharing costs for supplies, equipment, facility space, staff, volunteers, programming ideas, participant databases, marketing, and promotions. The following strategies focus on building and enhancing these partnerships, while also strengthening the ability to maintain park spaces for continued public use. Strategies also carefully consider Parks and Recreation's role in permitting, programming, and operating, and how they can close gaps and provide the community with a robust and vibrant array of programming opportunities that support the well-being of all people.

#### STRATEGIES

- M1. Evaluate internal and external program offerings to identify community recreation programming gaps, potential new program offerings, and areas for expanded and more formalized partnerships between Parks and Recreation and other community recreation service providers.
- M2. Engage in effective communication strategies to foster connections among community recreation providers, to receive and respond to feedback, and to disseminate information to the community about recreation opportunities.
- M3. Evaluate potential partnerships with the Duluth Transit Authority and other transportation providers for coupling public transportation passes with program registrations to ease access barriers.
- M4. Strengthen relationship with the school district to maximize year-round program opportunities by sharing indoor and outdoor facilities with one another.

- M5. Collaborate with area colleges and universities to foster connections between students and various public, private, and non-profit partners to advance the long-term success of recreation and natural resource management in Duluth.



Pop-up Splash Pads fill a local programming gap and foster a partnership with the Duluth Fire Department.





## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

### GOAL N. Promote and support strategically targeted volunteerism to efficiently increase the safe use and enjoyment of park spaces.

Supporting a culture of volunteerism in the park system helps with upkeep, shared responsibility, civic pride and belonging, championing, and stewardship of the city's expansive parks and recreation system. With focused dedication to engaging volunteer efforts, the City can bolster activities for habitat restoration, beautification, litter pickup, trail maintenance, and multi-generational learning.

#### STRATEGIES

- N1. Define and expand viable volunteer opportunities that support the stewardship, and/or care of park spaces for both one-time volunteer groups (e.g., litter clean-ups) and on-going volunteers (e.g., adopt programs).
- N2. Publicly acknowledge partner and volunteer contributions to community recreation, upkeep, and culture.
- N3. Nurture relationships with local user groups, advocacy groups, environmental partners, and volunteers supporting project development, implementation, programming, and maintenance efforts.
- N4. Identify staff and resources needed to provide expanded opportunities for engagement and volunteerism in stewardship and programming efforts.



Volunteers play a large role in helping the Duluth park system, including helping with maintenance and stewardship.



## STRENGTHEN PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND VOLUNTEERISM

### GOAL O. Increase community awareness of recreational opportunities in park spaces.

To maximize program offerings by Parks and Recreation, as well as other community recreation service providers, Parks and Recreation should focus efforts on visibility and marketing. This goal includes strategies for the creation of a strong marketing effort to inform and promote the recreation programs and services that are available in the park system.

#### STRATEGIES

- O1. Develop a visionary marketing plan that outlines areas of focus, specific marketing tools and tasks, responsible staff members for implementation, financial resources that are required, and a thorough evaluation process.
- O2. Integrate marketing efforts with community recreation service providers, the business community, and social service and healthcare providers to do more targeted outreach, meet people where they are already gathering, and promote programs that may be of interest to them.
- O3. Act as a “clearinghouse” for recreation programs and services provided in park spaces.
- O4. Identify funds to support a marketing and communications staff member to implement the marketing plan.
- O5. Host popular activities in under-utilized park spaces that are well maintained to better activate and increase awareness of those park spaces.
- O6. Update and maintain Parks and Recreation’s website to be more user-friendly when searching for park types, amenities, and program opportunities across the system.



The beach safety program at Park Point Beach helps young residents feel more comfortable near the water.





“The way we care for and protect natural resources in our parks is important for achieving the goals of the City of Duluth’s Climate Action Work Plan. Whether tackling Emerald Ash Borer, converting landscapes to no-mow zones with more pollinator plants, saving energy by using LED lights, or installing solar to offset ski trail lighting, Parks and Recreation can take a lead on sustainability. “

Mindy Granley, City of  
Duluth Sustainability  
Officer

## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

Duluth’s signature outdoor recreation experiences are natural resource based. The city has an extensive trail network of over 350 miles of City-owned and maintained trails that encourages all-season recreation and fosters connections between people and the outdoors. With 5,540 acres of natural / passive park lands, the City’s commitment to land conservation and investment in nature-based recreation is a significant contributor to Duluth’s strong sense of place and reflects community values. There is often a misconception that these spaces require little to no maintenance or improvement. However, nature near urban areas requires stewardship to not only be protected or maintained, but to thrive. Thriving natural areas provide environmental benefits, such as supporting diverse wildlife, providing resilience to natural disasters, and improved air and water quality.

Public access to open spaces also provides many human benefits such as offering a stage for environmental education, promoting wellness, and facilitating spiritual and cultural connections. Community feedback has emphasized that residents value the opportunities they have to spend time outdoors, connect with nature,

protect the natural environment, and maintain and improve their health. Parks and Recreation is well-positioned to nurture these community values through stewardship education initiatives, which can further protect and enhance trails and natural areas.

As Duluth looks to acquire natural lands for permanent protection, under the direction of the City’s Imagine Duluth 2035 Comprehensive Plan, it will be important to institute land management practices that increase climate-resiliency and provide safe, sustainable user experiences. The Sustain Trails and Natural Areas theme provides direction on how to do just that, while also highlighting the importance of implementing the City’s Natural Resource Management Program Plan (NRMPP), and promoting a culture of respect for public lands.



## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

### WHAT WE HEARD...

#### IMPORTANCE OF TRAILS

**81%** of residents selected walking, hiking, and running on trails as one of the top 5 ways that they use the park system.

**60%** of residents feel there is about the right amount of unpaved trails for hiking and snowshoeing.

#### TRAIL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Focus group participants stated that there should be ways to onboard new trail users to **increase education and stewardship.**

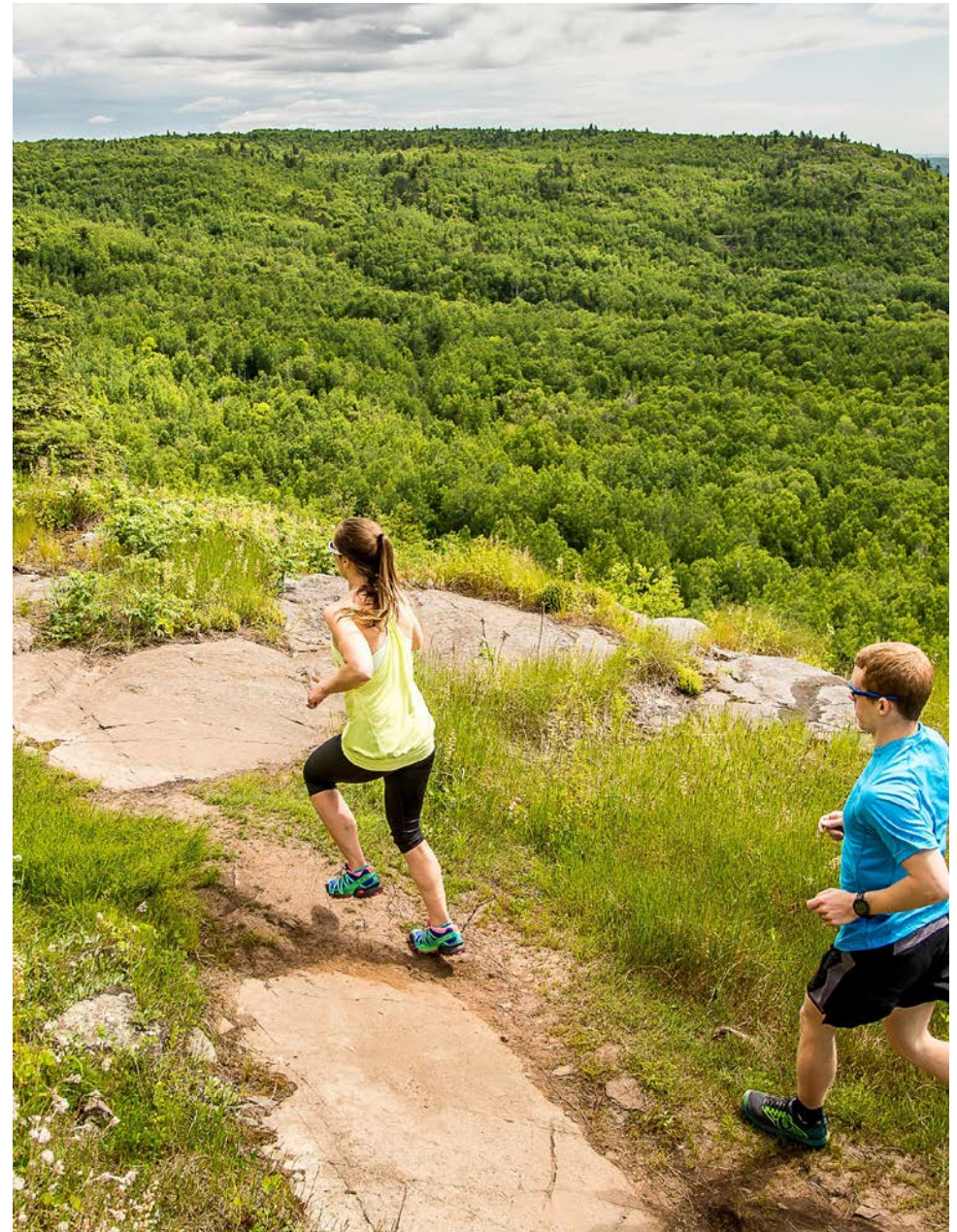
#### VALUES

**80%** of residents identified enjoying nature and wildlife as one of the top 5 ways they use the park system.

**88%** of residents felt that protecting natural environments, wildlife, and providing environmental resiliency was an essential or very important purpose for the park system.

