

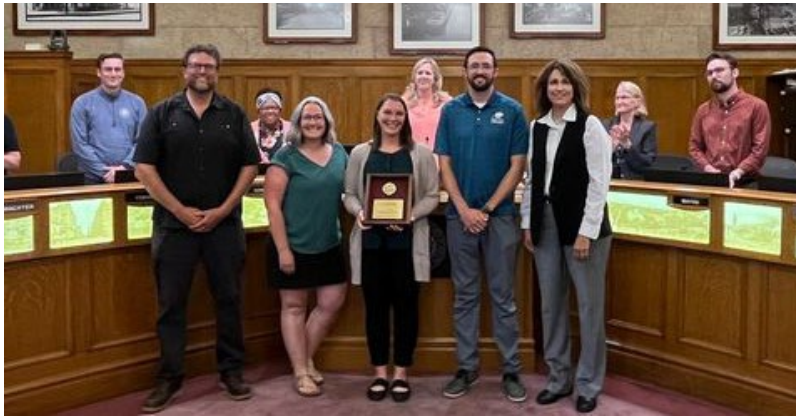
Parks and Recreation Division Report

August 2024

PROGRAMMING

MRPA Award of Excellence

Parks and Recreation staff were recognized at a Duluth City Council meeting on July 15 with an Award of Excellence from the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA) for our Youth on Trails mountain biking program! This program, funded through the Connecting People to the Outdoors Small Grant awarded by the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission, developed a mobile fleet of mountain bikes, balance bikes, trikes, and safety equipment, as well as a team of certified mountain bike instructors to lead programming across the City. The Youth on Trails program reduces financial, geographic, and social barriers to participation in mountain biking in Duluth.



Youth Programs

Summer 2024 has been our best and biggest yet! Youth programs continue to be busy, including things like Archery Camp, Fishing Camp, Wizards & Warlocks Camp, Friday Fun Days, Teen Adventures with the Library (Read & Ride, Escape Enger Tower), Out in the Woods teen hiking group, fishing field trips, archery field trips, dance & music classes, and more!

Highlights have included 25 teens participating in Escape Enger Tower, a new partner program with the Duluth Public Library in which teens participated in a modified “escape room” activity in Enger Tower! Another highlight has been our Youth on Trails mountain biking program, which has taken groups from the following programs mountain biking: Myers-Wilkins summer program, Valley Youth Center, Gary New Duluth Boys & Girls Club, and Lincoln Park Boys & Girls Club. Spirit Mountain also has partnered with us to host two Share the Shred events so far this summer, reaching more than 70 families for free biking skills clinics!



Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP)

North Shore SUP offered a variety of FREE stand up paddleboarding classes for the community to learn the basics of SUP and water safety on Park Point. These classes included Individual Intro to SUP, SUP for the Whole Family, and SUP for Women and Girls. A special thank you to North Shore SUP for being an amazing community partner!



Story & Play

Story & Play has been more popular than ever in 2024! We love this partner program with our colleagues at the Duluth Public Library! Weekly, this program rotates to a new park, and we have been able to see connections in the community grow within neighborhoods and between folks who come to the program every week. Our largest attended Story & Play this year was a beautiful day at Lester Park with more than 200 attendees!



Water Safety Awareness Beach Parties

Three Water Safety Awareness Beach Parties took place at the Park Point Beach House over the summer to promote rip current and hypothermia awareness with our Parks and Recreation team, as well as water borne illness awareness with the MN Department of Health. Kids who attended were able to win prizes for their beach safety knowledge, and utilize our beach games and equipment to further enjoy their day at the beach!

Pop-Up Splash Pads

Pop-Up Splash Pads have once again been a hit, continuing our partnership with the Duluth Fire Department for these events. On four Fridays throughout the summer, we visited parks in different neighborhoods to cool off and splash around in the street and park space. This year we held splash pads at Keene Creek Park, Grant Park, Washington Square Park, and Morgan Park.



