
Lakewalk Task Force

FINAL REPORT

Findings & Recommendations

January 20, 2015

LAKEWALK TASK FORCE REPORT

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Task Force Members	Name	Representative
Chair	Andrea Agar	Friends of the Lakewalk
	Thomas Burns	The Point Condominiums/Lighthouse
	Jackie Falk	Citizen-at-Large
Secretary	James Gittemeier	Citizen-at-Large
	Susan Isernhagen	The Ledges on Lake Superior
	Joel Sipress	Non-Voting City Council Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Lakewalk Task Force would like to thank the many individuals who provided support and assistance to the work of the Task Force. City Trails Coordinator Judy Gibbs, City Engineer Cindy Voigt, Dwight Morrison of the Wheels on Trials Organization, City Human Rights Officer Bob Grytdahl, and Chuck Froseth from the City's Planning Department gave very helpful presentations to the Task Force. In addition, Planning Director Keith Hamre, as well as Jim Shoberg, and Sue Wegener from city staff offered invaluable information. Mayor Don Ness and Chief Administrative Officer David Montgomery provided support and encouragement to the work of the Task Force. We offer our heartfelt thanks to the Duluth City Council for the opportunity to participate in this important project. Finally, we thank the many residents of Duluth who over the years have devoted their time, energy, and passion to keeping public attention focused on the issue of the Lakewalk and who helped create the political will to seek thoughtful solutions to the complex issues addressed by the Task Force.

PURPOSE & CHARGE

Established by the Duluth City Council (Resolution 14-0451R), the Lakewalk Task Force is to review and make recommendations regarding the Lakewalk in the vicinity of 19th Avenue East and 25th Avenue East (study area). The task force shall examine and make recommendations regarding the following issues:

- Safety issues at the intersection of the Lakewalk, 23rd Avenue East and Water Street;
- Pedestrian access to the lakefront in the study area;
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues in the study area; and
- The cost, benefits, and funding sources of potential options.

RESPONSE TO CHARGE

Within this report, the Lakewalk Task Force recommends a pedestrian footpath along the water's edge, herein referred to as the "Lakefront Pedestrian Trail". If the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail recommendation is deemed to not be feasible, then two alternatives have been provided. The Task Force has also outlined several safety and design recommendations pertaining to the 23rd Avenue East and Water Street Intersection. In addition, universal design and ADA recommendations were considered throughout. This report and its recommendations have received the unanimous endorsement of the members of the Lakewalk Task Force.

BACKGROUND

The completion of I-35 in 1992 was a significant change to the waterfront and made available the Lake Superior shoreline of the Endion Neighborhood, roughly 20th Avenue East to almost 2 blocks east of 26th Avenue East, including the significant geologic feature known as the "Endion Ledges," to public access, new improvements, and re-development. To take advantage of this opportunity and extend the waterfront revitalization already underway, Duluth leaders, planning officials, and hundreds of citizens participated in a public process to envision and develop the "Endion Waterfront Plan & Development Strategy," dated February 1995 (see Appendix). The Endion Plan expressed and documented the citizens of Duluth's publicly-shared expectations that unobstructed lake views and generous public access to the waterfront, and particularly the continuation of the Lakewalk, would be preserved and enhanced. The Endion Plan was submitted to the State as documentation that Duluth's use of the waterfront lands would benefit the public good and therefore its request for the transfer of tax forfeit waterfront lands merited approval.