**89%** of residents felt that opportunities to spend time outdoors and connect with nature was an essential or very important purpose for the park system.

Source: 2021 Parks & Recreation Survey Report



Multi-use trail at Ely's Peak overlooking the Magney-Snively Natural Area.  
Source: Hansi Johnson





## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

**GOAL P. Protect and enhance our open spaces to restore and maintain ecological health, build resilience to natural disasters, and preserve the area's natural beauty.**

Duluth's Natural Resource Management Program Plan (NRMPP) charts a resilient future for the City's natural lands. It helps to identify, assess, and invest in the future of Duluth's publicly owned open space lands. Supporting and investing in the directives set forth by the NRMPP means preserving ecological functions and values, enhancing the ecosystem, and reducing impacts of natural disasters.

### STRATEGIES

- P1. Support the on-going efforts of Duluth's Natural Resource Management Program Plan (NRMPP).
- P2. Establish a process to collect and analyze data that will be used to determine the most ecologically valuable open spaces.
- P3. Identify and prioritize habitats that offer critical ecological functions and develop mechanisms to protect, restore, and expand these habitats.
- P4. Work with City boards and commissions to identify lands within Duluth that have historical and/or cultural significance and identify a process for preservation.
- P5. Maintain and steward high-quality partnerships to help achieve the goals of the NRMPP.



Signage can help to alert users to preservation efforts and maintain ecological health.



## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

### **GOAL Q. Increase climate-resiliency throughout our park and trail system through modern design and best management practices.**

While the impacts of climate change are already evident in Duluth, the city's relatively moderate climate, proximity to fresh water, potential for growth, and expansive park system places it in a unique position to become a climate refuge hub. Leveraging the park system for climate change mitigation includes considering how these spaces can promote carbon storage and alleviate pressures from climate change effects. Pursuing resiliency will require ongoing collaboration with relevant stakeholders, exploration of current and future mitigation and adaptation opportunities, and remaining flexible within a changing climate.

#### **STRATEGIES**

- Q1. Develop climate adaptation strategies and natural lands management practices that support high environmental quality and resilience in alignment with the City's Climate Action Work Plan.
- Q2. Continue to work with St. Louis River Corridor stakeholders to discuss needs and further action plans for St. Louis River Estuary restoration and preservation.
- Q3. Develop forest management plans for important forested areas, boulevard trees, and parks.
- Q4. Implement urban forest management best practices to increase the health of the urban forest to reduce heat island effect, improve air quality, and provide wildlife habitats.
- Q5. Identify mitigation tactics for park properties that may be impacted by flooding, rising water, or other hazards.



The Hartley Nature Center provides a strong example of opportunities to integrate climate resilience in design, such as incorporating solar panels, native pollinator habitats, and extensive stormwater management practices.





## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

### GOAL R. **Complete and maintain a comprehensive trail system offering safe, sustainable, and diverse user experiences.**

Residents ranked trail use for walking, hiking, running, biking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing among their top uses of the park system. As use of the trails increases and more modes of use are introduced, it is imperative to create and maintain a safer, more accessible system. Local trail planning efforts should prioritize completing, connecting, and maintaining trails that are envisioned in the Duluth Trail and Bikeway Plan, 2015 Cross Country Ski Trail Master Plan, Imagine Duluth 2035 Plan, Duluth Traverse Mini-Master Plan, and individual area plans.

#### STRATEGIES

- R1. Prioritize a list of trail enhancement and creation projects remaining to be implemented from previous trail plans and create a timeline for capital investments.
- R2. Link undeveloped recreational land to existing parks through trail corridor connectivity.
- R3. Prioritize connections between parks and open space, residences, schools, and grocery stores to advance efforts of environmental justice.
- R4. Promote understanding and safety of all trail users by indicating the trail type and uses on signs across the park system, as directed in Parks and Recreation's signage standards.



Duluthians use the trail system year-round.



## SUSTAIN TRAILS AND NATURAL AREAS

**GOAL S. Promote a culture of respect for public lands, trails, and waterways, as well as other system users, through stewardship education initiatives.**

Conversations with focus groups that have a unique perspective on outdoor recreation and education opportunities in Duluth indicated that efforts are needed to educate new park and trail users on proper stewardship of natural lands. Educational efforts might teach new users seasonal best practice for care and upkeep. By encouraging residents to learn about the park system and participate in initiatives that steward, enhance, and maintain open space, Duluth's park system will improve and promote more activity.