Music in the Park

Formerly known as the Chester Creek Concert Series, Music in the Park has adapted to beautifully represent two park spaces in Duluth. The first half of the series took place at Chester Park, and the second half at the newly renovated Lincoln Park. An additional twist this year was double billing three of the evenings to highlight solo artists and duos who applied for the series. In the end, six bands and six solo/duo artists were invited to play in 2024. We have received incredibly positive feedback from the folks who have attended the Lincoln Park concerts sharing they are happy to see the space utilized and reenergized, and they are thrilled that we have brought concerts out west!



Athletics

Summer usage of our athletic fields, diamonds, and courts has been very busy. Open Skating at Duluth Heritage Center twice a week continues to be a popular activity for families. Successful programs that recently concluded include the second year of the Intro to Golf youth program partnership with the College of St. Scholastica Golf Team at Enger Park Golf Course. This program saw a total of 30 participants ages 6-13. The adult Ultimate Frisbee League at Irving Park also grew from 64 to 84 participants this summer.



Twins Bus Trip

On July 24, a group of all ages headed south too Minneapolis for the third annual Twins bus trip. The total number of 33 people was the largest group we have had since the first trip taken in 2022. The weather was perfect and the Twins walked off against the Phillies!

PERMITS AND OPERATIONS

Park Point Beach House

It has been a busy summer out at the Park Point Beach House. A ramp has been installed leading up to the bay side entrance, and landscaping is underway. Sidewalk lighting was also installed from the Beach House out to the parking lot. Lights will soon be added to the parking lot as well. This continues to be a popular wedding and event location, and most Saturdays are already booked through the 2025 season!



PERMIT TYPE	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
Park & Building Rentals	65	65	73	80	111	221	191
Commercial Operator Permits	1	1	2	6	6	3	2
Busker Permits	0	0	9	3	5	3	3
Alcohol Consumption Permits	2	5	5	15	14	18	17
Total	68	71	89	104	136	245	213

Social Media Statistics January-July 2024

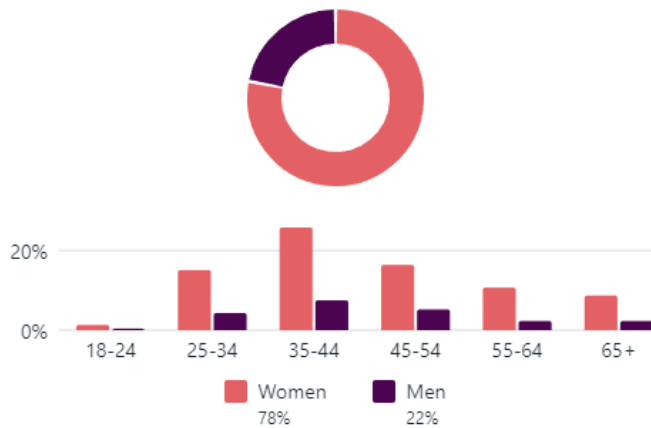
Facebook followers ⓘ

13,131

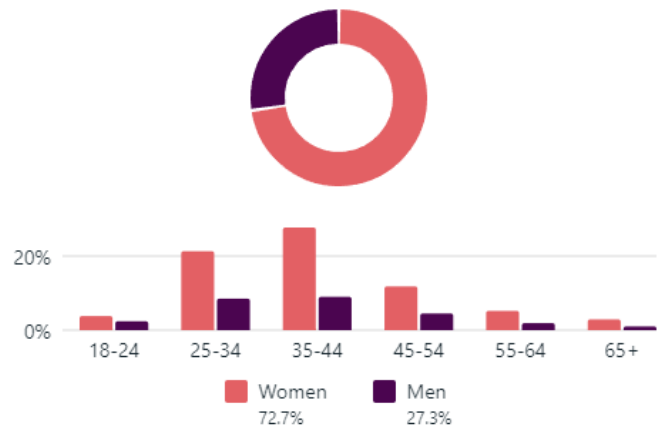
Instagram followers ⓘ

3,867

Age & gender ⓘ



Age & gender ⓘ



Comparing January-July 2024 to January-July 2023, we continue to see positive growth in our audience size, content reach (how many people have seen our content), and page visits.

