Duluth Traverse

Bike Skills Area & Trailheads

Community Engagement Summary

June 2025

Overview

The final scope of the Duluth Traverse Bike Skills Area and Trailhead Improvement Project was community informed through an iterative engagement process from August 2024 through May of 2025. Feedback identified preferred locations for improvements. Then, design firms developed conceptual layouts for proposed improvements, which were presented for input in May 2025. The community feedback informed the development of preliminary designs for the project.

Engagement opportunities included:

1. Public bike skills area survey in August 2024
2. Stakeholder workshop with trail organizations on September 12, 2024
3. Stakeholder workshop with trail organizations on May 22, 2025
4. Public survey soliciting feedback on conceptual layouts in May 2025
5. Public open house on May 28, 2025

Additional details regarding the process and results of these engagement opportunities are provided in the subsequent pages of this summary.

These engagement opportunities were completed in addition to previous planning and engagement completed during the development of the Duluth Traverse Mini-Master Plan that was adopted on April 14, 2017. The Plan identified Lester Park as a future location for a bike skills area and trailhead improvements.

1. Public Bike Skills Area Survey

The City of Duluth, in partnership with the Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores (COGGS), surveyed community members on preferences and priorities related to the development of a future bicycle playground/skills area in Duluth.

The survey was open to all persons and conducted using an opt-in, open participation format.

While the City and COGGS made concerted efforts to invite all community members to complete the survey using social media, email lists, newsletters, etc., the individuals who self-selected to take this survey represent persons who are more engaged with Duluth's park and trail system than the average community member.

The survey was open from August 8, 2024 – August 31, 2024.

A total of 704 survey responses were received.

Top 4 Takeaways

1. Design for beginner and intermediate riders.

Most survey respondents said Duluth's bicycle playground/skills area should be designed for beginner riders (86.2%) and intermediate riders (78%).

2. Focus on the fundamentals.

When asked which features are most important for Duluth's bicycle playground/skills area, survey respondents were most likely to say a pump track (73.6%), balance features (62.6%), and berms or cornering features (62.6%).

3. Access to trails and bathrooms is important.

When asked to think about the area around the bicycle playground/skills area, survey respondents were most likely to identify nearby trail connections (71.6%) and access to restrooms (65.3%) as the most important amenities.

4. Lester Park is a preferred location.

Based on an average weighted score, Lester Park scored highest among survey respondents when asked where they'd most like to see a bicycle playground/skills area.

2. Stakeholder Workshop: September 12, 2024

A stakeholder workshop was held on September 12, 2024, with participants from local trail organizations to identify preferred trailhead locations and the scope of improvements needed at each location. A total of fifteen attendees participated representing the following trail organizations:

- Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores
- Duluth Drift Toppers Snowmobile Club
- Duluth DEVO Mountain Bike Program
- Northern Minnesota Track Club
- Superior Hiking Trail Association
- Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club
- Duluth Foot Trails Alliance
- Vibrant Streets Duluth

City of Duluth staff presented the results of the August Bike Skills Area public survey and described the intended improvement project that would include two Duluth Traverse trailheads. With the City owning 18 Duluth Traverse trailheads, the goal was to gather feedback to determine prioritization of trailhead improvements. After the presentation, attendees split into three small groups to discuss. Each participant was provided with a worksheet that had prompts and ranking questions. The primary discussion question was: "Which trailheads would you most like to see improved?"





The **Piedmont Trailhead at Hutchinson** was, overwhelmingly, selected as the top trailhead for improvements because the trailhead serves a wide variety of user groups and skill levels, is centrally located and used year-round, and has a high-volume of traffic with a relatively low number of parking spaces and trailhead amenities.

The **Lester Park Trailhead at Lester River** was identified as a top trailhead for improvements because the park is heavily used by trail users and by community members in general. While participants generally agreed that expanding the parking lot was a lower priority (due to the potentially high cost and concerns for negative impacts to the river), they did overwhelmingly wish to see additional amenities at the trailhead and parking reconfiguration to improve safety.

The **Fairmont Park Trailhead**, located Fremont Street and South 72nd Avenue West, was selected as top location for trailhead improvements because the trailhead serves a wide variety of user groups, is centrally located, and has the potential to be fully reimagined as a family-friendly trail

center. There was a notable divide among workshop participants, with about half feeling that this space was too close to Spirit Mountain, which has many existing trailhead amenities and, therefore, *should not be the focus of this project*. For those that did support this location, they did so with a relatively high ranking.