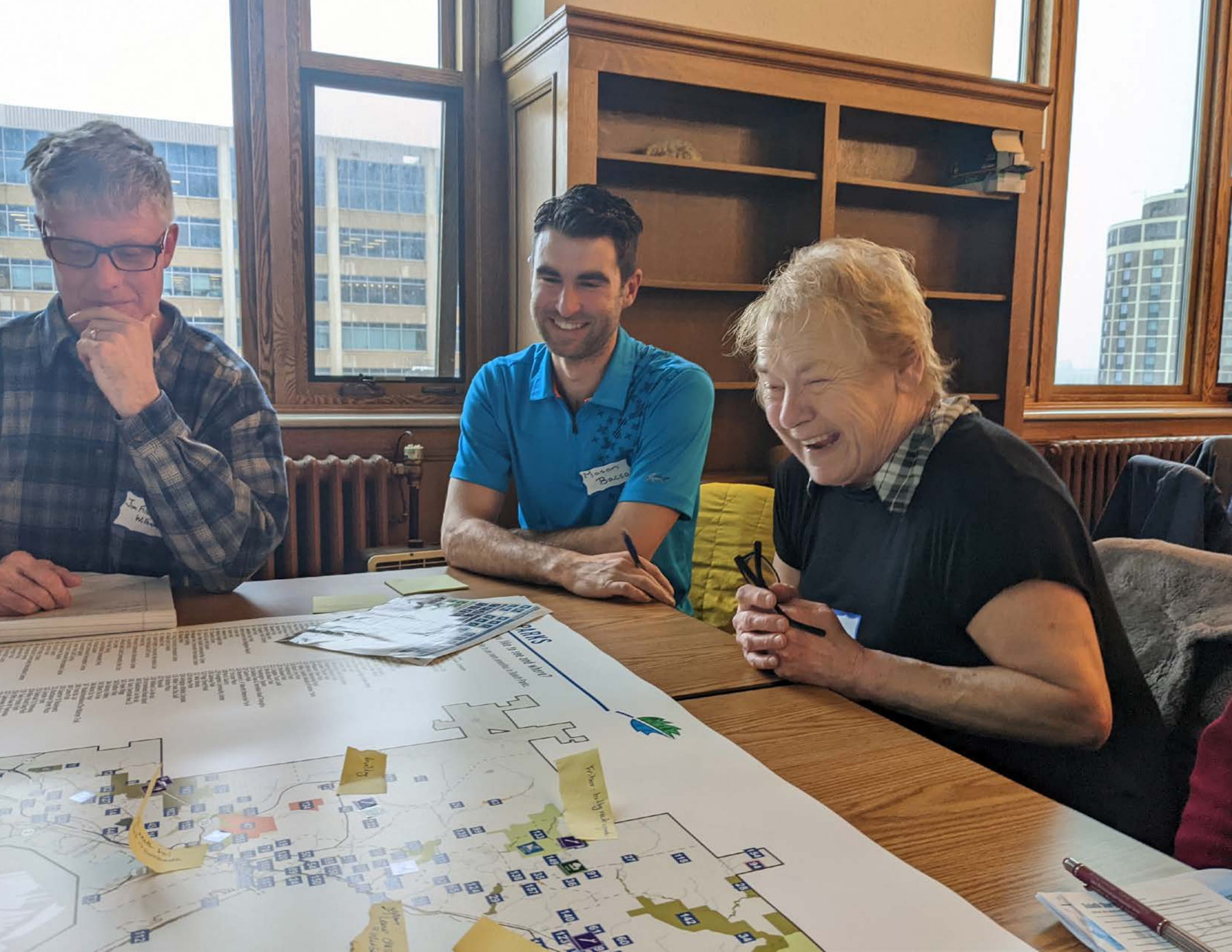
### STRATEGIES

- S1. Support a culture of volunteerism, and help keep parks, trails, and open spaces in a state of good repair throughout all four seasons, by providing educational opportunities for trail users on how to become trail stewards (i.e., proper trail etiquette, adapting to seasonal changes, leave no trace principles, etc.).
- S2. Collaborate with trail user groups to create a shared understanding of current and emerging trail uses and best practices for avoiding user conflicts, to provide education on etiquette expectations, and where possible and appropriate, to plan for parallel trails.
- S3. Build relationships among staff, other agencies, and Tribal leaders to increase knowledge and practice of land management procedures that link to Indigenous life, stewardship, and culture.
- S4. Incorporate engaging and educational interpretive signage in natural areas to encourage land stewardship.
- S5. Continue to formalize trail access points and ensure they are well-marked for trail entry to reduce social trails, protect surrounding natural lands, and manage formalized neighborhood access.
- S6. Formalize design and maintenance standards based on industry best practices. Utilize various standards targeted to the specific uses for each trail type and use.



Youth fishing at Chambers Grove is fun and teaches kids new skills.









# CHAPTER 4 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

## SECTION CONTENTS:

- Introduction
- Action Plan
- Level of Service Standards and Guidelines
- Funding Opportunities



# INTRODUCTION

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OVERVIEW

The Implementation Plan includes three sections: an Action Plan, Level of Service Standards and Guidelines, and Funding Recommendations.

Based on the themes, goals, and strategies outlined in Chapter 3, the Action Plan is intended to provide clear, tangible tasks and projects for implementation based on community input and prioritization criteria. It details system-wide efforts, as well as those based on the geographic subareas of western, central, and eastern Duluth. Each action item indicates which plan themes are supported and which items will require additional funding resources.

In developing action items, the following factors were considered:

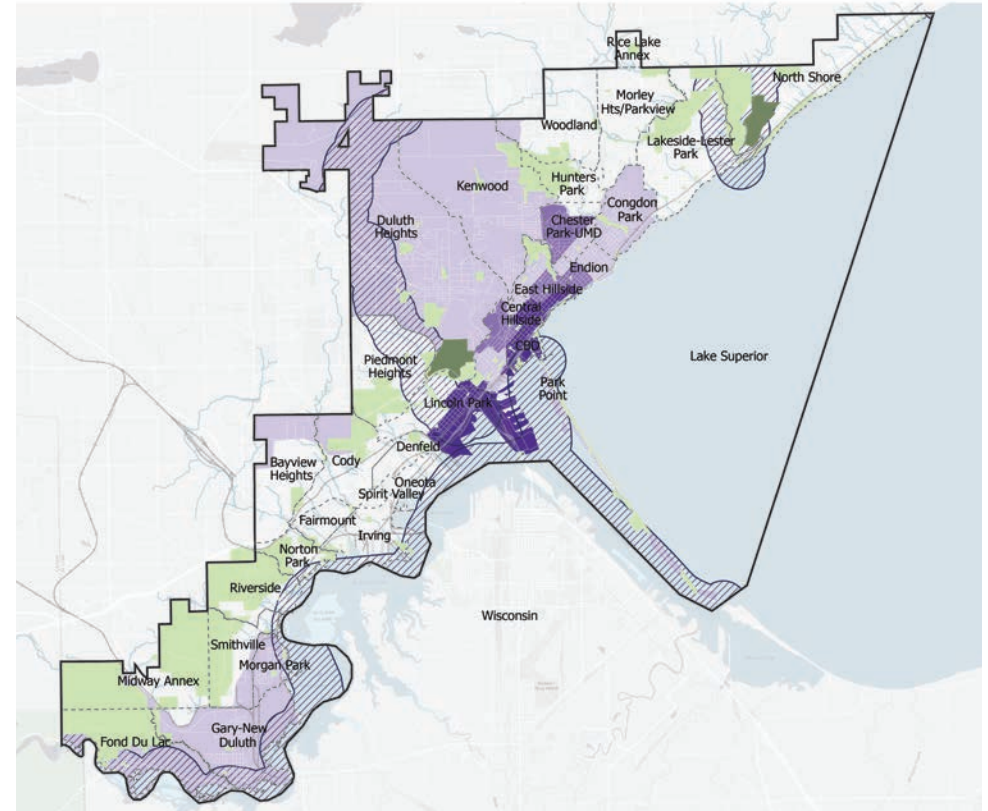
1. Previous planning efforts to support ongoing proposed efforts;
2. The statistically valid survey of resident priorities, cross tabulated by respondent zip code;
3. Map-based exercise outcomes from community workshops;
4. Technical analysis and professional recommendations; and
5. Continuous feedback from community members and community partners.

The completion of action items will be prioritized based on the following criteria:

- **Funding and Resource Dependency.** Are funding/ resources available to undertake this action?
- **Equity Goals.** Is the project or program directed to a high or medium priority equity area (Figure 15) and/or will the actions address income, age, ability, race and ethnic diversity disparities?
- **Condition.** Is this park identified as having a low condition/quality rating?
- **Potential Impact:**
  - » Extent: Will the project, program, or action result in large scale impact throughout the city rather than being limited to a singular geography?
  - » Long-term Return: Does this action have the potential to result in significant long-term benefits?

The Level of Service Standards and Guidelines portion of the Implementation Plan offers overall policy direction for Parks and Recreation to guide resources and provide a high-quality recreation system that meets community needs. Finally, the Funding Opportunities section addresses alternative and diversified financial resources for Parks and Recreation to consider, in addition to revisions to the dedicated property tax levy and tourism tax revenues, to support the park system more holistically.

**Figure 15:** Priority Equity Areas Map



Source: Design Workshop Analysis, CDC SVI Data 2021

### LEGEND

#### Equity Area

- High-Priority Equity Area
- Medium-Priority Equity Area
- Low-Priority Equity Area
- Impaired Water Quality Zone

- Open Space
- Golf Courses
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary






Factors informing the equity priority zones include median household income, race, physical activity levels, disability status, mental health, age, population density, and car ownership.

# ACTION PLAN

## SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION ITEMS

The following recommendations are applicable to areas across the city with an aim of maximizing benefits for all Duluthians.






**Table 21:** System-Wide Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>SW1:</b> Ask City Council to authorize a referendum that would, if approved by voters, increase funds generated by the existing Park Fund levy and allow them to grow over time by changing the levy from a fixed dollar amount to a fixed percentage of taxable property value. Prioritize the additional funds for parks capital maintenance.	X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>SW2:</b> Work in partnership with Duluth's Planning and Economic Development Department to codify development requirements for new construction. These may include park dedication and/or in-lieu fees that would be provided to Parks and Recreation and support system expansion that keeps pace with new developments.		X	X				
<b>SW3:</b> Ask City Council to renew the existing half-and-half tourism tax to support sports tourism citywide by investing in capital improvements to publicly owned community athletic facilities.	X		X				
<b>SW4:</b> Ask City Council to consider an increased allotment of local tourism tax dollars for key parks serving as tourist destinations in order to support their higher maintenance needs.	X		X				
<b>SW5:</b> Identify funding and re-establish a Park Ranger Program to improve safety and serve as a resource for residents and visitors in park spaces.		X	X			X	
<b>SW6:</b> Create a dedicated "enterprise fund" for other heavily reserved areas, similar to the Bayfront Festival Park model, where user and rental fees are put back into maintenance and capital investments.	X		X		X		
<b>SW7:</b> Preserve, restore, and maintain natural lands in accordance with the Natural Resources Management Program Plan (NRMPP) recommendations.		X		X			X
<b>SW8:</b> Implement sustainable management plans to improve water quality, increase habitat, and reduce maintenance. Strategies may include mow/no-mow standards, transitioning parks and open spaces to more naturally functioning landscapes and stream bank restoration.	X			X			X