	Jan - July 2023 Reach*	Jan - July 2024 Reach	% Change	Jan - July 2023 Page Visits	Jan - July 2024 Page Visits	% Change
Facebook	169,300	225,200	+33%	27,300	28,300	+4%
Instagram	7,400	14,400	+95%	2,500	2,900	+12.5%

Top performing organic posts include:

- July 20: Out in the Woods – Queer Teen and Ally Hiking Group 18k
- June 11: Tischer Creek trail closure due to fallen tree – 11.9k
- April 17: Informational Chambers Grove Pelican Migration – 9.7;
- June 20: Brighton Beach closure for Grandma’s Marathon – 8.6k
- May 28: Free Saturday morning yoga at Enger Park – 8.6k

PROJECT UPDATES

Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI) Action Plan

RDG Planning & Design (RDG), an interdisciplinary firm complete with a Sports Studio team, has been selected as the consultant to assist with development of Duluth's Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI) Action Plan. RDG services for the Action Plan will include an analysis of existing athletic facilities, a sports tourism-focused market analysis, site selection analysis and economic impact analysis for any new indoor athletic venue, and providing recommendations related to prioritized investments, site design, public-private financing, and operating models. In support of these services, RDG will facilitate extensive community engagement, including consultation with the Indoor Athletics Venues Taskforce, community surveys, focused user group meetings, open houses, and public presentations.

On July 17-18, 2024, kick-off meetings were held with City administration, key staff, and RDG to introduce the project team, reaffirm project goals, review the plan process, discuss partnerships, and begin preparations for the first round of community engagement opportunities.

The first set of community engagement opportunities have been scheduled for Tuesday, August 27 – Thursday, August 29, 2024, which includes focus group meetings with key facility users, as well as public open houses at various locations throughout the city. Fliers for engagement opportunities will be emailed to Parks and Recreation Commission members and key stakeholders, and shared on social media and the City's website.

Chester Park Chalet Reconstruction

On July 31, 2024, the Thom Storm Chalet and Outdoor Recreation Center reconstruction project received support from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) when it was selected for inclusion in their annual recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature on how to allocate proceeds from the state's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The project was recommended for 81% of our requested funding amount, with a tentative allocation of \$2,312,000.

In collaboration with Chester Bowl Improvement Club (CBIC), the project aims to reconstruct the Chalet to improve accessibility, achieve modern sustainability standards, and better meet the community's nature-based recreation, education, and preservation needs. If approved by the 2025 Legislature and signed into law by the Governor, construction of the new building is anticipated to take place over the 2026 construction season.

This project would not be possible without the excellent work of CBIC and their [Growing Up Chester](#) capital fundraising campaign, which is providing the required match funds and all additional project costs. The total project cost is estimated at \$3,815,000.

Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve Plan Implementation, Phase 1

On July 31, 2024, the Enhancing Preservation and Accessibility at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve project received support from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) when it was selected for inclusion in their annual recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature on how to allocate proceeds from the state's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The project was recommended for full funding, with a tentative allocation of \$155,000.

In collaboration with Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory (HRBO), the project aims to complete a universally accessible trail loop and an accessible path to the existing viewing platform to provide visitors of all abilities with access to high-quality outdoor recreation and conservation-based education opportunities. If approved by the 2025 Legislature and signed into law by the Governor, construction of the trail is anticipated to take place over the 2026 construction season.

Cross City Trail Extension and Accessibility Improvement

There are two sections of the Cross City Trail that are currently under construction, one is an extension, and the other is an accessibility reconstruction. Both sections are supported by grant funding from the MN Department of Transportation through the Transportation Alternatives Program. These sections are progressing well. Contractors have cleared the new alignment, prepared the trail, and poured new asphalt!

The new alignment for the section between Kingsbury Creek and the trailhead across from the Lake Superior Zoo has a much lower incline than the previous trail, and the reconstruction will also address a section of rough pavement that was near the bridge over Kingsbury Creek. Both aspects will improve the accessibility of the trail. The extension includes repaving of the Cross City Trail section that passes through Irving Park, and then extends the trail from S 57th Ave W to S 59th Ave W.