Chester Park has two options for trailheads and these locations prompted a fruitful discussion. The current trailhead, located at College Street and Kenwood Avenue, has limited amenities, but is in close proximity to heavily used roads and a busy intersection. For this reason, workshop participants brought an alternative location forward – near the intersection of Kenwood Avenue and Hovland Lane. Participants preferred this location over the Chester Park trailhead at Kenwood and College because there is more space, safer ingress/egress for vehicles, and better access for multiple user groups throughout the year. Participants noted that this was valuable, centralized park space that they would like to see re-activated and put to a higher and better use (currently used as gravel storage for a non-park use).

Ultimately, Piedmont-Hutchinson and Lester Park were identified as the top priorities for improvement by stakeholders due to their respective opportunities for improvement and connectivity for multiple user groups.

3. Stakeholder Workshop: May 22, 2025

A stakeholder workshop was held on May 22, 2025, with participants from local trail organizations to review conceptual layouts for proposed trailhead improvements at the Piedmont-Hutchinson and Lester Park trailheads and the Lester Park bike skills area. A total of twelve attendees participated representing the following trail organizations:

Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores	Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club
Duluth DEVO Mountain Bike Program	Duluth Foot Trails Alliance
Northern Minnesota Track Club	Vibrant Streets Duluth

City staff presented two conceptual layouts for each trailhead location and the bike skills area to gather feedback that would inform preliminary designs. The discussion of the **Piedmont-Hutchinson** lot centered around the need to balance any proposed parking lot changes with wetland protections. Workshop participants favored limiting wetland encroachment while acknowledging that parking lot expansion would be minimal in that case. At **Lester Park**, the preference was to reconfigure the parking lot to a one-way traffic pattern, and the new buffer between the parking lot and Lester River Road was appreciated. However, these changes would not allow for a significant net increase in the number of parking stalls, which was disappointing news to many of the stakeholders. The **Bike Skills Area** was well received with participants indicating that it fills a need in the community and that it will be important to retain as much natural space and existing vegetation as possible. The primary concern was new impervious surfaces, which would be managed with stormwater treatment basins.

4. Public Survey for Conceptual Layouts

The City of Duluth surveyed community members regarding conceptual layouts for proposed changes to the Piedmont – Hutchinson Trailhead, Lester Park Trailhead, and Bike Skills Area development in Lester Park. The survey included images of the conceptual layout options and nine accompanying open-ended questions to gather feedback. Notice of the survey (and open house) were mailed to 255 residences within a quarter-mile radius of Piedmont-Hutchinson and Lester Park, flyer postings at each location, and social media posts.

The survey was open to all persons and conducted using an opt-in, open participation format.

While the City and COGGS made concerted efforts to invite all community members to complete the survey using social media, email lists, newsletters, etc., the individuals who self-selected to take this survey represent persons who are more engaged with Duluth's park and trail system than the average community member.

The survey was open from May 22, 2025 – June 1, 2025.

A total of 102 survey responses were received.

Top Takeaways

1. One-way traffic flow is preferred for Lester Park trailhead parking.

Most survey respondents said that a one-way traffic flow in the parking lot would improve safety and maximize parking capacity with the addition of the new buffer island (84.4%) compared to maintaining a two-way flow (15.6%).

2. The Bike Skills Area has strong support overall.

Most survey respondents were in support of the bike skills area development, with many praising the conceptual layouts. Favored aspects were the progressive features and a strong desire for paved pump tracks. The top concerns centered on the location already being a busy area and potentially attracting additional visitors (although some also indicated this as a benefit for visibility and use), and possible impacts to natural resources.

3. At Piedmont – Hutchinson we should focus on doing the basics well.

The wetland space constraints on site and exposed bedrock present challenges, and most respondents wanted to see simple improvements. There was a slight preference to maximize parking (55.9%) rather than creating a new space for a picnic shelter or gathering space (44.1%).

5. Public Open House: May 28, 2025

The City of Duluth and Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores offered an in-person engagement opportunity on May 28, 2025. The event was conducted as a "drop-in" style open house where participants could visit tables to learn more about the project, see conceptual plans for the two trailheads and the proposed bike skills area at Lester Park, and share feedback. Facilitators were present to ask questions of participants to better understand community desire and needs so that the proposed improvements can best support the community. Notice of the open house (and survey) were mailed to 255 residences within a quarter-mile radius of Piedmont-Hutchinson and Lester Park, flyer postings at each location, and social media posts.





Nine people attended the event and discussed the options in detail. Lower than anticipated attendance may have been a result of the iterative feedback process and multiple opportunities to provide input. Many of the participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity. All attendees were supportive of the project.