# ACTION PLAN

**Continued...Table 21:** System-Wide Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>SW9:</b> Stabilize steep slopes in park areas and work to mitigate/correct storm water runoff issues as appropriate for the conditions and work to prevent erosion thorough education, enforcement, and management actions.		X					X
<b>SW10:</b> Complete a needs assessment and reinvestment plan for public campgrounds in Duluth to determine whether and how to reinvest in the deteriorated city campground at Indian Point and whether, where, and how to invest in a new city campground at another location.		X	X	X			X
<b>SW11:</b> Develop and implement trailhead standards for level of service and types of amenities, built upon previous planning efforts.		X		X			X
<b>SW12:</b> Update the Duluth Trail and Bikeway Plan to reflect current conditions.		X		X			X
<b>SW13:</b> Update map of existing trails and planned major trails every 3-4 years. Ensure that these revised maps are distributed through partners, businesses, public places, and online.		X		X		X	X
<b>SW14:</b> Advance plans in the Duluth Traverse Mini-Master Plan to ensure continued development of mountain bike infrastructure for riders of all skill levels, and with an emphasis on less skilled riders.		X		X			X
<b>SW15:</b> Assess, design, and finance solutions for challenging park infrastructure maintenance problems, based on scale, expense, structural design, cultural significance, and permitting challenges. Examples include Leif Erikson stage, major Cascade Park gazebo, Enger Tower, etc.		X	X	X	X		
<b>SW16:</b> Develop and implement a pavement management plan for paved trails and parking lots to ensure regular seal coating, overlay and/or replacement.		X	X	X			X
<b>SW17:</b> Develop and implement a system-wide lights standard for parks that complies with City energy standards, prioritizes safety, and, where possible, achieves “dark sky” principles.		X	X		X		
<b>SW18:</b> Continue to implement the Gate, Wayfinding, and Signage Plan, with greater emphasis on Indigenous language and cultural representation and a focus on ensuring that major, city-wide trail systems are well-signed to serve both locals and tourists in wayfinding efforts.		X		X	X		X

# ACTION PLAN






**Continued...Table 21:** System-Wide Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>SW19:</b> Create a guiding document for public art installation in park spaces to work in conjunction with any future funding and maintenance procedures from the Duluth Public Art Commission.		X		X	X		
<b>SW20:</b> Prepare a resource guide for staff to utilize when language assistance or interpretation is needed on a case-by-case basis.		X			X		
<b>SW21:</b> Support City-wide efforts to effectively address health and safety challenges associated with unhoused individuals within park spaces.	X		X		X		X
<b>SW22:</b> Complete an accessibility audit of parks, playgrounds, facilities, and amenities to benchmark and prioritize actions for elements in need of accessibility alterations or replacements.		X	X	X	X		
<b>SW23:</b> Develop and implement policies to solicit, accept, and allocate donations to support a scholarship program for individuals lacking financial means to participate in programming.	X		X			X	
<b>SW24:</b> Conduct an evaluation of internal and external programs to identify gaps in Duluth's recreation program offerings.	X					X	
<b>SW25:</b> Identify staffing and information needs to support city staff to be a resource for recreation programs, special events and facility information within park spaces.		X	X		X	X	
<b>SW26:</b> Identify staff and resource needs to develop a multi-year and annual marketing plan for Parks and Recreation offerings.		X	X		X	X	
<b>SW27:</b> Create a social media campaign to advertise program registration, describe offerings, celebrate park improvements, and recognize park partners.	X				X	X	
<b>SW28:</b> Provide all-ages programming in densely populated neighborhoods in centrally located spaces.		X			X	X	
<b>SW29:</b> Establish a youth development and career path program for teens interested in the recreation profession.		X	X		X	X	
<b>SW30:</b> Develop and implement a standardized programming evaluation process for Parks and Recreation program offerings.		X	X		X	X	








# ACTION PLAN

Continued...Table 21: System-Wide Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>SW31:</b> Implement a trail maintenance plan, in collaboration with trails organizations, to support trail use in all four seasons, continue routine maintenance activities, and identify areas in need of invasive species treatment and restoration efforts.		X	X		X	X	X
<b>SW32:</b> Expand program offerings for older active adults, environmental education and nature exploration, entry-level and skill-building experiences with outdoor recreation activities, and multi-generational activities.	X			X	X	X	X
<b>SW33:</b> Reorganize Park Maintenance staffing to balance regular maintenance with specialized maintenance expertise across the city.		X	X			X	
<b>SW34:</b> Complete and implement a citywide community athletic facilities needs assessment and reinvestment plan that will cost-effectively improve the quality and equitable availability of fields, courts, rinks, and ancillary athletic amenities.		X	X	X	X	X	
<b>SW35:</b> Formalize a Parks and Recreation policies and procedures manual.	X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>SW36:</b> Establish and implement a framework for various levels of formal and informal partnership agreements that identify roles, expectations, facility-scheduling, fees, operations, and maintenance.	X		X		X	X	
<b>SW37:</b> Develop and implement a Community Engagement Plan for Parks and Recreation planning efforts.		X	X		X		
<b>SW38:</b> Implement and uphold permitting policies and practices. Review and update use agreements to assure appropriate return to the City and delivery of quality recreation services.	X		X		X	X	
<b>SW39:</b> Expand on the current Permit Guide to detail preferred uses of specific park spaces to encourage park activation.	X				X	X	X
<b>SW40:</b> Conduct a pavilion locations evaluation to better plan for equitable distribution and right-sizing of gathering spaces.	X			X	X		
<b>SW41:</b> Conduct a study to evaluate the possibility of adding an indoor playground space to an existing or proposed community recreation center.		X		X	X	X	

# ACTION PLAN

Continued...Table 21: System-Wide Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>SW42:</b> Conduct an analysis to identify appropriate places for locating splash pad(s) to provide residents opportunities for safe water access and refuge from urban heat islands.		X	X	X	X		
<b>SW43:</b> Identify appropriate open space sites that are well-suited to provide temporary water infiltration functions.		X					X
<b>SW44:</b> Identify staffing and resource needs to develop area-specific forest management plans that include boulevard trees and that addresses species selection and succession, appropriate forestry management policies, and emergency procedures for events such as wildfire, disease/insect infestation, and windstorms.	X						X
<b>SW45:</b> Develop a Building Action Plan that identifies a framework for prioritizing investment in park buildings.	X		X		X	X	
<b>SW46:</b> Develop a Restroom Facilities Action Plan that identifies a framework for prioritizing investment in various restroom facility types.	X		X			X	
<b>SW47:</b> Develop a Playground Action Plan that identifies a framework for prioritizing investment in playground equipment.	X		X		X		
<b>SW48:</b> Coordinate reporting tools and contact forms on the City website to consolidate and centralize the submission process for citizens.	X		X		X		
<b>SW49:</b> Develop policies and procedures for the naming of parks, trails, and assets within the park system.	X		X		X		X
<b>SW50:</b> Develop a revised and right-sized memorial program that is sustainable and addresses replacement cycle needs.	X		X		X		



## WESTERN DULUTH

In comparison to other subareas, a greater percentage of residents in the western Duluth subarea use parks and recreation spaces for off-leash dog parks and playing at playgrounds.

**Figure 16: Western Duluth Subarea Park System Map**






**Legend:**

- Destination
- Community
- Neighborhood
- Special Use
- Plaza
- Parkway
- Natural / Passive Park
- Trailhead/Water Access
- Undeveloped
- Streams
- Duluth City Boundary
- Railroads
- Trails

# ACTION PLAN

The following recommendations are applicable to the western Duluth subarea. Action items are not listed in prioritized order.






**Table 22:** Western Duluth Subarea Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>W1:</b> Implement the interrelated plans for Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail Mini-Master Plan, Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail Interpretive Trail Plan, and the St. Louis River Estuary Water Trail.		X		X			X
<b>W2:</b> Acquire essential green space in the Brewer, St. Louis River, Mission Creek, and Spirit Mountain areas and designate those properties as protected parkland, in accordance with the Imagine Duluth 2035 plan and the Natural Resource Management Program Plan.		X		X			X
<b>W3:</b> Support Spirit Mountain Recreation Authority's implementation of Spirit Mountain Master Plan and pursue opportunities to connect Spirit Mountain to the citywide parks and trails system.		X		X		X	X
<b>W4:</b> Develop and implement a mini-master plan for Indian Point Campground that outlines necessary reinvestment in campground infrastructure and/or prescribes conversion to a park that may include a water access, swimming beach, improved parking, accessible trail connections, cultural gathering space, etc.		X		X	X		X
<b>W5:</b> Fulfill potential of National Water Trail by improving water access infrastructure and working with St. Louis River Alliance and the City's tourism promoters to promote the National Water Trail as a paddling destination.	X			X		X	X
<b>W6:</b> Develop and implement a plan to establish a swimming site on a restored section of the St. Louis River Estuary.		X	X	X			X
<b>W7:</b> Evaluate the potential to encourage and increase all-level bouldering/ climbing opportunities in Short Line Park.		X		X			X
<b>W8:</b> Implement recommendations of citywide community athletic facilities needs assessment and reinvestment plan at one or more major sites in the western planning area.	X		X	X		X	
<b>W9:</b> Expand organized activities and special events offered in western Duluth, including the use of using Wheeler Athletic Complex for summer day camps delivered by Parks and Recreation.	X				X	X	



