

Proposed Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Natural Area

Date: 4/30/2025

City Code:

Article XXIX. Chapter 2.

Duluth Natural Areas Program.

- Management Plan
- Community recognizes special features
- Compatible Uses
- 8:1 Council Reverse

HARTLEY MANAGEMENT PLAN ACTIONS

Action	Est Cost	Lead Entity/ <u>ies</u>	Status
Hartley Pond/Dam Feasibility Study	\$79,000	MN DNR	Complete
Tischer Creek Restoration / Hartley Dam Removal	\$320,000 to \$1,400,000	City of Duluth, MNDNR	In Progress – project design is funded and is next step.
Invasive species control in priority areas	\$140,000 +	City, HNC, Volunteers	Ongoing
Develop Plant community management and restoration plan	\$20,000	City	Complete
Conifer plantation conversion (thinning)	\$50-100K	City	On Hold
NW Hills Trail and Forest Management	\$20,000	City, COGGS, TNC	Ongoing
Vernal Pool Identification and Mapping	\$0	HNC	Complete



MINNESOTA LAND TRUST



South St. Louis
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



**DULUTH NATURAL AREA PROGRAM
NOMINATION:**

**LESTER-AMITY-HAWK RIDGE
NATURAL AREA**

**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
APRIL 23, 2025**

Gini Breidenbach
Minnesota Land Trust

Janelle Long
Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory

Tim Beaster
South St. Louis Soil & Water Conservation
District

John Lenczewski
Minnesota Trout Unlimited

DULUTH NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM

*Legislative Code,
Chapter 2
Article XXIX, Sec. 2-
152*

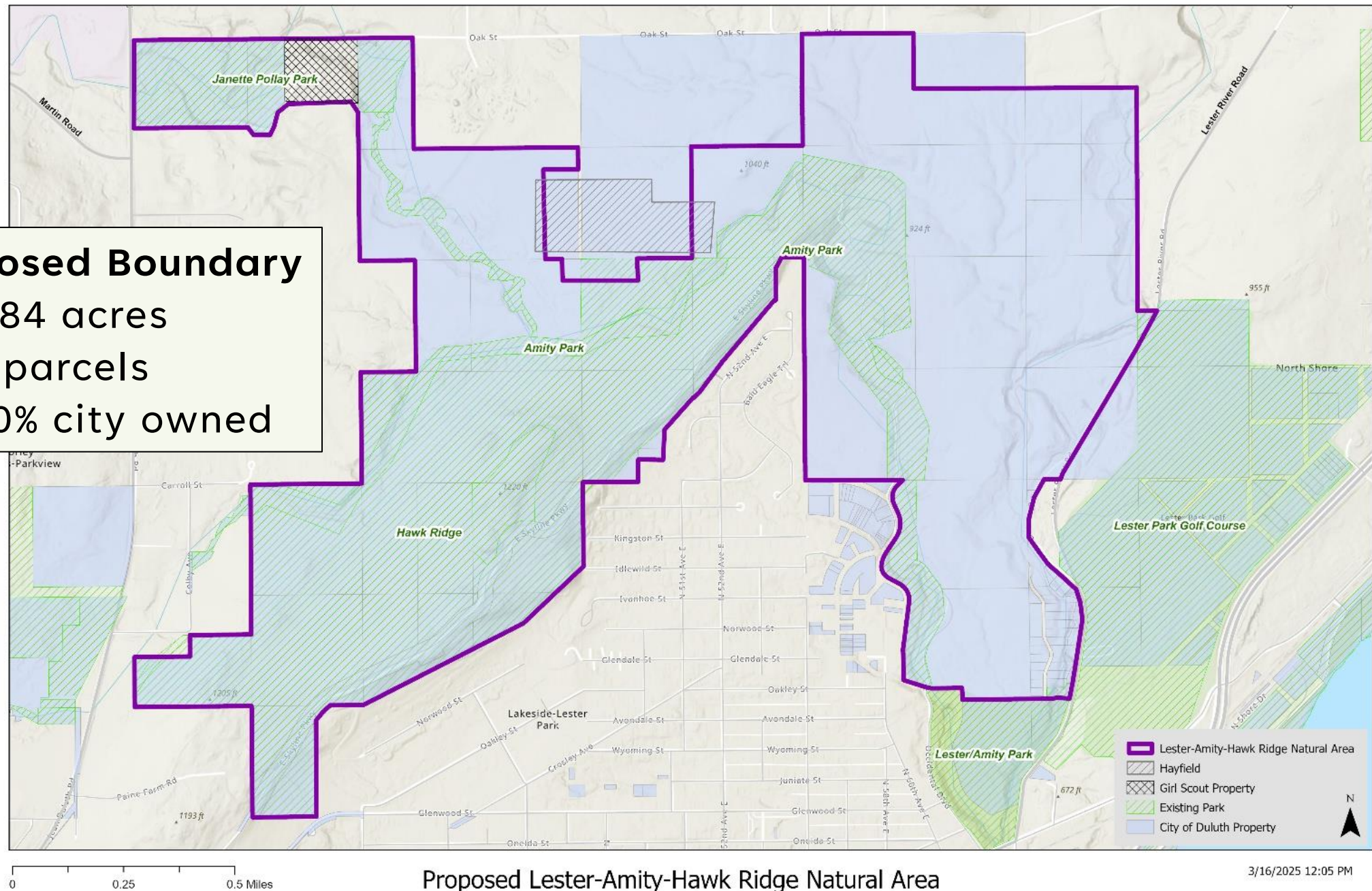
The ability to nominate certain lands with environmental value as permanent open space

