



Duluth's Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI)

Duluth City Council

Committee of the Whole

March 2026



Funding: The “Half-and-Half” Tax

- The Half-and-Half tax refers to two existing taxes:
 - A 0.5% increment in Duluth’s food and beverage tax
 - A 0.5% increment in Duluth’s lodging tax
- Per state law, food and beverage taxes and lodging taxes must meaningfully support tourism.
- How Half-and-Half project financing works:
 - The City borrows to pay for authorized supporting improvements
 - Annual Half-and-Half tax revenues are used to make debt payments
- Authorized in 2014 to fund \$18 million in improvements to public outdoor recreation facilities in western Duluth.



Reauthorization of the Half-and-Half Tax for Sports Tourism

Duluth City Council Resolution 23-0095R

Resolution supporting an extenuation of half-and-half tax “for the purpose of funding up to \$36 million in capital improvements to parks-based public athletic facilities in support of sports tourism and quality of life in northeast Minnesota.”

Unanimously Approved, January 23, 2023

2023 State of Minnesota Omnibus Tax Bill

Including a provision authorizing financing for the Duluth Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative.

Signed by Governor Walz, May 24, 2023

Duluth City Council Resolution 25-0805R

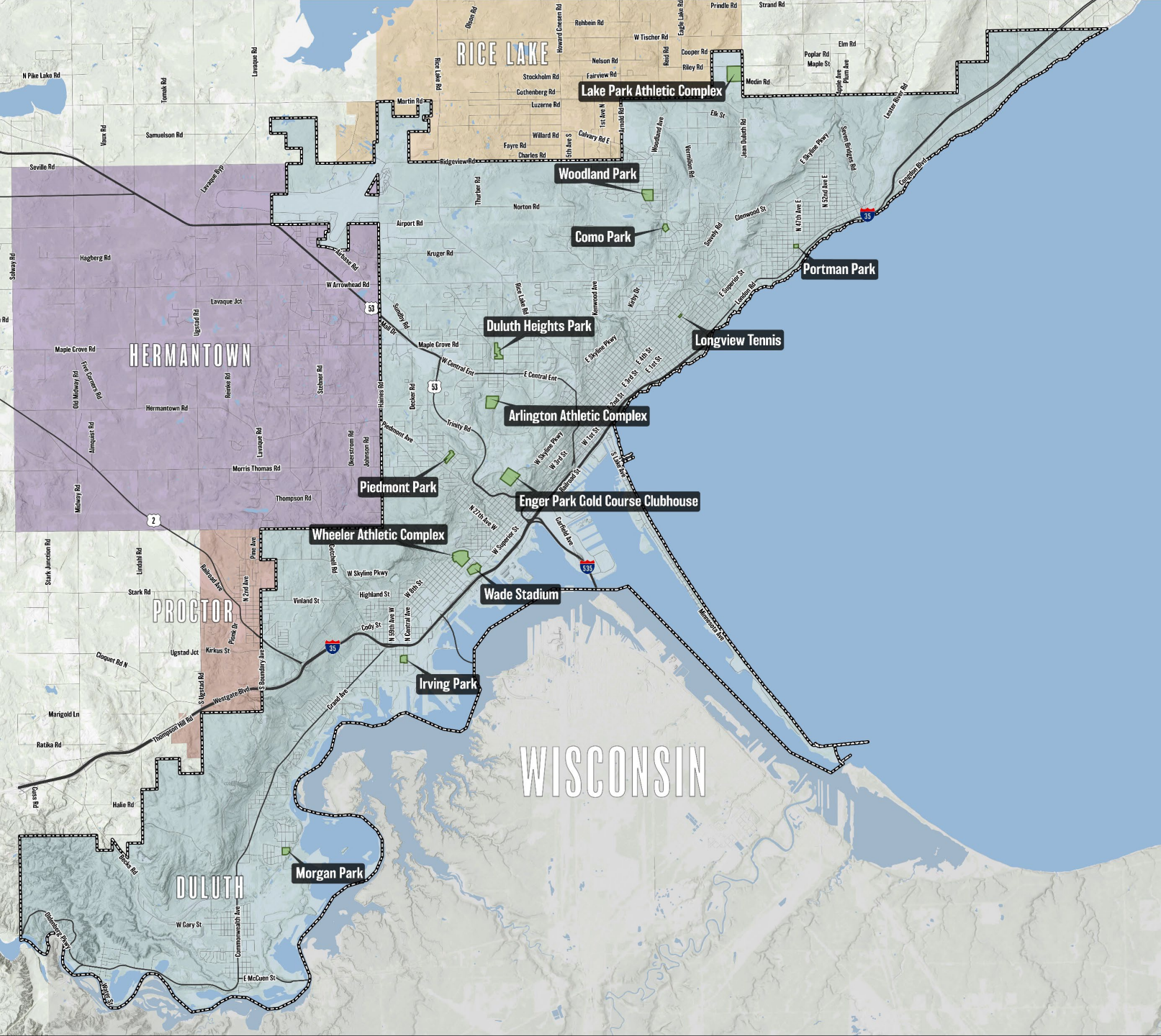
Resolution distributing the estimated 2026 half-and-half tax, including \$36 million for parks-based public athletic facilities