# ACTION PLAN

Continued...Table 22: Western Duluth Subarea Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>W10:</b> Support Lake Superior Zoological Society's implementation of Lake Superior Zoo master plan and pursue opportunities to connect the zoo experience to the larger citywide parks and trails system.		X				X	
<b>W11:</b> Monitor condition of Wade Stadium, including the artificial turf, building, and other facilities, and prepare a funding plan in anticipation of whole or partial repair or replacement of the facilities.		X	X		X	X	

# ACTION PLAN

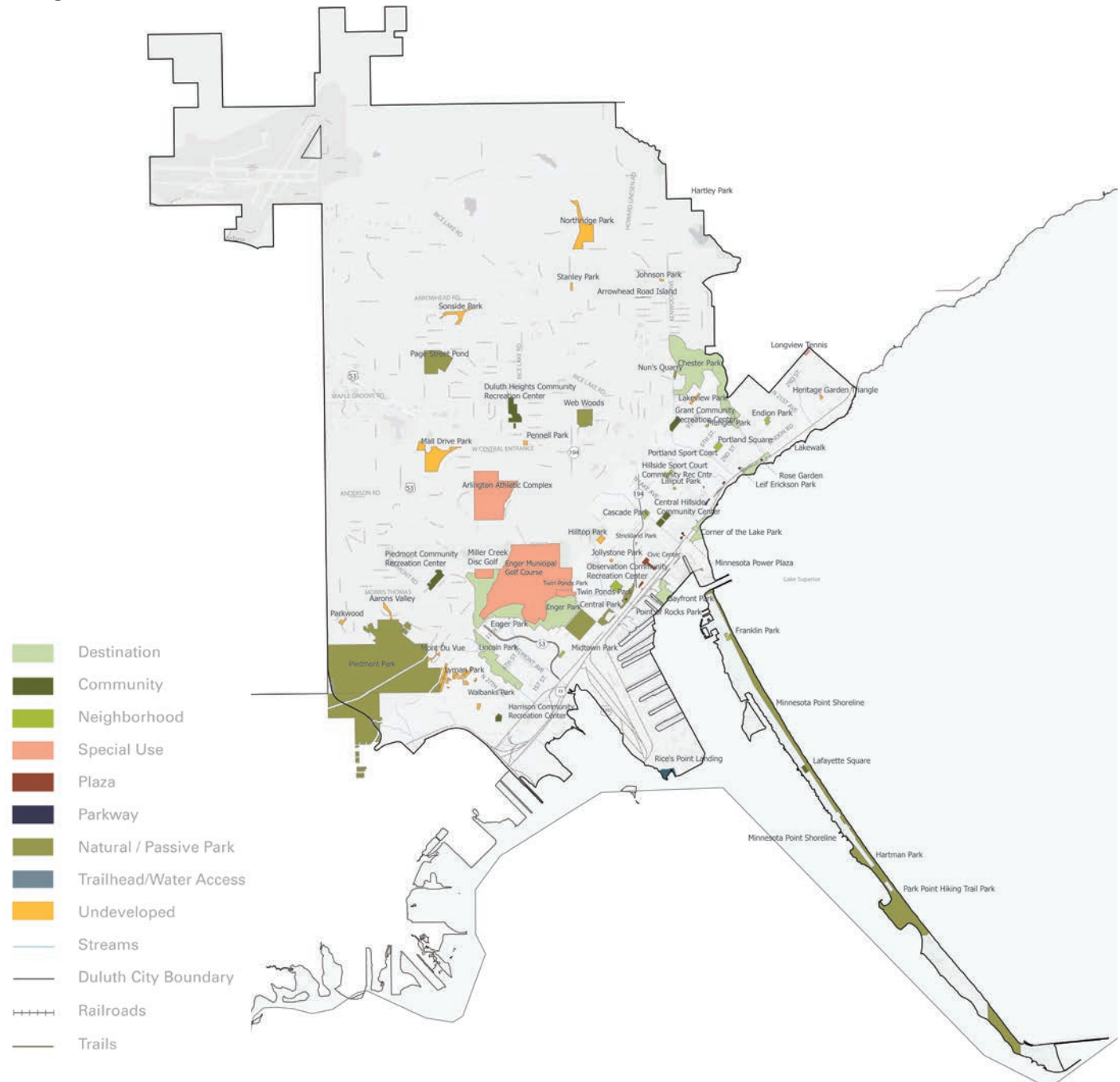
## CENTRAL DULUTH

The Central Duluth subarea is made up of neighborhoods including the Central Business District (CBD), Central Hillside, Downtown, East Hillside, Park Point, Chester Park, Endion, Kenwood, Duluth Heights, and Piedmont Heights (Figure 17). The neighborhoods in the northern part of this area have a relatively low population density. Central Hillside, East Hillside, and Downtown are mostly within high and medium priority equity areas, making this an area of focus for actions.

Park types in central Duluth span from destination and special use parks to neighborhood parks and plazas, with a few undeveloped parks in the northern area. Several of the smaller developed parks are in poor condition or challenging for residents to access by foot.

The top activities identified by residents in central Duluth are enjoying nature, walking, running, and hiking. Compared to the rest of Duluth, a higher proportion of residents in the more centralized area said that they use the City's parks and recreation facilities for swimming, organized special events, and camping. In the northern area, a significantly higher percentage of residents use park and recreation spaces to play team sports and for organized special events.

**Figure 17:** Central Duluth Subarea Park System Map










# ACTION PLAN

The following recommendations are applicable to the western Duluth subarea. Action items are not listed in prioritized order.






**Table 23:** Central Duluth Subarea Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>C1:</b> Implement the Lincoln Park Mini-Master Plan including restored historic pavilion, rehabilitated picnic shelter and new playground, parking lots, nature playscape, accessible walking trails, sports field and sport court.		X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>C2:</b> Ensure that the future renovations of the Chester Bowl Chalet continue to offer public restrooms, along with strategic placement of portable restrooms.		X	X		X		
<b>C3:</b> Enhance spaces for active recreation activities in Chester Park including improving the multi-use sports field and playground area.		X	X	X		X	
<b>C4:</b> Commence planning effort for Park Point Recreation Area to address aging infrastructure and climate impacts, to identify desired recreation options that are compatible and sustainable, to increase connectivity to recreation and water, and to strategize appropriate restroom and trash/recycling amenity locations.		X	X	X			X
<b>C5:</b> Continue to implement “low mow” efforts at Park Point Recreation Area. Enhance green spaces with natural plants and pollinator gardens to support climate resiliency efforts.	X						X
<b>C6:</b> Secure funding for upgrades to aging infrastructure in Cascade Park and Leif Erikson Park.		X	X				
<b>C7:</b> Develop mini-master plans for Central Hillside Park, Hillside Sport Court, Observation Park, Gichi-Ode’ Akiing, and Leif Erikson Park. Seek funding to support the implementation of plan outcomes.		X	X	X	X		
<b>C8:</b> Relocate and redevelop Midtown Park to mitigate impacts of the Twin Ports Interchange Reconstruction project.		X		X	X		
<b>C9:</b> Implement the Duluth Lakewalk Renewal plan to ensure safe public access to Lake Superior, coastal resiliency, and preservation of natural resources and characteristics near the shoreline.		X		X			X

Note that previous analyses separated Duluth Heights and central Duluth subarea; action items in Duluth Heights and central Duluth subareas have been combined into one section for purposes of implementation.

# ACTION PLAN

**Continued...Table 23:** Central Duluth Subarea Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>C10:</b> Implement recommendations of citywide community athletic facilities needs assessment and reinvestment plan at one or more major sites in the central planning area.		X	X	X		X	
<b>C11:</b> Acquire essential green space in the Page Street Pond, Piedmont, and St. Scholastica areas and designate those properties as protected parkland, in accordance with the Imagine Duluth 2035 plan and the Natural Resource Management Program Plan.		X		X			X
<b>C12:</b> Conduct a feasibility study related to the possible acquisition of tax-forfeit properties for conversion to small neighborhood parks, specifically for areas with low park access that have experienced a large influx of residential development.		X	X	X	X		
<b>C13:</b> Pursue financing to complete construction of the Campus Connector Trail.		X	X	X			X
<b>C14:</b> In partnership with other agencies and other City departments, continue to work towards beach preservation, natural resource management, and safe access points along the Minnesota Point Shoreline.		X		X		X	X
<b>C15:</b> Identify a Community Park in a High Priority-Equity Area to host a splash pad for safe water access and refuge from urban heat islands, while minimizing City resources (staffing, maintenance, etc.).		X		X	X		
<b>C16:</b> Convert space within an existing and underutilized park in central Duluth to include an enclosed, off-leash dog area.	X			X	X		
<b>C17:</b> Evaluate long-term maintenance and site needs for water-based recreation delivered by third-party non-profits such as Duluth - Superior Sailing Association at the Park Point Recreation Area.		X		X		X	
<b>C18:</b> Implement the Enger Golf Course Renovation Plan.		X		X	X		

Note that previous analyses separated Duluth Heights and central Duluth subareas; action items in Duluth Heights and central Duluth subareas have been combined into one section for purposes of implementation.