Norton Park

At the public meeting in April about future improvements at Norton Park, some community members requested additional information on the cost to restore the building to useable condition. Progress on the assessments of the condition of the building at Norton Park are progressing. The building was closed years ago due to lack of use. Water damage within the building and general condition decline from being unused has created significant problems. There is a dense mold infestation throughout the building and the mold extends deep into the porous surfaces. This summer, staff contracted Twin Ports Testing for a mold, asbestos, and regulated waste inspection, and are awaiting external reports to determine cost for mold remediation and architectural restoration. Once these final reports are received, staff will share the information and prepare a community survey to help inform priorities for future improvements. The survey will hopefully be launched in September and then a subsequent community meeting in October to discuss results of the survey and identify next steps.

Hillside Sport Court Park Plan Implementation

On June 24, 2024, Parks & Recreation received an award notification letter from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources informing staff that the Hillside Sport Court Park project was selected for funding under the FY2025 Outdoor Recreation Grant Program, with an anticipated award amount of \$350,000. Additionally, on July 25, 2024, an award notification letter from the City of Duluth's Planning and Development division confirmed that Parks & Recreation will receive \$30,000 of Community Development Program funds to support playground improvements at the park. With the addition of these funds, the estimated minimum funding package necessary to fully implement the Hillside Sport Court Park Plan has been achieved.

The first phase of the Hillside Sport Court Park Plan implementation, which includes capping utilities and removing the dilapidated building, is expected to be completed this month (August 2024). Next steps toward full project implementation include: bringing the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program contract before City Council for approval to accept the funds, completing final design and construction documents this fall, bidding and awarding the project to a contractor over winter, and the start of construction in spring 2025.

Duluth Traverse Trailheads and Bike Playground / Skills Area

Parks & Recreation staff, in collaboration with Cyclists of Gitchee Gumees Shores (COGGS), are initiating public engagement opportunities to prepare for a future grant application to support improvements at Duluth Traverse trailheads. The Duluth Traverse is designated as a regionally significant trail by the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Commission. This designation allows the City to apply for grants to support the Duluth Traverse trail system. With much of the trail system now constructed, there are significant improvements needed at many trailheads. COGGS has expressed interest in a bicycle playground and/or skill development area. If placed near the Duluth Traverse, the proposed grant application could support new trailhead infrastructure, and development of a bicycle playground.

A bicycle playground, also often referred to as a skills area, is an intentionally designed skill development area with bike-optimized features to allow riders to explore and progress their abilities in a fun and easily repeatable environment. While the specific features will vary depending on the targeted skill level, bicycle playgrounds/skills areas often include elements like a pump track or rollers, wood bridges, tunnels, teeter-totters, logs, balance elements, and progressive jumps and drops.

On Thursday, August 8, staff, in partnership with COGGS launched a community survey to help inform priorities for a bicycle playground. The survey will close on August 31.

Future engagement will focus on locations most desirable for trailhead improvements; these improvements may include elements such as: lighting, restrooms, drinking water, signage and wayfinding.

WE WANT YOUR INPUT: TAKE THE SURVEY!

The City of Duluth, in partnership with COGGS, is exploring options for a new bicycle playground/skills area in Duluth! Community input and preferences will be used to support a future grant application to fund the project.



Use the QR code or visit the webpage below through **Saturday, August 31** to make your voice heard!

Longview Tennis Courts Improvements

This summer, Duluth Friends of Tennis completed a court resurfacing project and picnic area improvements at Longview Tennis Club! The new court surface not only looks beautiful, it also improves player mobility, bounce of the ball, and overall play of the game. The picnic area, which was supported by generous donors, provides a pleasant and comfortable resting and viewing area for players and spectators alike. Many thanks to Duluth Friends of Tennis for funding and organizing these great projects!