Project Selection:

Does an athletic venue currently host – or could an improved venue in the future host – athletic competitions, activities, and events that will regularly attract numerous participants from outside the Duluth region?





- Arlington Athletic Complex
- Como Park
- Duluth Heights Park
- Enger Park Golf Course
- Irving Park
- Lake Park Athletic Complex
- Longview Tennis
- Morgan Park
- Piedmont Park
- Portman Park
- Wade Stadium
- Wheeler Athletic Complex
- Woodland Park



Phase 1: Time-Sensitive Projects Were Funded First

Enger Park Golf Course	Complete irrigation system	\$1.7 M	Completed
Spirit Mountain Nordic Center	Complete snowmaking and lighting	\$1.2 M	In Progress
Wade Stadium	Main building structural repairs	\$1.2 M	Completed
Gary-New Duluth Skatepark	Complete skatepark	\$0.3 M	Completed
Planning & conceptual design	Action Plan for all future projects	\$0.4 M	In progress

AVRI Action Plan Development

- RDG Planning & Design
 - Community engagement
 - Existing conditions analysis
 - Sports tourism-focused market analysis
 - Study opportunities for new indoor venue(s)
 - Vetting of public-private partnership opportunities
 - Conceptual plans, cost estimating for site investments



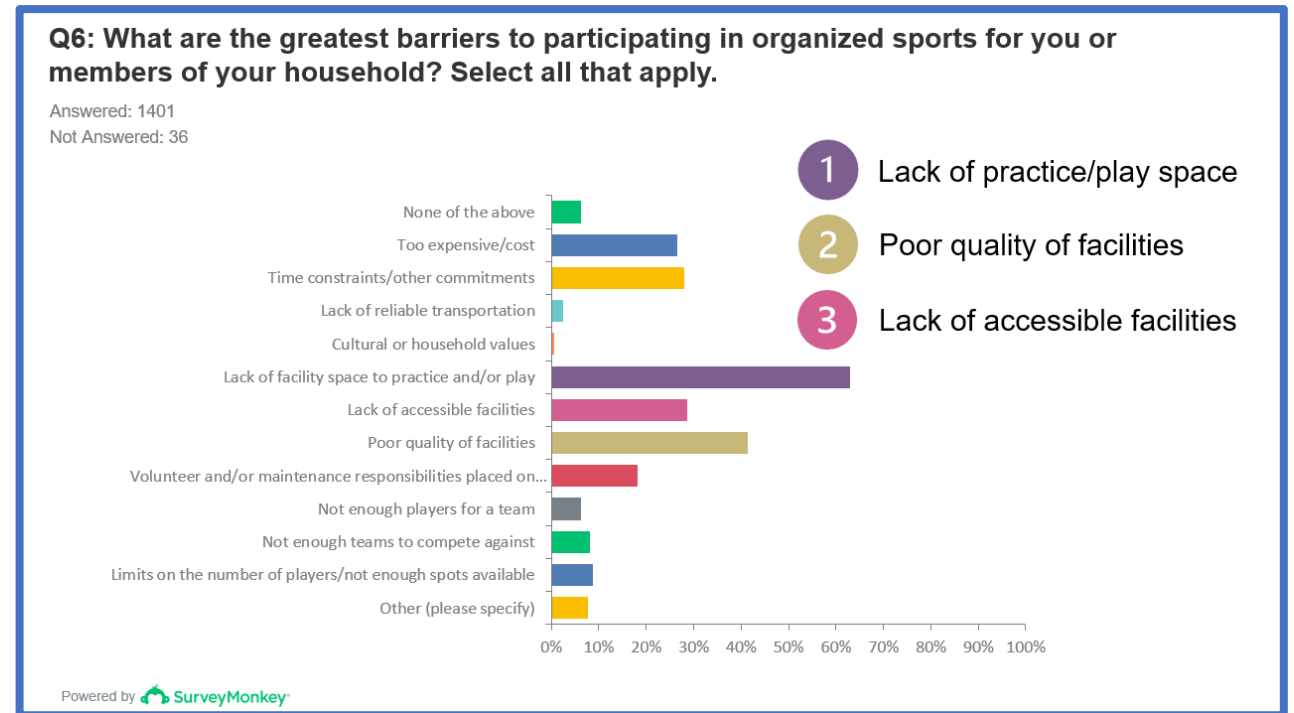
Community Engagement Overview

- **3 community-wide workshops** (east, central, west) - 100+ participants
- **6 focus group meetings** - 50+ participants, informative conversations
 1. City staff
 2. Indoor Athletics Venues Task Force members
 3. Court user groups
 4. Rink user groups
 5. Diamond field user groups