# ACTION PLAN

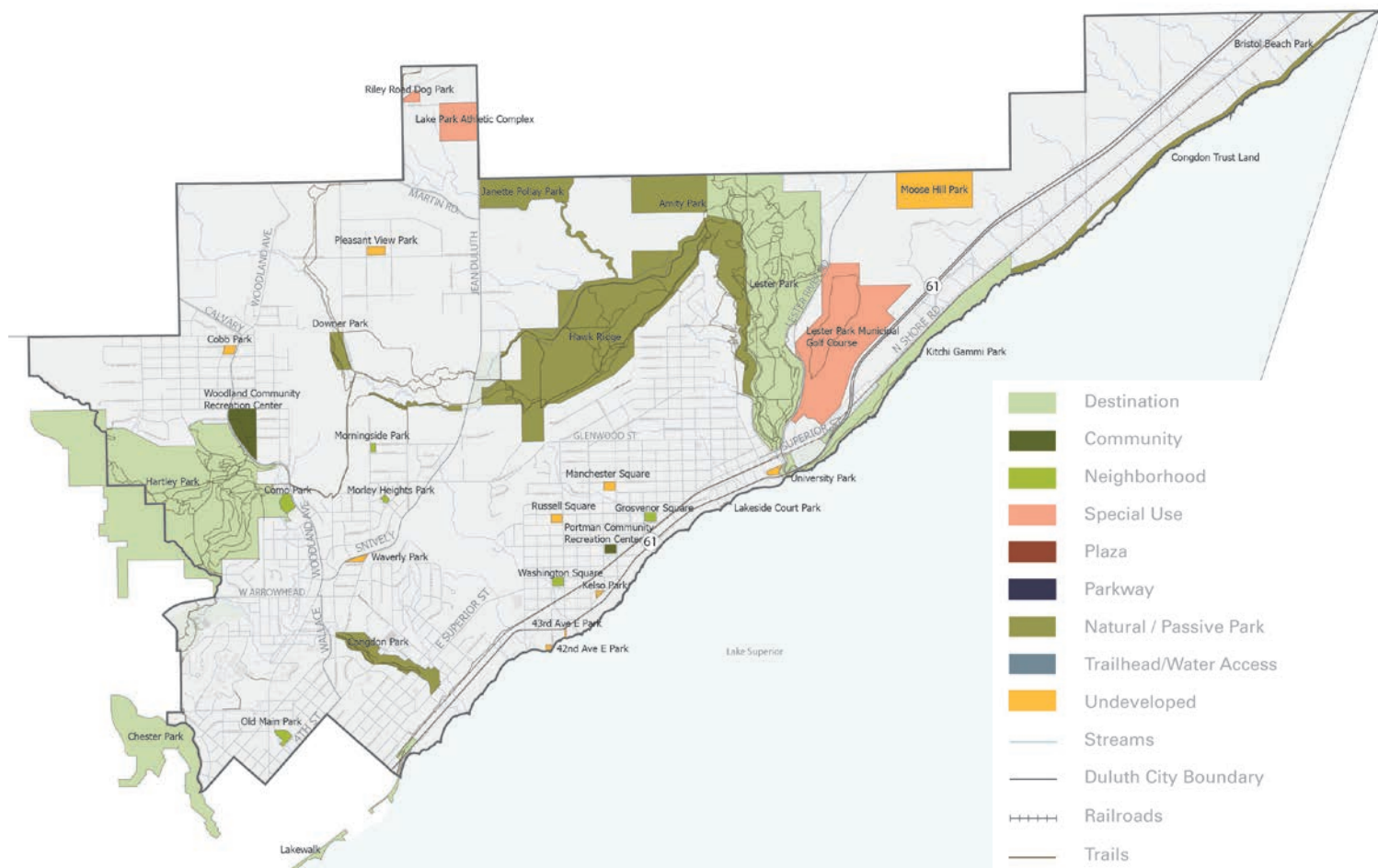
## EASTERN DULUTH

Neighborhoods included in the Eastern Duluth subarea, for the purposes of this Action Plan, include North Shore, Morley Heights, Parkview, Lakeside-Lester Park, Congdon Park, Hunters Park, and Woodland (Figure 18). In this subarea, only the neighborhoods closest to UMD are within a high-priority equity zone.

The Eastern Duluth subarea includes undeveloped open land, community parks, destination parks, and special use parks. Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, Lester Park, the Lester River, and Hartley Park are some of the key parks and recreation spaces in eastern Duluth. The Walkshed Analysis Map (Figure 8, page 43) shows many of the residences in central Lakeside Lester Park, North Shore, western Morley Heights, and Park View are outside of a 10-minute walk from parks. Additional trail connections may improve this.

A majority of the residents in this subarea visit Duluth's parks and recreation at least once a week. Top activities include walking, hiking, running, and enjoying nature. A large majority of residents, as compared to the other subareas, also enjoy snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, and sledding.






**Figure 18:** Eastern Duluth Subarea Park System Map



# ACTION PLAN

The following recommendations are applicable to the western Duluth subarea. Action items are not listed in prioritized order.

**Table 24:** Eastern Duluth Subarea Action Items

ACTION ITEM	WITHIN CURRENT FUNDING	ADDITIONAL FUNDING REQUIRED	THEME				
			INVEST IN DULUTH'S FUTURE 	UNIQUELY DULUTH EXPERIENCES 	PARKS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY 	PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERISM 	TRAILS & NATURAL AREAS 
<b>E1:</b> Develop a mini-master plan for future improvement and use of the 230-acre portion of Lester Park Golf Course that the City intends to retain as a protected park following permanent closure of the course.		X	X	X	X		X
<b>E2:</b> Implement recommendations of citywide community athletic facilities needs assessment and reinvestment plan at one or more major sites in the eastern planning area.		X	X	X		X	
<b>E3:</b> Protect, formalize, and improve existing unofficial neighborhood trail connections to parks by acquiring select tax forfeit and cemetery property then designating, maintaining, and, in some cases, improving the trails.		X	X	X			X
<b>E4:</b> Improve access points and formalized connections between residential areas and water bodies.		X	X	X			X
<b>E5:</b> Develop mini-master plans for Portman Community Recreation Area and Woodland Community Recreation Area.		X	X	X	X	X	
<b>E6:</b> Complete resilient restoration of Brighton Beach Park.		X	X	X			X
<b>E7:</b> Acquire essential green space in the Lester Park and Downer Park areas and designate those properties as protected parkland, in accordance with the Imagine Duluth 2035 plan and the Natural Resource Management Program Plan.	X		X				X
<b>E8:</b> Conduct a feasibility study to retain, remove, or modify the pond in Hartley Park to best balance recreation, aesthetics, history and ecology.		X					X
<b>E9:</b> Pursue financing to complete construction of the Campus Connector Trail.		X	X	X			X
<b>E10:</b> Collaborate with the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory for implementation of the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve Mini-Master Plan.		X	X	X	X	X	X







# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

## DISTRIBUTION OF AMENITIES GUIDELINES

The guidelines in Table 25 provide recommendations for the distribution of specific park amenities in each park classification type. The recommendations are based on park classification descriptions, popularity of use, resources required for upkeep and maintenance, and the distribution of park types within the existing system.