Old Main Park

An independent engineer analysis of the historic arches at Old Main Park suggests that the arches have deteriorated to an extent that they pose a public safety hazard. In June, as a short-term solution, six-foot, vinyl-coated chain-link fencing with signage was installed around each of the arches. The fencing provides for a safe distance between the public and the arches, while still allowing the historic structures to be visually enjoyed. Because the arches are part of a federally and locally designated historic district, the long-term solution must be developed through an alternatives analysis process that will be supported by a cultural resource specialist. The alternatives analysis process will develop and evaluate a range of options from complete restoration (estimated cost \$300,000) to partial or complete demolition, paired with memorialization. The planning, design, grant-seeking, permitting and construction process could take 2-3 years. Parks and Recreation staff are currently seeking proposals for a cultural resource specialist. Throughout the process, staff will return to Parks and Recreation Commission to seek input, provide updates, and ultimately, ask for a recommended alternative.

Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail Segment 3 – US Steel Ribbon Cutting

A ribbon cutting was held on Wednesday, July 10 to celebrate the opening of the 1.5-miles of new trail on the US Steel site. This segment of Waabizheshikana is accessible via Blackmer Park and from Falcon Street, located near the Morgan Park Community Center. The trail runs along the St. Louis River on the US Steel site to roughly Wire Mill Pond, with a loop trail on the Spirit Lake Delta. A guided hike was also provided in the evening of July 10, where project representatives provided an overview of the remedies and habitat restoration activities that were complete at this four-year, \$186.5 million project site. Over 180 people joined the guided hike!



NATURAL RESOURCES

Buckingham Creek – Enger Park Golf Course

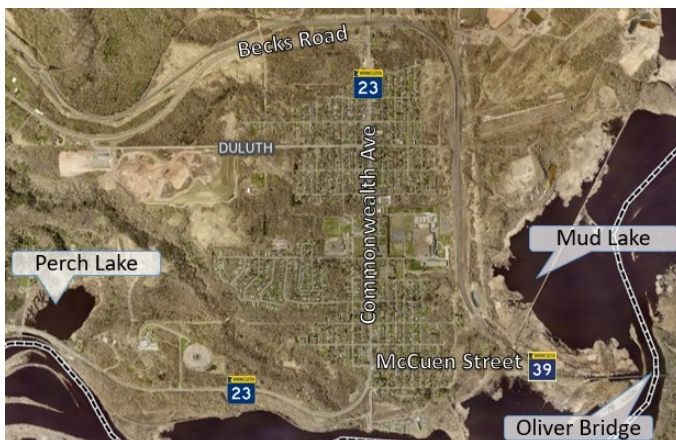
Buckingham Creek runs through the Enger Park Golf Course. This summer, the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are restoring roughly 3,500 feet of Buckingham Creek, the coldest designated trout stream in Duluth. Undersized culverts will be replaced with bridges, the riparian area will be replanted while accommodating course standards, habitat features (pools and riffles) will be added, and appropriate stream geomorphology for this size watershed will be restored. The below photos show the newly daylighted stretch of Buckingham Creek, which previously ran through culverts in this section. Now that the creek's natural path is being restored, contractors will work on the adjacent plantings.



This project is being completed concurrent with the City's irrigation project at Enger Golf Course. Restoration work is funded by a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant and funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. This project will result in a more resilient creek, better trout habitat, and a more aesthetically pleasing course.