 6. Rectangular field user groups
- **Community survey** - 1,437 responses
- **User groups questionnaire** - 17 user groups responded
 - Representation from volleyball, baseball, figure skating, hockey, pickleball, soccer, and ultimate frisbee groups



Community Engagement Key Take-Aways

- Lack of space for practice and competition
- Deferred maintenance must be addressed
- Need to reduce maintenance burdens for staff and volunteers
- Desire to extend sports season through targeted improvements
- Interest in multi-use, flexible spaces
- Desire for indoor and outdoor artificial turf
- Ice rink strategy is needed
- Willingness to travel further for better facilities



Existing Conditions Overview

- Documented inventory
- Rated condition of assets
- Mapped each site
- Developed analysis for each site

CH 1 SITE ANALYSIS

LAKE PARK ATHLETIC COMPLEX

Location:
3525 Riley Road, Duluth, MN 55803

Description:
Lake Park Athletic Complex is 40.12 acres and is located in far eastern Duluth and is located west of Jean Duluth Road and south of Riley Road. The complex is very flat, which creates good visibility and potentially good access, but does not drain well.

Athletic Program Elements:

- Five little league baseball diamonds (Fields A - E) with outfield fences ranging from 200 feet to 230 feet.
- One baseball diamond (Art Von Field) with an outfield fence at 310 feet.
- Concessions building at soccer.
- Three small maintenance buildings.
- Four batting cages with synthetic turf.
- Four youth soccer fields.
- One full size soccer field.
- Two gravel parking lots.