Designating these lands ensures we will always have access to these special places to appreciate nature and enjoy the outdoors. In doing so, we are preserving our natural heritage for the public good by:

- Ensuring the city can better manage our forests, streams and wetlands
- Supporting diversification of our region's economy
- Promoting the well-being and happiness of our citizens and visitors
- Maximizing resiliency for a changing climate through services these lands provide (e.g., controlling stormwater runoff, supporting ecological diversity)

Proposed Boundary

- 1,184 acres
- 82 parcels
- 100% city owned



DNAP
SCIENTIFIC
CRITERIA

- Important Bird Congregation Area
- Natural Water Feature Area
- Special Species Area
- Significant Plant Communities Area
- Geological Landform Area



IMPORTANT BIRD
CONGREGATION AREA





HAWK RIDGE NATURE RESERVE

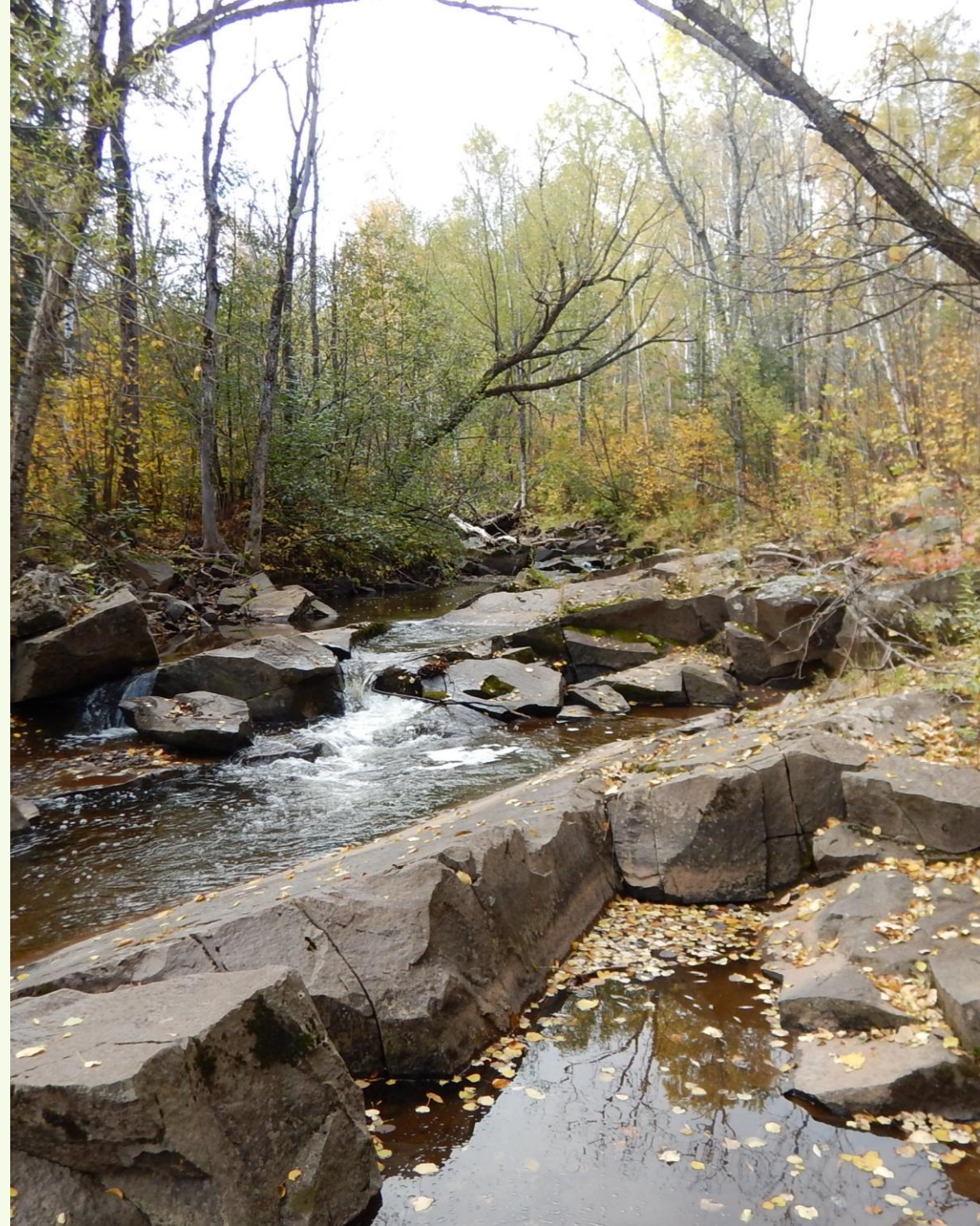
- Globally important migratory corridor
- 60,000 raptors and 200,000 other birds are counted annually during Fall migration
- Record of 201,826 raptors counted in 2003
- Migrating birds originate from summer breeding areas as far north as the Arctic and have winter destinations as far south as South America
- 59 species of greatest conservation need identified