Many of the goals of the Endion Plan were lost sight of in 2004, when the City executed land transfers, changes in zoning, and negotiated easements along the lakefront in this area, also obtaining an easement on property east of 22nd Avenue up to the property of the Hayden family. In 2006, the City went on to secure an easement across private land from 22nd to 19th Avenue in exchange for vacating its ownership of the 21st Avenue right-of-way between Water Street and Lake Superior. As the purchasers of the new housing developments became residents, Duluth citizens continued to express their desire for the extension of the Lakewalk as envisioned in the Endion Plan. The occupied properties and limitations on access entailed by the property transfers created new conditions that necessitated revisions in the

planning and implementation of the Lakewalk extensions between 19th to 26th Avenues East to the “Endion Ledges”

Bob Bruce, then Director of Planning for the City, commissioned the engineering firm Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH®) to develop a feasibility plan for an extension of the Lakewalk between 20th and 25th Avenues East. SEH produced its report in April 2007 (see Appendix). Bruce shared SEH’s plan at a public meeting April 17, 2007. The public discussion reflected the intense passions persisting among both shore residents and the Duluth’s citizenry; nevertheless, at that meeting those present endorsed the two-phased approach that Bruce later took to the City Council on June 25, 2007, and reinforced on February 26, 2008. All of the recommendations built closely upon those of SEH in recommending that further discussion of extending the Lakewalk focus upon: (1) building a multi-use route between Water Street and I-35 to be used for all wheeled traffic, and (2) further exploring the feasibility of a footpath from 20th to 23rd Avenues. The tensions surrounding the planning process depleted citizen energy, sapped its political will and stopped progress for a time. Then in 2009 an administrative requirement threatened that city ownership of the land in front of the Ledges would revert to the state. Concerned citizens united to build a temporary bluestone footpath that is now much loved, from 23rd to 25th Avenues.

In January 2014, the City Council gave permission to the city administration to seek external funding for the planning and building of a multi-use trail as Bruce and the SEH report had recommended along Water Street. In September 2014, the City Council authorized the Lakewalk Task Force (see Appendix) to explore the second part of Bruce’s recommendations more fully as well as to offer suggestions for remodeling the intersection of 23rd Avenue and Water Street where the previously approved extension of the multi-use trail will cross. The report before you is the result of the investigations and deliberations of the Task Force.

All documents referred to in this summary background statement and many more are available on the City Council Website www.duluthmn.gov/city-council/lakewalk-task-force/.

Timeline

- 1992 – I-35 Opens to 26th Ave E
- 1995 – Endion Plan completed
- 2004 – Land Transfers, Zoning changes & Easements set in area.
- 2005- Ledges Developed
- 2006 – Beacon Pointe Developed
- 2007 – SEH Lakewalk Feasibility Study
- 2008 – Bob Bruce Lakewalk Recommendations
- 2009 – Ledges bluestone footpath developed.
- 2008-14 – Duluth applies for TAP funding for the Water Street Shared Use Path
- 2014 – Water Street Shared Use Path funded
- 2014 – Lakewalk Task Force Formed
- 2017 – Planned construction of the Water Street Shared Use Path

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Before developing a proposal the Task Force felt it was imperative to outline the principles and values surrounding our charge. These values acted as our “Mission Statement” in past discussions and meetings. The list below defines those values:

- Public access to enhance the water’s edge experience for all users of the Lakewalk;
- Trail connectivity;
- Maximum accessibility for all people, including those with limited mobility and disabilities through universal design;
- Minimal disruption to the natural terrain and utilization of the native vegetation and hard-scape as much as possible;
- Recognition of the unique geological formation known locally as the “The Endion Ledges”;
- Respect for the immediate neighbors;
- All construction should be built professionally.

PROCESS

The Lakewalk Task Force was appointed on September 16th, 2014. Each appointee submitted an application to Duluth City Council President, Linda Krug. There was a specific call for a representative from The Ledges community, The Point / Lighthouse community, a current board member of Friends of the Lakewalk, and two citizens at-large not affiliated with those previously mentioned groups. A non-voting City Council Representative was also appointed.

After the initial Task Force meeting on September 16th, Andrea Agar was selected as Chair and James Gittemeier as Secretary. 2 ½ hour meetings were scheduled for every other week at City Hall. The Task Force reserved the last 10 minutes of each regularly scheduled meeting for public comment. Each appointee was given an extensive packet of information compiled of history, previous studies, maps, legal documentation, and budgets regarding the study area, collated by Duluth City Councilor, Joel Sipress.