CH 1 SITE ANALYSIS

WHEELER ATHLETIC COMPLEX

Location:
3501 Grand Ave, Duluth, Mn 55807

Description:
Wheeler Athletic Complex is 32.21 acres and is located in western Duluth and is located north of Grand Avenue, south and west of the railroad and east of Merritt Creek. While the Complex is located in western Duluth, it is close to central Duluth. The Complex is located in a moderately densely populated area of Duluth and lies close to a high-priority equity area within the City. Wheeler Athletic Complex is buffered to the northeast, northwest and southwest with woodland. Topography is a considerable element on site with approximately 25 feet of grade change from the south parking lot to the upper 2 ballfields (Fields 3 and 4) to the north. Although not directly connected, Wheeler Athletic Complex is located near Wade Stadium, approximately 0.1 miles apart. The Duluth Heritage Sports Center is approximately 0.40 miles away.

Athletic Program Elements:

- Four softball diamonds (Fields 1 - 4) with outfield fences ranging from 285 feet to 300 feet.
- One baseball diamond (Field 5) with an outfield fence that ranges from 295 feet to 310 feet.
- Concessions and restroom building within the wagon wheel of ballfields, constructed in 2000.
- Two small maintenance buildings south of the baseball field.
- Four pickleball courts.
- Two tennis courts that can also serve four additional pickleball courts.
- One basketball court.
- Volleyball court.
- Bocce ball court.
- Horseshoe court.
- Wheeler Field House, constructed in 1970.

1 = Favorable

3 = Average

5 = Challenged

ATHLETIC VENUE - CONDITION ASSESSMENT	Soccer Venue Accessibility	Soccer Field Condition	Soccer Field Sports Lighting	Lacrosse Ready	Baseball Field Sports Lighting	Baseball Venue Accessibility	Baseball Venue Condition	Softball Field Sports Lighting	Softball Venue Accessibility	Softball Venue Condition	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other
Arlington Athletic Complex	5	3	5	5														
Como Park - Glen Avon					5	3	3											
Duluth Heights Park				5				5	3	3								
Enger Park Golf Course Clubhouse																		
Irving Park				5														
Lake Park Fields Athletic Complex	5	3	5	5	5	3	3											
Longview Tennis																		
Morgan Park																		
Piedmont Park								1	3	3								
Portman Park				5														
Wade Park					5	5	3	1**	1	1								
Wade Stadium - Stadium					1	3	5*											
Wheeler Park Athletic Complex					1	3	3	See Baseball	See Baseball	See Baseball								
Woodland Park																		
* WP - Field 1 - West					3	5	3											
* WP - Field 2 - East						5	5											
Woodland Park - Fryberger Arena																		



Existing Conditions Key Take-Aways

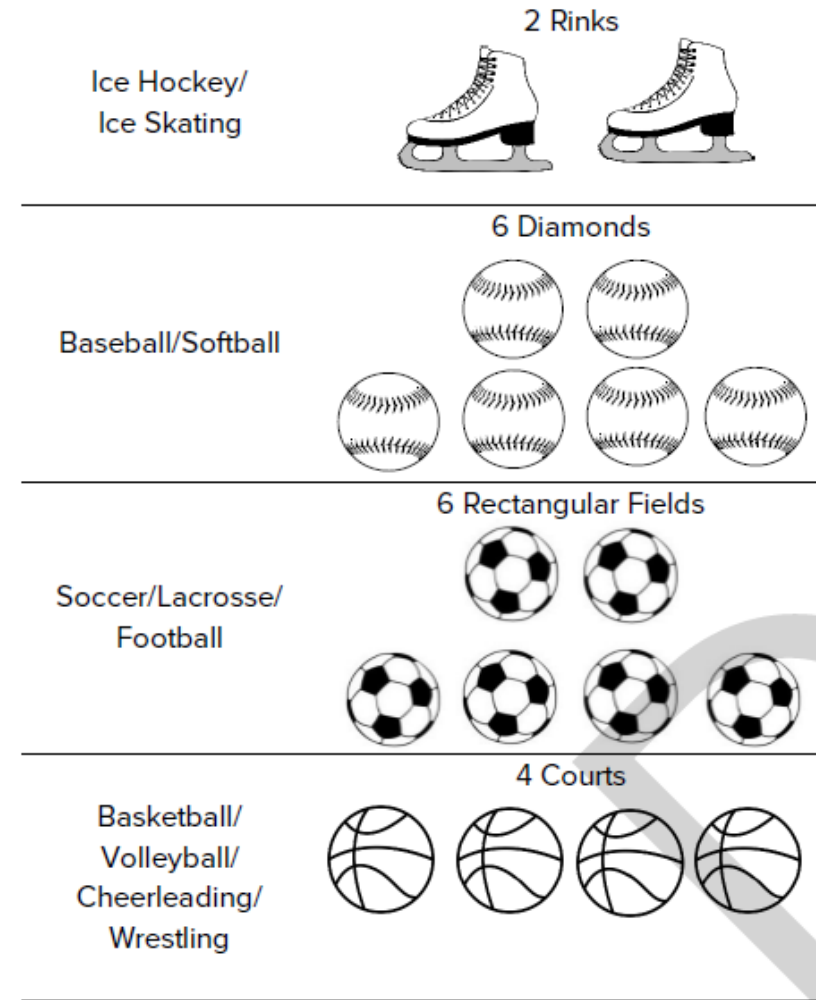
- Facilities provide good level of quantity, but not quality
- Extensive deferred maintenance must be addressed
- Lack of lighting and high-quality turf limits seasonal use opportunities
- Nearly all assets demonstrate some level of reinvestment opportunity
- Cost of all reinvestment opportunities far exceeds available AVRI funding