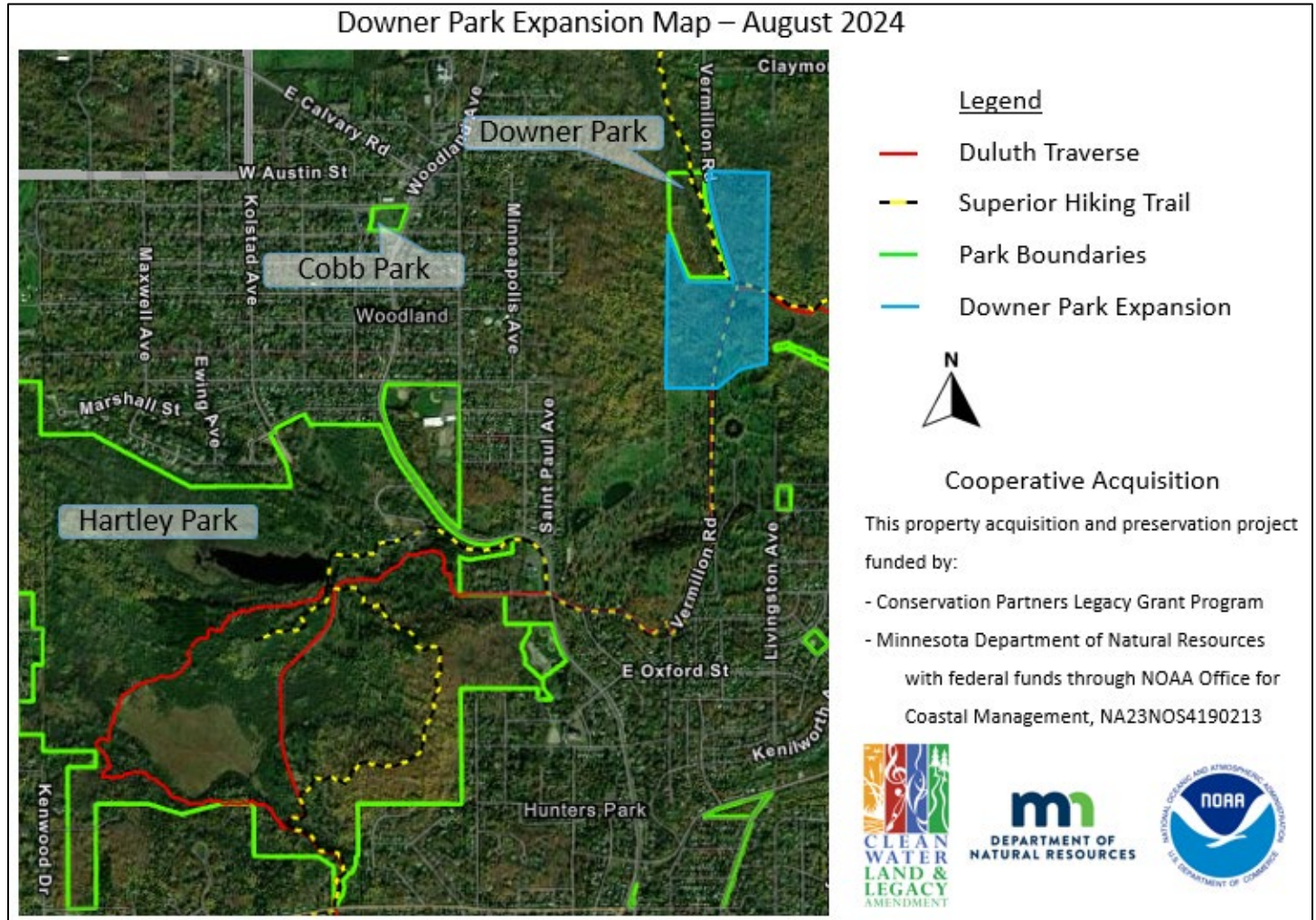
Mud Lake Habitat Restoration

On Wednesday, July 31, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources held a public meeting at the Morgan Park Community Center to share information about upcoming restoration work planned for Mud Lake. The restoration project is intended to improve fish and wildlife habitat in Mud Lake, a sheltered bay of the St. Louis River that is bisected by the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad causeway. Goals include restoring deep water habitat, reestablishing native wetland plants, and improving the flow of nutrients and sediment between both sides of Mud Lake and the St. Louis River. Construction is expected to begin in 2025. The project is funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the MN Outdoor Heritage Fund.



Downer Park Expansion

In December 2023, the City completed a cooperative acquisition of approximately 55 acres of property from the Park Hill Cemetery Association to preserve the area's natural resources and support recreation opportunities through the area. In the coming months, the acquired land will be designated as an extension of the adjacent Downer Park, which is located off Vermillion Road in the Woodland neighborhood (see map below). The acquisition was possible through awarded grants, including \$100,000 from Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program and \$650,000 from the Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grant Program. This past summer, a native plant community assessment was completed for the site with funding from the CPL grant, and this information will support future habitat restoration of the site.