HAWK RIDGE BIRD NATURE RESERVE

- Annual bird counts contribute to long-term research data sets
- Important site for banding research on raptors and passerines
- 80,000 annual visitors (local and tourists)
- Economic impact during fall migration is \$22M from 35,000 tourists



NATURAL WATER FEATURE
AREA





AMITY CREEK

- East Branch of Amity Creek is the best trout fishery in Duluth
- Robust population of naturally reproducing Brook Trout
- Ranks 5th among north shore streams based on Brook Trout sampling
- One of the least urbanized watersheds in the city – 3% developed



AMITY CREEK

- East branch and mainstem are listed as impaired for turbidity
- EPA Nine Key Elements Plan was completed, and management actions have been identified
- South St. Louis SWCD and Trout Unlimited are investing more than \$2M in state and federal funds to restore the stream corridor over the next 10 years

SIGNIFICANT PLANT
COMMUNITIES AREA





NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES

- Nine native plant communities
- Wetland plant communities contribute to groundwater recharge and water quality
- Wetland and upland communities offer foraging and nesting habitat for migrating birds
- Continuous forest is an important wildlife corridor connecting to Lakewood Township on the east and Tischer Creek on the west

NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES AT HAWK RIDGE

Hawk Ridge Plant Community Survey 2014			
DNR CODE	DNAP Code	Plant Community Name in DNAP	Acres
FPn73a	CPn79a	Northern Alder Swamp	32.56
FFn57a	FFn67	Northern Floodplain Forst	15.38
MHn35b	MHn5b	Northern Rich Maple-Basswood Forest	23.9
ROn23a	ROn1a	Northern Rock Outcrop	63.38
WMn82b	WMn1a	Northern Sedge Meadow	0.06
FDn33b	FDn2d	Poor Dry-mesic Bedrock Aspen-Birch-Fir Woodland	107.72
FDn33a	FDn2f	Poor Dry-mesic Great Lakes Pine Woodland	10.43
WFn55a	WFn71c	Wet Black Ash Swamp	52.9
MHn46b	MHn62b	Wet-mesic Black Ash - Sugar Maple Forest	43.21

SPECIAL SPECIES AREA





CANADA BUFFALO BERRY

SHEPHERDIA CANADENSIS

- Documented in the proposed natural area since the 1940's
- Narrow range – found only in 7 counties in the state close to the Canadian border
- Prefers rocky outcrops in full to part sun in difficult to access eroding cliffs or scrubby upland habitats
- Higher density of the species within the proposed natural area than in other areas of the state

GEOLOGICAL LANDFORM AREAS





HAWK RIDGE

Mid-Continent Rift
(about 1.1 billion years ago)

- Diabase rock ridge is more resistant to erosion and weathering than the surrounding rock

Great Ice Age Glaciation
(over the last 2.5 million years)

- Formed the Lake Superior Basin

DESIGNATING THE LESTER-AMITY-HAWK RIDGE NATURAL AREA



WILL NOT

- Alter the trails plan
- Place limitations on the development or sale of private property adjacent to the natural area

WILL

- Bring valued open space under city ownership and protect it from sale and development
- Lead to management plans that provide for protection and restoration
- Assure park and trail plans are consistent with natural resource conservation goals
- Serve as a focal point for partners to assist the City with management activities

NEXT STEPS

Natural Resources
Commission

- May 7 (vote)

Planning Commission

- May 13 (presentation)

Parks and Recreation
Commission

- May 14 (info only)

We bring together a powerful partnership with support from six NGOs for the management of the 1200-acre Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Natural Area.