Market Analysis Overview

- Population, income and sports spending
- Hotel inventory
- Regional sports and recreation market
- Participation trends
- Visitation trends
- Facilities evaluations

**Sport Tourism Standard:
Minimum Threshold to Host Tournament**



Source: Johnson Consulting



Market Analysis Key Take-Aways: Existing Facilities

- Except for indoor multi-use courts, current facility quantities are good *at face value*
- *However*, Duluth's climate and facility conditions often render facilities unusable, especially outdoor facilities, putting Duluth below the threshold across all facility types
- Improving and upgrading existing sites will expand opportunities for the community and sports tourism

Park & Recreation Facilities Residents & Athletic Surface Comparison			
Facility Type	Average Number of Facilities in a City of Duluth's Size	Duluth Facility Inventory	Shortage/ Surplus
Diamond Fields	23.5	30	+6.5
Rectangle Fields	21.2	23	+1.8
Ice Rinks	2.9	20	+17.1
Pickleball	8.2	12	+3.8
Multiuse Hard Courts			
Excl. Schools*	3.6	2	-1.6
Incl. Schools	3.6	15	+11.4

*DISC excluded

Sources: NRPA, Duluth Parks & Rec, Visit Duluth, Esri, Johnson Consulting



Market Analysis Key Take-Aways: New Facilities

- The athletic tourism market in Duluth could support new indoor and outdoor synthetic turf fields and courts, and indoor ice

Market Supportable Facility Improvements Duluth, MN

Sport	Surface	Indoor/Outdoor	Quantity	Local/Regional Use
1 Soccer/Football/Lacrosse	Synthetic Turf Rectangle	Outdoor	5*	Both
2 Baseball/Softball	Synthetic Turf Diamond	Outdoor	5*	Both
3 Hockey	Ice	Indoor	2	Both
4 Basketball/Volleyball	Multiuse Court	Indoor	4	Both
5 Pickleball	Dedicated Court	Outdoor	6	Local
6 Soccer/Football/Lacrosse	Synthetic Turf Rectangle	Indoor	1	Local

*Including a dedicated championship field.

Note: Outdoor synthetic turf rectangles and diamonds can be overlay fields.