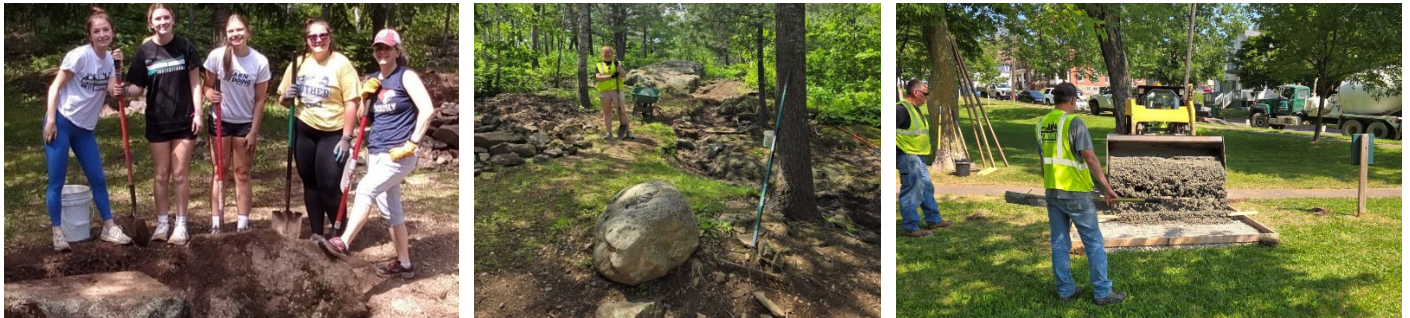
PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES

Maintenance Projects

On Saturday, July 13, staff collaborated with the Lake Superior Rose Society to host the annual Rose Fest at the Rose Garden. The event went smoothly and featured tours of the garden, classes on selecting and growing roses, and a treasure hunt for kiddos.

In addition to the typical work in parks, such as sanitation work, mowing, and site maintenance, there are an array of maintenance projects happening across Duluth Parks. Staff assembled the picnic tables and then will install them at Brighton Beach. Pavilions and garbage/recycling hubs in parks received their second power-washing of the season. Landscaping crews continue to clear shrubby materials and weeds from landscaped beds, and topdress mulch as needed.

In Enger Park, staff worked with volunteers to restore a small waterfall and pond within the landscaped area of the park (below left and center pictures). A new concrete slab was installed at Portland Square for the portable toilet (below right).



Staff tilled and removed weeds at playgrounds across Duluth. Chambers Grove, Harrison Park, Irving Park, and Woodland Park all received new top dress of engineered wood fiber fall zone material. Athletic field maintenance continues to hold steady with so many sport events and practices. Keeping up with all the activity includes regular mowing and tilling and reforming infields (below right picture shows Wheeler Athletic Complex infield maintenance).



At Bayfront Festival Park, staff complete significant vegetation management along the vendor areas in the park. Pictures below show the before and after of invasive and encroaching plant material clearing.



Forestry

Tree removals and general tree care continues along. Lately, the dry July has meant crews are spending quite a bit of time watering young trees throughout Duluth. Ash trees dying from emerald ash borer infestations become brittle and risk blowdowns without quick removals, which is why they have been the priority. However, when other species are damaged or otherwise unwell, they can also become higher risk. What previously had been small problems are becoming larger and more urgent. With the heavy focus on ash tree removals over the past six years, this summer has seen a shift in dealing with these non-ash problem trees. Hopefully these other tree removals are mostly complete, and crews can get back to removing ash trees this fall.

Engineering's lead water line replacement work proceeding well in many areas. The process for water line replacements is causing some damage to boulevard trees that can hopefully be reduced moving forward with some changes to tree planting locations and focus areas. The goal will be to plant trees with reference to the water line replacement maps to allow replacements to be completed quickly and ensure trees will survive. By the end of the year, the Gary-New Duluth neighborhood will have all the lead line replacements complete, and Morgan Park has previously had their lines replaced. So, tree planting next year will likely be focused in those neighborhoods. Unfortunately, there are still lead water lines in some neighborhoods where ash trees have been removed and now new trees need to be planted. Where trees need to be planted and water lines have not yet been replaced, forestry crews will provide a wider berth for water lines and avoid the adjacent area where possible. While these changes may slow down tree planting progress slightly, it will result in more healthy trees in the future.