During this time the Task Force elected to have a site visit with the City of Duluth’s Trails and Bikeways Coordinator. The Task Force spent three hours

Task Force Speakers:

Judy Gibbs
City of Duluth Trails &
Bikeways Coordinator

Cindy Voigt
City of Duluth Engineer

Bob Grytdahl
City of Duluth Human Rights
Officer

Dwight Morrison
Wheels on Trails
Organization

Chuck Froseth
City of Duluth Land Use
Supervisor

touring the study area and learning the terrain. Following the site visit, the Task Force generated a list of speakers and topics for further discussion.

On December 1st, the Task Force drafted an interim report for the City Council reporting on progress and findings to date. Attached in Appendix.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PART ONE – LAKEFRONT PEDESTRIAN TRAIL

The Task Force discussed a number of trail alignment alternatives for the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail. Of the options possible, the task force determined that the following option is the best available.



Description

A pedestrian footpath entirely along the Lake Superior shoreline from 19th Ave East to approximately 25th Avenue East. The alignment of the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail goes as follows:

- Western Entrance near the current parking lot around 20th Avenue East and on the western side of The Point Condominiums would follow a gradual grade from near the shoreline to just west of the current parking area along the Lakewalk. It would not turn at a right angle next to The Point Condominiums but rather meander along the lakeside with a gradual incline to the current Lakewalk. The grade appears to be within ADA recommendations.

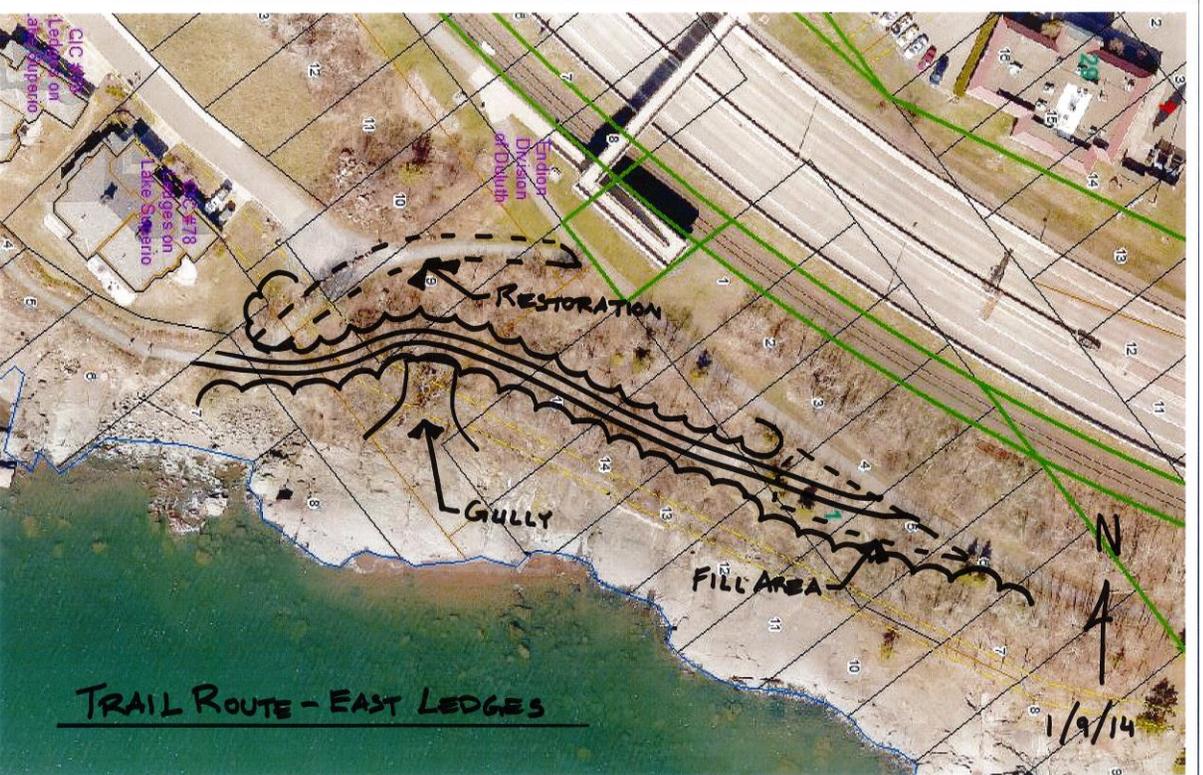
- Lakefront Pedestrian Trail continues along the Lake Superior shore, utilizing the easement in front of The Point Condominiums, the Beacon Pointe Hotel Resort, and the Lighthouse Condominiums. It would then use the easement in front of Edmunds Building and continue east lakeside of the Hayden Property (711 S 23rd Ave East). It would then cross 23rd Avenue East and continue on the current location of bluestone footpath in front of the Ledges.
- On the east end, the Trail would not turn abruptly north as it presently does, but continue along the lakefront on land which is discussed in the Endion Plan, and expose trail users to the geographically unique Endion Ledges. Around 26th Ave East it would gradually go uphill to re-join the existing Lakewalk.