Source: Johnson Consulting



Indoor Athletic Venues

- Duluth lacks indoor facilities with artificial turf and courts that could support tournaments and extend playing seasons; ice facilities coming off-line
- Indoor Athletic Venues Task Force formed in December 2023 to explore renovating existing indoor athletic venues and/or constructing new indoor athletics facilities
- Early costs estimates show that constructing a new indoor, tournament-ready facility would use all AVRI funds, leaving nothing to improve facilities we already have
- Financial partnership is the only path forward for indoor facility improvements or additions



INDOOR SPORTS COMPLEX

City of Kearney, Nebraska

The design for the Indoor Sports Complex transforms Kearney into a regional hub for youth tournaments providing a significant economic impact to the area. The new 209,000 SF facility, includes 62,000 sf of wood-floor gymnasium space (8 basketball courts, 12 volleyball courts, and can accommodate 16 wrestling mats for tournaments), 65,000 sf of Indoor turf (many different soccer pitch arrangements, drop-down batting cages, softball practice infield), 4 dedicated pickleball courts, and a suspended running track.

Program

- 8 Court Recreation Gymnasium
- Indoor Turf Field (U12 - 190' x 260')
- Turf Storage
- 4 Pickleball Courts
- Jogging/Walking Track
- Multipurpose Room
- Lounge / Viewing
- Concessions
- Entry Lobby
- Control Desk
- Private Office
- Breakroom / Workroom
- Conference



Metrics

Schedule: Planning Began: Jun 2021; Planning Completion: Oct 2021; Design: Jan 2022-Jun 2023; Construction: May 2023; Occupancy: Jan 2025

Construction Costs: \$42,850,000

Size: 209,314 GSF

Participants

Architect of Record, Landscape Architect, Lighting Designer: RDG Planning & Design; MEP Consultant: Engineering Technologies; Structural: Thompson, Dreesen & Dornier; Cost: Stecker-Harmsen

Reference

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Recommended Approach: Fix What We Have

- **Prioritize deferred maintenance, core infrastructure, public safety, and accessibility**
 - Examples: field and drainage improvements, parking lot enhancements, accessibility modifications, existing building improvements, removals, or replacements
- **Partner with community groups to extend scope of outdoor athletic facility improvements**
 - Examples: field lighting, scoreboards, dugouts, bleachers, synthetic turf
 - Funding potential from fundraising, sponsorships, naming rights, grants, and more
- **Partner with community groups, non-profit organizations, and business community for new or improved indoor facilities**
 - Will need to be at the table for adding new indoor ice in Duluth



High-Level AVRI Funding Approach

Location	Purpose
Heritage Center / Other	Contribution towards new indoor ice
Wheeler Athletic Complex	Parking lot, buildings and fields improvements, ADA
Wade Stadium	Parking lot, roof, structural repairs
Lake Park Athletic Complex	Field improvements, irrigation, fencing, ADA
Arlington Athletic Complex	Field improvements, irrigation, fencing, ADA
Enger Golf Course	Contribution towards new clubhouse
AVRI TOTAL	\$ 31,200,000