**Table 25:** Guidelines for Distribution of Amenities by Park Classification

PARK CLASSIFICATION	ABUNDANT	MODERATE	LIMITED
<b>Destination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Gathering spaces with amenities</li> <li>» Water access</li> <li>» Restrooms, lighting, trash receptacles</li> <li>» Off-street parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Multi-use trail system</li> <li>» Single-use trail system</li> <li>» All ages/abilities playgrounds</li> <li>» Interpretive signage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sports fields and courts</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Multi-use courts and fields</li> <li>» Playgrounds</li> <li>» Multi-use ice rinks</li> <li>» Community garden</li> <li>» Gathering spaces with amenities</li> <li>» Lighting and trash receptacles</li> <li>» Off-street parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Skate parks</li> <li>» Age/ability focused playground</li> <li>» Community center</li> <li>» Grills</li> <li>» Interpretive signage</li> <li>» Restrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Single-use courts or fields</li> <li>» Pavilions</li> <li>» Sand volleyball</li> <li>» Disc golf</li> <li>» Dog park</li> <li>» Trail system</li> <li>» Water access/splash pad</li> </ul>
<b>Neighborhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Picnic tables and benches</li> <li>» Playgrounds</li> <li>» Open play space</li> <li>» Lighting and trash receptacles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Water access</li> <li>» Multi-use sports and fields</li> <li>» Skate park</li> <li>» Community garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Community center</li> <li>» Multi-use ice rinks</li> <li>» Trails</li> <li>» Restrooms</li> </ul>
<b>Special Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Single-use amenity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Disc golf</li> <li>» Trails</li> <li>» Restrooms</li> <li>» Picnic tables</li> <li>» Off-street parking</li> </ul>	
<b>Plaza</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Decorative elements</li> <li>» Seating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Parking</li> <li>» Gardens and orchards</li> <li>» Hardscapes that provide for vendors</li> <li>» Micro-mobility parking/docking stations, electricity</li> </ul>	
<b>Parkway</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Landscaping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Ornamental hardscape</li> </ul>	
<b>Natural/Passive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Trail system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Benches</li> <li>» Water access</li> </ul>	
<b>Trailhead/Water Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» ADA accessible elements</li> <li>» Map and wayfinding signage</li> <li>» Water vessel launch</li> <li>» Lighting and trash receptacles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Restrooms</li> <li>» Benches</li> <li>» Interpretive signage</li> <li>» Off-street parking</li> </ul>	



# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

## OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

Duluth's expansive park and trail system requires a great amount of resources to conduct basic routine maintenance activities across the entire system. Duluth's parks have been grouped into nine park classifications: Destination Park, Community Park, Neighborhood Park, Special Use Park, Plaza, Parkway, Natural/Passive, Trailhead/Water Access, and Undeveloped. Detailed park classification descriptions and examples can be found on pages 39 and 40.

Maintenance service and frequency should be determined and allocated consistently throughout the system as informed by the park classification guidelines (see Table 25). Trail systems, such as the Cross City Trail, the Duluth Traverse and the Duluth, Winnipeg, and Pacific (DWP) trail, may go through various park classification types that receive varying levels and intensity of service, including natural/passive parks. Trails and their associated signage should receive consistent maintenance throughout the trail's route, regardless of the various park classifications they cross.

Maintenance services for grounds, amenities, and buildings are delivered primarily through the Park Maintenance and Property and Facility Management teams. Community

partners and user groups also assist in maintenance activities, most notable with athletics and trails, often through formalized maintenance agreements. Volunteerism and community engagement is a critical strategy in stewarding Duluth parks and trails. Individuals, organizations, businesses and park user groups frequently provide maintenance services to the system including litter removal, park beautification, gardening, habitat restoration, trail maintenance, and more. Volunteer coordination, while beneficial, requires substantial staff time and resources to effectively schedule, facilitate and lead projects, ensure safety, provide equipment and necessary materials, and track contributions. Striking a balance between volunteer contribution and staff coordination is important in defining and expanding engagement opportunities in maintenance operations.

The seasonality of maintenance activities in parks and on trails is significant, and routine maintenance levels are adjusted accordingly. Maintenance activities during the winter are typically limited to parks and trail-related snow removal, trail grooming, and ice rink maintenance. Park Maintenance is responsible for snow clearing on City-owned sidewalks which extend beyond the park system. Park Maintenance also holds responsibility for forestry work, including planting, watering, pruning

and removing trees, for both the parks and boulevards.

In addition to routine maintenance, Park Maintenance staff responds to graffiti reports, critical safety concerns, abandoned waste, deferred maintenance priorities, and special event requests on an as-needed basis across all park classifications.



Maintenance, including graffiti removal, serves to ensure that parks are welcoming for users.



# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

**Table 26:** Routine Park Maintenance Guidelines

## DESTINATION PARK

Generally have dedicated maintenance staff assigned for the daily care of the park for upkeep of facilities, amenities, grounds, and landscaping, including routine trash collection, restroom service, and mowing.

## COMMUNITY PARK

Typically receive weekly maintenance services and upkeep of facilities, amenities, grounds, and athletic fields and courts, including routine trash collection, restroom service, and mowing.

## NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

Monitored by staff regularly and the staff will respond to conditions on an as-needed basis. Maintenance activities are focused on supporting the intended use of the park as defined by its features and amenities. These parks receive trash collection, restroom service, and mowing on a case-by-case basis as justified by their intensity of use. Should alternate resources become available to service Destination parks, this category of parks could receive more frequent levels of service.

## SPECIAL USE PARK

Often actively managed by, or along with, a third-party partner, and maintenance responsibilities are defined and shared per formal or informal agreements. Maintenance service is variable and corresponds with the intensity, type, and frequency of use.

## PLAZA

Often actively managed by, or along with, a third-party partner, and maintenance responsibilities are defined and shared per formal or informal agreements. Maintenance service is variable and corresponds with the intensity, type, and frequency of use.

## PARKWAY

Generally receive limited routine maintenance service and tree management. These spaces are not serviced or mowed at a frequency necessary for recreational use.

## NATURAL/PASSIVE PARK

Generally receive limited routine maintenance service and tree management. These spaces are not serviced or mowed at a frequency necessary for recreational use.

## TRAILHEADS / WATER ACCESS

Monitored by staff regularly and the staff will respond to conditions on an as-needed basis, including trash collection, restroom service, and mowing.

## UNDEVELOPED

Generally do not receive maintenance service.



Routine maintenance will look different for various sites depending on considerations like level of use and the types of amenities present.



# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

## COMMUNITY CENTER LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

As funding allows, the following amenities, services, and/or design features are recommended for every City-owned building that functions as a Community Center:

- Design for universal access
- Rooms designed for flexibility
- Gym or other indoor recreation space
- Spaces that serve senior, youth, and teen needs
- Kitchen space
- Design for year-round use, including heating and cooling needs
- Indoor restrooms
- Wi-Fi connectivity
- Use of renewable energy sources
- Storage
- Trail access
- Programming
- Adequate parking

## AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS TO GUIDE FUTURE COMMUNITY CENTER INVESTMENTS

The following set of questions are provided to create a process for the planning and design of future Community Center investments. These questions are centered around the goal of providing recreation amenities that are tailored to the needs and makeup of surrounding neighborhoods.

Just as important as identifying the known recreational activities is identifying who may not be benefiting from this investment due to physical, social, or economic barriers.

Questions to ask when planning reinvestment activity:

- » Who lives in my Center's neighborhoods?
- » What do they want to do in the parks?
- » Who are active users of this park space? How do they use the park?
- » Who is not visible using the park? What are their recreational needs?
- » How is this neighborhood's desires alike or different from those in other parts of the city?

This inquiry requires the project team to identify a set of metrics that help to answer each question and guide the decision making process. Information should come from a variety of sources such as statistical datasets, input from the community, and observations of park spaces at different times of day and inquiring about who is and is not present.

The following resources offer additional tools for developing park spaces under a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) framework:

- Gehl's Institute - Inclusive Healthy Places
- Trust for Public Lands - Toolkit for Health, Arts, Parks and Equity

- American Planning Association - Planning for Equity Policy Guide

See Appendix E for the full URLs to these resources.



Holiday Party at Evergreen Community Center.

# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

## UNIVERSAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Universal design is a term used to describe spaces that are inviting and comfortable for all users, regardless of age or ability. Universal design incorporates design elements required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), which focus on physical barriers, and also supports those who may have different sensory needs and preferences.

Per the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Professional Practice recommendations for universal design, park and plaza designs should consider the following:

- Connections to the street that integrate ramps and stairs with safe materials that are tactile, provide high contrast, and are not slippery when wet;
- Create a clear identity between the street and park space and integrate vegetation to buffer noise and other sensory information;
- Provide options for play, leisure, and relaxation; and
- Provide restrooms that are easy to locate and access.

ADA elements such as gentle ramps, shade, seating, signage, and markings are important elements that enhance comfort and safety in park spaces,

particularly for the elderly and populations with low visibility.

Universal design considerations should be evaluated by staff when updating or developing all parks and recreation spaces. Emphasizing universal design will help to create spaces that are inclusive and welcoming and ensures that community members are able to utilize park and recreation spaces regardless of age or ability.



Universal design allows for spaces that are welcoming and inclusive to all community members despite age or ability. The top two images are examples from other communities, and the lower image is Duluth's renewed Lakewalk.



# LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

## RECREATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

A Recreation Program Assessment of the programs and services provided offers an in-depth perspective of program offerings and helps identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. The assessment also assists in identifying core programs, program gaps within the community, key system-wide issues, areas of improvement, and future programs and services for the community. This assessment requires time to explore options and initiate changes.

When developing or enhancing new programs, key questions to be asked include:

- » Does the Division have the knowledge and equipment to provide the program, service, or function? Will this be the most cost-effective method to obtain the program, service, or function?
- » What are the community benefits of this being provided by an alternative organization (e.g., inclusion, familiarity, social connections, community capacity building and stewardship)?
- » Will the quality of the program, service, or function suffer if it is contracted to other organizations?

Every program should be evaluated based on the direct cost of offering the activity as well as the minimum number

of registrants needed to conduct the program. Evaluating the need for the program, its market focus, and its ability to support the program plan and priorities of Parks and Recreation should also be considered.

In a Recreation Program Assessment, it is important to consider the lifecycle of a program, and developing criteria around the following elements will streamline program assessments over time:

- Program Development Plan
- Program descriptions
- Program classifications
- Program lifecycle analysis
- Volunteers utilization
- Post program evaluations
- Partnership agreements
- Promotional methods
- Public input process
- Financial standards
- Remaining Key performance measures

The results of the evaluation process should be utilized to adjust the programming process as well as individual programs themselves. The analysis should be tracked and reviewed on an annual basis. Programs should be placed into the following categories:

- New – programs in the start-up phase that are just starting to build in popularity.

- Mature – programs that have consistent high levels of registrations and are still growing in popularity.
- Dated – programs that are seeing a decline in popularity

Program offerings should be reasonably distributed among these three areas to ensure a healthy and vibrant programming focus. Programs that are in the dated category should ultimately be changed, updated, or discontinued.

# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

## FUNDING DIVERSIFICATION

Parks and Recreation should consider seeking alternative revenue sources to enhance service and programs. This will require a significant and consistent effort by staff and political will. However, if successful, alternative funding sources could provide the means necessary to grow Parks and Recreation services and programs. **These fund options should be considered in addition to asking City Council to authorize a voter referendum on the question of whether to increase the Park Fund levy, to renew the existing half-and-half tourism tax, and to increase General Funds** to provide for more robust foundational funding. The following funding types could be pursued to diversify sources and increase support for the differing needs of the park system and recreation programming.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The following descriptions are associated with and supplement strategies outlined in Chapter 3 (Invest in Duluth's Future and Park Spaces for Building Community).

### Advertising sales

Advertising can occur within sports complexes, scoreboards, gym floors, trash cans, playgrounds, locker rooms, dog parks, trails, flowerpots, and as part of special events held in the City to pay for operational costs.

### Business improvement district

A business improvement district (BID) is a defined area of a city that requires a fee from businesses in exchange of improved services, such as trash and recycling upkeep and maintenance of park spaces. BIDs are most typically found in downtown settings where there is a high density of businesses and foot traffic.

### Capital improvement fees

Many park and recreation systems add a capital-improvement fee onto an existing user fee when they develop or enhance major recreation facilities. This is usually applied to golf courses, aquatic facilities, recreation centers, ice rinks, amphitheaters, and special-use facilities like sports complexes. However, given the limited scope of facilities and price elasticity, it will likely take an above-average amount of time for the dollars earned to offset the cost of the capital improvement.

### Corporate and personal giving

Corporate and personal giving involves the solicitation of corporate lead funds or personal lead gifts via a foundation partner or through personal contacts that are used to catalyze wider giving in support of a specific project, program, or operation. The lead donations set the precedent for additional giving over a period of one to five years.

### Donations

Private donations are often used to pay for improvements to facilities, programs, and services that are

highly visible and valued by the public.

Donations can either be received directly by the city or channeled through a foundation or conservancy aligned with the city's park, recreation, and trail priorities. Donations of cash can be made to a specific park or trail by community members or businesses. Depending on the project, donations can also include the gift of materials and essential supplies that help fund new construction, repair, or renovation of facilities.

### Foundations

A Parks Foundation is a joint-development funding source or operational funding source between a foundation and the city. Foundations operate as a non-profit organization, working on behalf of the city to raise needed dollars to support its vision and operational needs. The dollars raised by the conservancy are tax-exempt. Foundations promote specific causes, activities, or issues that a park and recreation system needs to address. They offer a variety of means to fund capital projects or programming, including capital campaigns, gifts catalogs, fundraisers, endowments, sales of park-related memorabilia, etc. Private donations may be received in the form of cash, securities, land, facilities, recreation equipment, art, or in-kind services. Donations from local and regional businesses as sponsors of events or facilities should be pursued.

### "Friends of" associations

"Friends of" associations are typically formed to advocate and/or raise money for a single purpose, such as a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and, at the same time, meet special interests.

### Grants

The grant market continues to grow annually. Having a strong grant writer and researchers are essential if Parks and Recreation is to pursue grants. The City of Duluth has a successful history of obtaining grants, however, one challenge is that most grants require some form of matching dollars that can be difficult to anticipate ahead of time and within the annual Capital Improvement Plan. This plan recommends creating a long-range plan with a schedule that identifies grant cycles and due dates.

### Irrevocable trust

These trusts are established for individuals who typically have more than \$1 million in wealth. They agree to leave a portion of their wealth to a park and recreation system in a trust fund that grows over time. The system can use a portion of the interest earned to support specific facilities or programs that are designated by the trustee.

### Legacy endowment fund

The Duluth Legacy Endowment Fund is a grant fund source through the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation. The fund provides support to the City for public projects that fulfill the fund



# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

mission of supporting arts and culture, economic development, education, the environment, human services, and parks and recreation.

## **Maintenance endowment**

This is a fund dedicated exclusively for park maintenance and is funded by a percentage of user fees from programs, events, and rentals. The fee is paid by players, teams, or other users and is added to a dedicated fund for facility and equipment replacement, such as athletic equipment, lights, artificial turf, and park-maintenance equipment.

## **Park, open space, and trail bond issues**

Public entities typically seek park bonds to meet park-related needs. To be successful, it is extremely important that the use of debt financing through a bond is for a project that meets unmet needs and is clearly a community priority. It is best to propose a capital bond project that serves a variety of users and needs. It is also common that a specific future funding source or projected user revenue/fees would be sufficient to cover the debt payments.

## **Park dedication fee**

Park dedication fees are collected through construction of new developments and are created to support funding for park system expansions. Typically park dedication fees are tied to the geographic area of new developments in order to support the additional provision of recreation services upon new growth.

## **Park revolving fund**

This is a dedicated fund replenished on an ongoing basis from various funding sources such as grants, sponsorships, advertising, program-user fees, and rental fees within one or more parks. The City could establish a revolving fund to support maintenance at multiple parks.

## **Partnerships**

Partnerships are joint-development funding sources or operational funding sources formed from two separate agencies, such as two government entities, a non-profit and a public agency, or a private business and a public agency. Two partners jointly develop park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, responsibilities, and asset management based on the strengths of each partner.

## **Special sales tax bond issue**

This is a funding mechanism the City has implemented in the past, which uses a local sales tax, as approved by the State legislature and City Council, to make payments on debt financing through a bond issuance. This could be for a specific project or a system-wide use or priority.

## **Tax increment financing**

Commonly used for financing redevelopment projects, a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District involves the issuance of tax-exempt bonds to pay front-end infrastructure and eligible development costs in

partnership with private developers and local businesses that benefit from the improvement.

## **PERMITTING AND COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS**

The following policy recommendations would facilitate permitting and commercial operations in park spaces. These changes could allow for additional revenue sources for Parks and Recreation.

### **Permit fees**

This fee could apply to the exclusive and non-exclusive reservation of pavilions, sports fields, special events, and competition tournaments held in the city by other organizations. Permit fees include a base fee for all direct and indirect costs to provide the space on an exclusive basis plus a percentage of the fees charged. A cost accounting model is needed to assess if the City permit fees are undervalued.

### **Private concessions operating within City parkland**

Contracts with private businesses to provide and operate desirable recreational activities and services provide compensation to the City through a land lease. Contractors may include coffee shops, grill and food concessions, small restaurants, ice cream shops, bicycle shops, farmers markets, and small businesses. Land leases are usually based on 15% of the value of the land plus a percentage of

gross revenues from the contractor on an annual basis.

### **Catering permits and services**

This allows caterers to work in the parks on a permit basis with a set fee or a percentage of food sales returning to the city. Many departments that have their own catering service contracts receive a percentage (10-15%) from the sale of food and drinks. This may be most suitable for large or special events occurring on City-owned properties.