Background

The Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation builds upon Alternative 3 as presented in the Construction Feasibility Study for the Duluth Lakewalk completed by SEH for the City of Duluth in 2007. SEH's Alternative 3 suggested a standard multi-use paved trail along Water Street along with a pedestrian-only path along the lakeshore in the entire study area. The chief barrier to construction of the suggested pedestrian path has been a pinch point on the western end of the Point Condominiums at which a city-held easement goes over an embankment and through a small ravine. Previous discussions of a pedestrian path have assumed that the pinch point could be traversed only through installation of a bridge that would be costly and that would create privacy concerns for residents of the Point Condominiums. An examination of the site by City Trail Designer Jim Shoberg, however, has determined that a trail that traverses the ravine without bridging may be feasible. (See maps on the following page.) A preliminary examination of the proposed trail alignment by city planning staff indicates that it lies above the ordinary high water mark and thus does not require DNR approval. If further study confirms these preliminary findings, a pedestrian path can be constructed at a lower cost than previously assumed and in a way that respects the privacy concerns of the immediate neighbors.

With the exception of the Hayden Property just to the west of 23rd Avenue East and one privately owned parcel (expected to soon enter tax forfeit status) near the proposed new eastern terminus of the pedestrian trail, all property required to complete the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail is either publicly owned (City of Duluth or MnDOT) or has a city-held easement. Completion of the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail would require the city to obtain the right to traverse the Hayden Property.

Documentation makes reference to a "temporary construction easement" alongside the city's permanent trail easement in front of the Point Condominiums, the Beacon Pointe Resort, and the Lighthouse Condominiums. Residents have contested the existence of the temporary construction easement. If the city proceeds with Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation, the status of this temporary construction easement will need to be resolved.



Access Points

The Task Force recommends a number of access points. Note that each of the following points will provide access to the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail and the Lake Superior shoreline. Each access point should be designed to be welcoming to the trail user so they may enjoy the vistas of Lake Superior and access to the water's edge as well as include trail user friendly amenities, (possibly including benches, picnic tables, etc). Each access point will be thoughtful in design to encourage trail users to utilize these specific points and reduce the likelihood of trail users blazing their own pathways to the shoreline. Access points would also act as a turn-around space for wheelchairs indicated by the ADA.