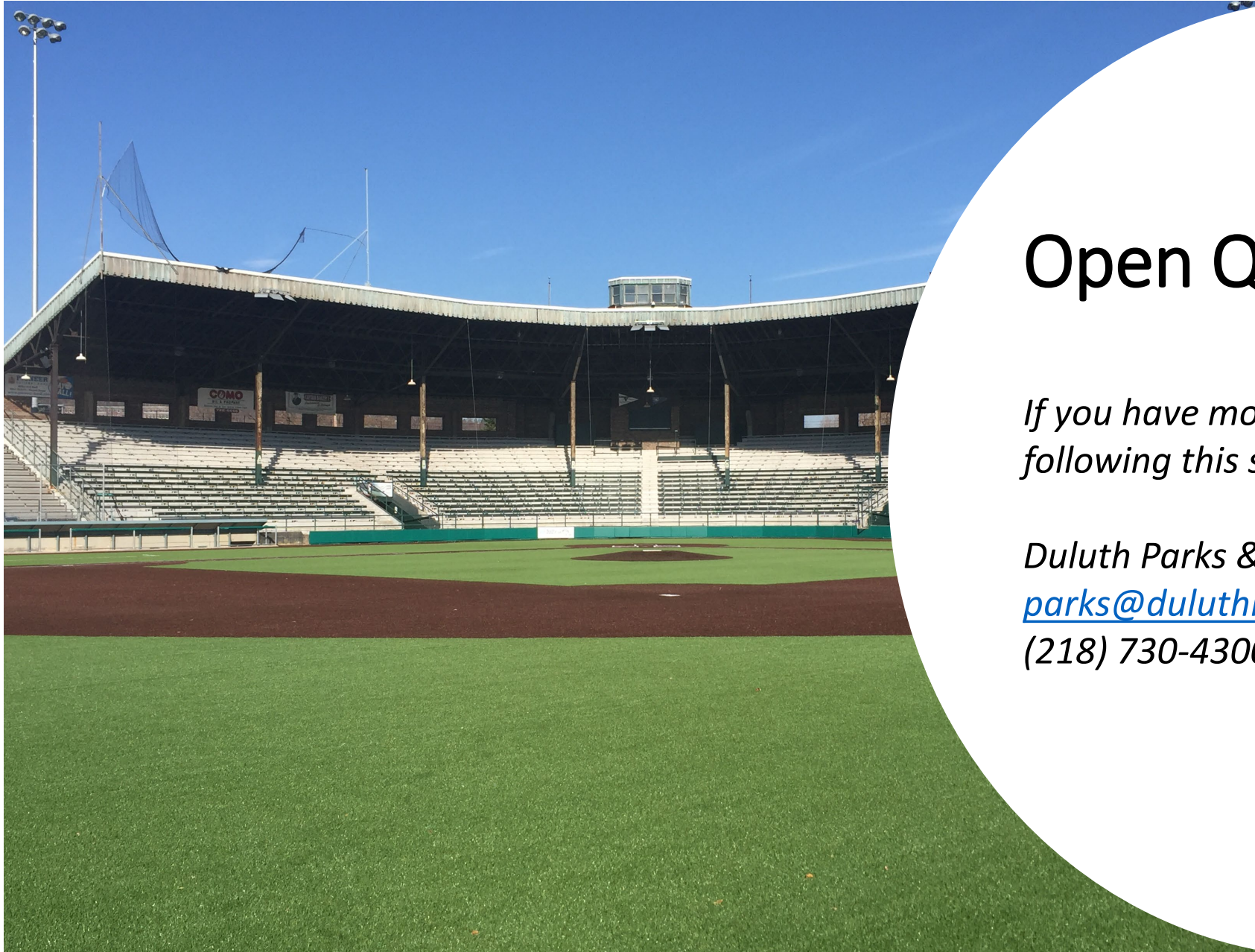
High-Level Project Support Opportunities (Partnerships, Fundraising, Grants, Sponsorship, Naming Rights)

Location	Purpose
Heritage Center / Other	Contribution towards new indoor ice
Wheeler Athletic Complex	Fencing, field lighting, dugout improvements, 1 synthetic turf field
Wade Stadium	Replace bleachers/concrete or other interior work
Lake Park Athletic Complex	Field lighting, parking improvements, new scoreboards and backstops, dugout improvements
Arlington Athletic Complex	Field lighting
Enger Golf Course	Contribution towards new clubhouse
Potential cost sharing opportunities beyond AVRI	\$ 20,000,000 – \$ 45,000,000

Next Steps

- Community engagement
 - Review approach with key user groups and community partners
 - Determine opportunities and preferences for community contributions
- Determine future project phasing
 - Start with most immediate needs
 - Consider fundraising needs and timelines
- Determining the appropriate cost recovery model
- Bring final recommendations before Parks & Recreation Commission and Duluth City Council





Open Q & A Session

If you have more questions or comments following this session, please reach out to:

Duluth Parks & Recreation

parks@duluthmn.gov

(218) 730-4300