Thank you for your careful consideration of this nomination.

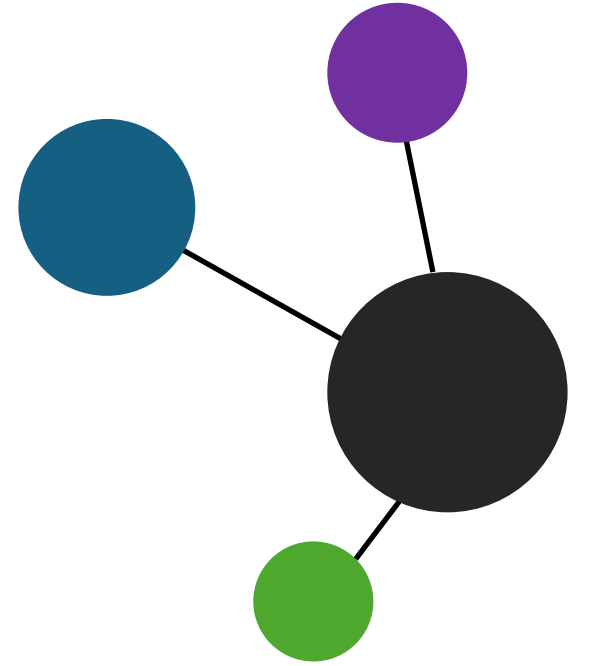
QUESTIONS?



The Park Fund and Capital Assets

Jessica Peterson, Parks and Recreation Manager

Presented to Parks and Recreation Commission on May 14, 2025



Background: Org Chart

The Duluth Park System's core support comes from three City Divisions:

- Parks and Recreation
- Property and Facilities Management
- Park Maintenance

The City-based funding sources that support the Parks & Recreation Operating and Capital Budgets are:

- Park Fund Levy
- General Fund
- Revenues (programs, reservations, permits, etc.)



Park Fund – What is it and how did it come to be?

- Special Levy - A property tax approved by voters for a specific public purpose.
 - **Park Fund Levy proposed on 2011 ballot**
- Levy Referendum - A special election in which voters decide whether to establish a special levy at a specified level.
 - **Voters approved the Park Fund Levy on their 2011 ballot**
- Park Fund Levy - The special levy approved by referendum in 2011 to pay for parks and rec facilities and activities
 - **Property owners began paying the Park Fund Levy in 2012**

The original Park Fund Levy, still in effect today, is a fixed annual dollar amount:

\$2.6 million

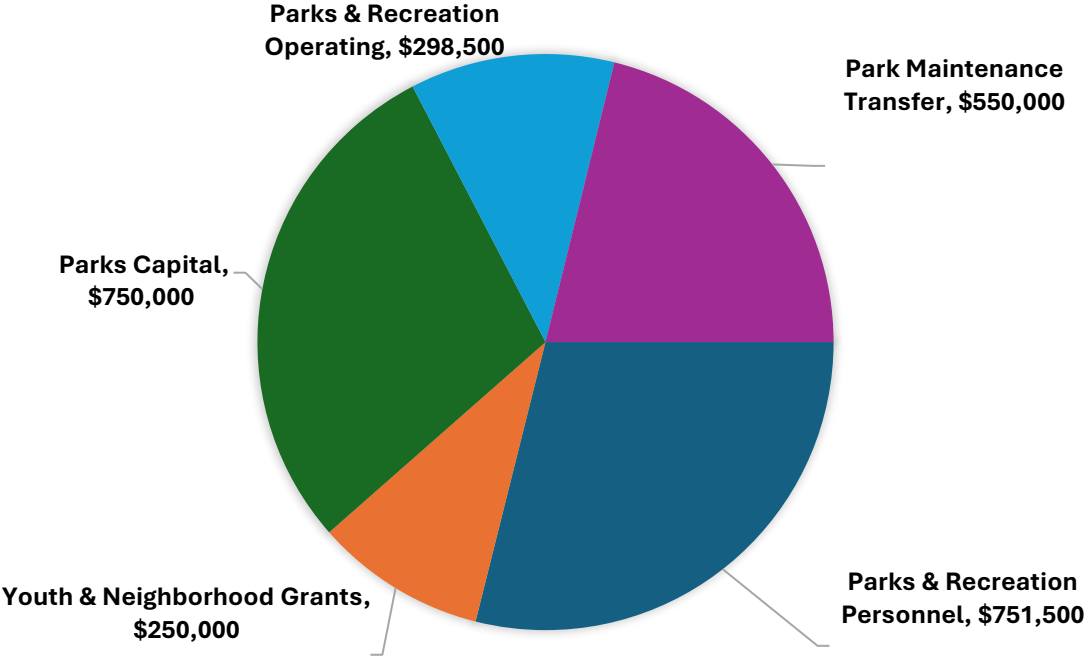
If the property tax base grows, the individual contribution by each property owner decreases to maintain the fixed total amount