- 20th Avenue East, near the existing parking lot
- 22nd Avenue East
- 23rd Avenue East
- 26th Avenue East

Special Considerations

- a) Establish a trailhead at 19th Ave East stormwater reservoir/parking lot (western terminus). Include trailhead amenities that are user-friendly, including restrooms, waterfountains, etc.
- b) Trail should be surfaced with durable, permeable pavers to provide a fully accessible (smooth, hard, stable and firm) surface that fits into the natural environment, similar to the surface recommended for the "Core Assessible Trail" in the Hartley Master Trail Plan. Trail width to be 3 to 4 feet except at access points where it would be wider and follow ADA accessibility standards.
- c) Hours on the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail to be sunrise to sunset. This was the understanding of the Point Condominiums and Lighthouse residences as well as the Ledges.
- d) No pathway lighting nor benches along portions of the footpath in front of residential condominium units. This was understood by The Point Condominiums, the Lighthouse and the Ledges. It is in the Ledges written agreement with the city.
- e) Through working with nearby residences develop a clearly defined buffer between this public trail and the private yards.
- f) The Point Condominiums and the Lighthouse residences should have maximum separation possible between their private property and the public trail, through terracing the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail to be lower than the lowest floor of each building so that this is accomplished.

If the Lakewalk Task Force’s recommendation for the Pedestrian Trail along the shoreline is determined to not be feasible and therefore cannot be constructed, then the easement in front of the Point Condominiums, the Beacon Pointe Hotel Resort, and the Lighthouse Condominiums should revert to the adjacent property owners to resolve and fully close this issue.

In addition, the City of Duluth should pursue alternative alignments for the Pedestrian Trail. Both alignment alternatives should include a consistent path along its entirety. The existing blue-stone path adjacent to the Ledges should be improved and/or updated to ensure the look and feel of the pathway is the same from end to end. In order of preference, the Task Force offers the following two alternatives.

Pedestrian Trail Alternative 1



This alternative to the Pedestrian Trail is based on the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation being not feasible between the Point/Lighthouse development and the Lake Superior shoreline. Therefore, the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail would begin at the 22nd Avenue East access point. The route is as follows:

- Follow the planned shared-use path along Water Street from the 20th Avenue East parking lot to 22nd Avenue East, then down 22nd to shoreline and turn east in front of Edmunds property and Hayden property. Cross 23rd Avenue East and continue along the current lakefront trail (footpath) in front of the Ledges.
- On the East end, it would not turn abruptly north, but continue along the lakefront on land which is discussed in the Endion Plan. Somewhere around 26th Ave East it would gradually go uphill to join the Lakewalk-bike trail.

Access points, as described in the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation, should be developed.

Pedestrian Trail Alternative 2



This alternative to the Pedestrian Trail is based on the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation not being feasible between the Point Condominiums, the Beacon Pointe Hotel Resort, the Lighthouse Condominiums and the Lake Superior shoreline as well as not being able to secure an easement nor right-of-way across the Hayden Property (711 S 23rd Ave East), which is the property closest to Lake Superior on the end of 23rd Avenue East . Therefore, the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail would begin at the 23rd Avenue East access point. The route is as follows:

- Follow Water Street to 23rd Avenue East, then down 23rd to shoreline and turn east, continuing along the current laketrail in front of the Ledges.
- On the East end, it would not turn abruptly north, but continue along the lakefront on land which is discussed in the Endion Plan. Somewhere around 26th Ave East it would gradually go uphill to join the lakewalk-bike trail.

Access points, as described in the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation, should be developed.

PART TWO: INTERSECTION OF THE LAKEWALK – 23RD AVE EAST & WATER STREET

When the intersection of 23rd Ave East and Water Street was designed in the early 1990s, it was not fully clear how the land between Water Street and Lake Superior would be redeveloped, if at all. Therefore, the intersection, particularly the upper part where 23rd Avenue East travels down from I-35 and meets Water Street, followed typical roadway design standards of the time which included wide travel lane widths and corner radii. Without knowing what type of development, this standard intersection allowed for flexibility in accommodating a variety of vehicle types, including large trucks.

In addition, once it was determined that the Lakewalk would be extended eastward as part of the I-35 new construction project, the trail alignment was planned to follow the Lake Superior shoreline not through the Water Street and 23rd Avenue East intersection. Therefore, few bicyclists and pedestrians were anticipated to traveling through this intersection once the Lakewalk was built along the shoreline.

