

Parks and Recreation Division Report

January 2025

PROGRAMMING

Youth on Trails – Tommy Johnson Award

Duluth Parks and Recreation was awarded the Tommy Johnson Award on Friday, January 10 during the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association’s Annual Awards Ceremony. The award recognizes the Youth on Trails program for its innovative approach to expanding kids’ access to mountain biking in Duluth.

The Tommy Johnson Award is presented to the highest scoring recipient of MRPA’s “Award of Excellence” recipients. The successful “Award of Excellence” project or initiative that is selected best exemplifies the characteristics and values that Tommy Johnson was known for: innovative, futuristic, revolutionary and/or creative ideas and initiatives that help establish future trends, philosophical change, sharing of new resources, and new exciting concepts.

The Youth on Trails mountain biking program was developed by Duluth Parks and Recreation in collaboration with community organizations thanks to a \$167,783 grant awarded by the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission, through the Connecting People to the Outdoors Small Grant fund, which is sourced from the Minnesota Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. This funding was used to develop a mobile fleet of mountain bikes, balance bikes, trikes, and safety equipment, and it supports a team of certified mountain bike instructors to lead programming across the city’s park and trail system. The Youth on Trails program reduces financial, geographic, and social barriers to participation in mountain biking in Duluth that traditionally prevent or reduce youth’s participation in this growing lifetime activity.



Solstice Luminary Hike

The Solstice Luminary Hike on Thursday, December 19 was once again a hit! Around 500 people attended this event, welcoming winter with a beautiful luminary-lined hike and hot cocoa. A special thanks to Enger Park Golf Course for their partnership in hosting us for this event!

Lunch, Learn, and Share

Lunch, Learn, and Share is a popular ages 55+ partnership program with Duluth Aging Support. This monthly program is typically hosted at Harrison Community Center and includes a lunch and a discussion on a new topic each month. The holiday celebration was held at Clyde Iron Works and featured music from Duluth Victory Chorus, which is a dementia-friendly singing chorus.

55+ Annual Senior Holiday Party

December was busy with holiday festivities. The 55+ programs celebrated the Annual Senior Holiday Party on December 12 at Morgan Park Community Center, with more than 100 attendees and volunteers. Everyone enjoyed visiting with friends, Parks and Recreation staff, and Duluth Police Officers. The group had a wonderful meal together, followed by a raffle prize drawing, and finishing with a concert from local music group 'Blue Water Big Band'.



Save the Date! Cold Front 2025

Saturday, February 1 at Bayfront Park; visit coldfrontduluth.com for more information and updates!



PROJECT UPDATES

Norton Park Improvement Planning

A community meeting will be held on Thursday, January 16 from 6:00 – 7:30 PM at the Norton Park United Methodist Church. At the meeting, staff will provide an overview of the various building assessments that were completed over the summer and discuss next steps for park improvements that are planned to take place in 2026.

Over the summer, staff coordinated three different independent third-party assessments of the building at Norton Park to evaluate the existing condition. These assessments included (1) a mold, asbestos, and regulated waste inspection conducted by Twin Ports Testing, (2) a mold remediation estimate completed by ServPro, and (3) architectural, structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing assessments completed by Architecture Advantage with consultation from Northland Consulting Engineers and CMTA. The assessments were compiled into one report that is available on the project webpage ([Report Link](#)).

These independent assessments concluded that the building is structurally compromised and the primary systems are beyond their useful life. Because of the nature of the building's design, construction, age and condition, renovation is not feasible. Demolition of the building has been recommended by these consultants. The community meeting will provide an opportunity for residents to weigh in on park improvement priorities, with the caveat that the City has limited financial resources.

Lafayette Boardwalk Replacement

Construction of the new boardwalk at Lafayette Community Center is now complete!

Before



After



The City applied for and was awarded project funds from Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program to improve beach access and better preserve the surrounding sensitive dune habitat. Construction of the boardwalk was a joint effort between our Parks Maintenance staff and our Property and Facilities Management staff, and they did an amazing job! Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa staff were on-site to monitor for cultural resources during all ground disturbing activities.

The project did come in under budget and staff has submitted a request to the Coastal Program to extend the grant contract and use remaining funds to replace the deck area between Lafayette Community Center and the new boardwalk. Staff is waiting for final approval of this extension and use of funds.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural Resources Management Program Plan

The City successfully closed the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant at the end of 2024. This grant supported the development of the Natural Resources Management Program, funded the purchase of 350 tax forfeit parcels, and supported the removal of invasive buckthorn on almost 100 acres of designated natural area. The strategic acquisition of the 350 parcels from St. Louis County will ensure these natural areas will be preserved for the future.

Downer Park & Amity Creek

Using grant funding from a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant, contractors will be restoring a small area of the Amity Creek forest. The City recently acquired area north of Park Hill Cemetery and hired a consultant to prepare a Native Plant Community Report. This report described the plant communities found in the area and provides suggestions for managing the site in order to restore the forest community and protect Amity Creek.

The ash stand replacement and buckthorn removal project began in early January 2025. Approximately 100 ash trees that have died due to Emerald Ash Borer infestation will be cut and burned. Then, native tree species, including Yellow Birch, River Birch, and Swamp White Oak, will be planted. The Natural Resources Management Program will use this site to gauge the success of species that could best emulate the ecosystem services we will be losing with the loss of our Ash stands. Emerald Ash Borer is present in Duluth, and Ash mortality is nearly 100% once a stand is infested. Buckthorn will also be removed during the project.

Trail access is closed temporarily for the duration of the project. Smoke will be visible, and chainsaws will be used during this time as part of the restoration work.

Minnesota Point Section 111 Study

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has hired a contractor to complete the modeling of sediment transport along MN Point. The modeling process will support the assessment of how, or if, the Federal Navigation Structures have influenced erosion. Modeling is progressing and results are expected by March, at which time another public information meeting will be held. After the modeling results are complete, the USACE will determine culpability and identify solution options.

PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES



Park Maintenance has been maintaining decent skiing conditions at Chester Bowl Ski Hill considering the winter season we have had.

Bayfront ice rink is underway and should be up and running in the next week! A list of skating rinks and their hours can be found on the Parks and Recreation website: <https://duluthmn.gov/media/mirha0w2/winter-2025-outdoor-rink-hours-of-operations.pdf>