The Task Force goals for this intersection include re-designing the intersection to increase safety for all the users of the intersection and be more user-friendly.

- a. Design the trail approaches to the intersection that will direct users to travel through (not into the middle of) the intersection as intended. Redesign the existing Lakewalk entrance (on the northwest corner) with the intersection to be in alignment with the multi-use trail across 23rd Ave East.
- b. Re-enforce the awareness of the 4-way stop through signage and pavement markings on the trail and roadway, including “STOP AHEAD” markings.
- c. Align both the east and west Lakewalk approaches with the 23rd Avenue East intersection so the trail user clearly understands where to cross and it is easy for the user to cross.
- d. On the east approach to the intersection, rebuild the existing trail and incorporate a more defining “S” curve on the Lakewalk to naturally slow down the users.
- e. Reduce the width of the intersection, by squaring the corner radii at Water Street and narrowing the intersection. See options on the following page.

Below are two redesign concepts presented to the Lakewalk Task Force for the intersection of Water Street and 23rd Avenue East.



Intersection Concept from the Wheels on Trails Organization with a pedestrian safety island and smaller corner radii.



Intersection Concept by the City of Duluth Engineer with a more visible crosswalk and smaller corner radii.

In addition, the city should move forward with low cost bicycle and pedestrian measures, such as signage and pavement markings on both the Lakewalk and 23rd Avenue East immediately (see report by Duluth City Engineer Cindy Voigt in appendix).

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Potential external funding sources to implement the recommendations of this report include:

- **Mn/DOT Transportation Alternatives Program**—This program provides access to federal funds to support construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, and transportation projects to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **MN DNR Legacy Grant**—This program provides grants to local units of government to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance. Funding for this grant program is from the Parks and Trails Fund created by the Minnesota Legislature from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.
- **Minnesota’s Lake Superior Coastal Program**—This program offers grants for projects that benefit Lake Superior and its inland coast, including public access and coastal community development.

These external funding sources do require a local match. The following local sources should be considered to provide matching funds:

- **Parks Capital Fund**—This is the fund that has typically been used to finance local matches for trail development grants that the city has received. This fund is financed by the special parks levy approved by Duluth voters in 2011.
- **Tourism Tax Fund**—A portion of the city’s tourism tax revenue is available to be spent on tourism-related capital projects. The 2015 tourism tax distribution, for instance, allocates funds to repair the Lakewalk stairs in the vicinity of the Portland Malt Shop.

NEXT STEPS

The following steps should be taken immediately to implement the recommendations of the Task Force:

1. A feasibility study of the Pedestrian Trail Recommendation be undertaken. The study should address both cost and technical factors to help determine the feasibility of the recommendation.
2. Short-term low-cost measures be undertaken to increase bike and pedestrian safety at the intersection of 23rd Avenue East, Water Street, and the Lakewalk.
3. Long-term redesign of the intersection of 23rd Avenue East, Water Street, and the Lakewalk, be pursued in the context of the forthcoming shared-use path so the intersection will provide seamless connectivity, visual continuity, and proper alignment of all approaches into the intersection.

SUMMARY

If a feasibility study reveals that the Lakefront Pedestrian Trail Recommendation is indeed viable, the Task Force encourages the City to move forward with implementing that recommendation. In regards to the 23rd Avenue East and Water Street intersection, the Task Force urges the city to redesign a safe and accessible intersection in conjunction with the planned shared-use path along Water Street Plan as soon as possible. By doing so, this will allow the residents of the City of Duluth to put these issues to rest and move forward with the enjoyment of a wonderful new Duluth amenity.

APPENDIX

- Duluth City Council Resolution
- Endion Waterfront Plan and Development Strategy (1995)
- SEH Report 2007
- Lakewalk Task Force Interim report – December 2014
- Wheels on Trails Organization Report
- Duluth City Engineer Cindy Voigt Report