Primary Uses of Park Fund Levy:

1. Parks and Recreation Division operations
2. Enhancement of routine park maintenance
3. Parks capital improvements

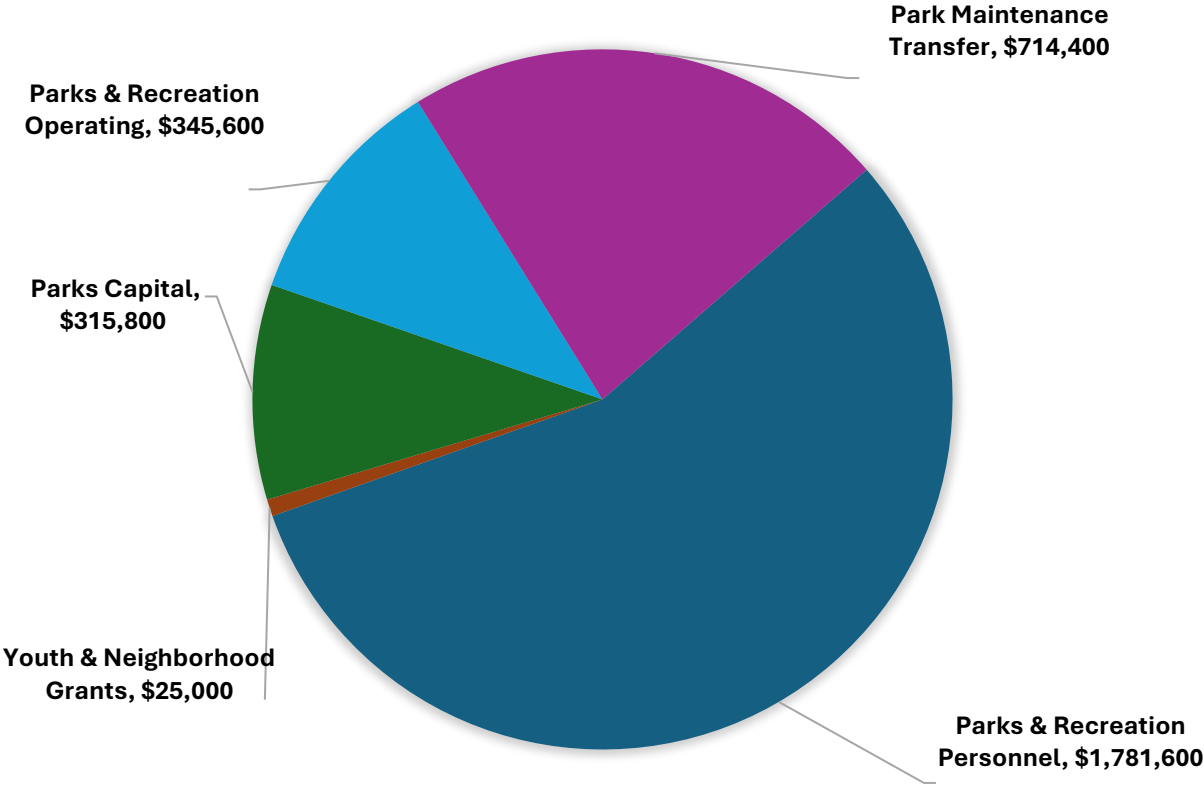
Pie Chart Bookends: 2012 and 2025

2012 PARK FUND AND PARKS & RECREATION
BUDGET: \$2.6 MILLION*



9 FTEs + 0 Temps/Seasonals
*Source = Park Fund Levy

2025 PARK FUND AND PARKS & RECREATION
BUDGET: \$3,182,400**

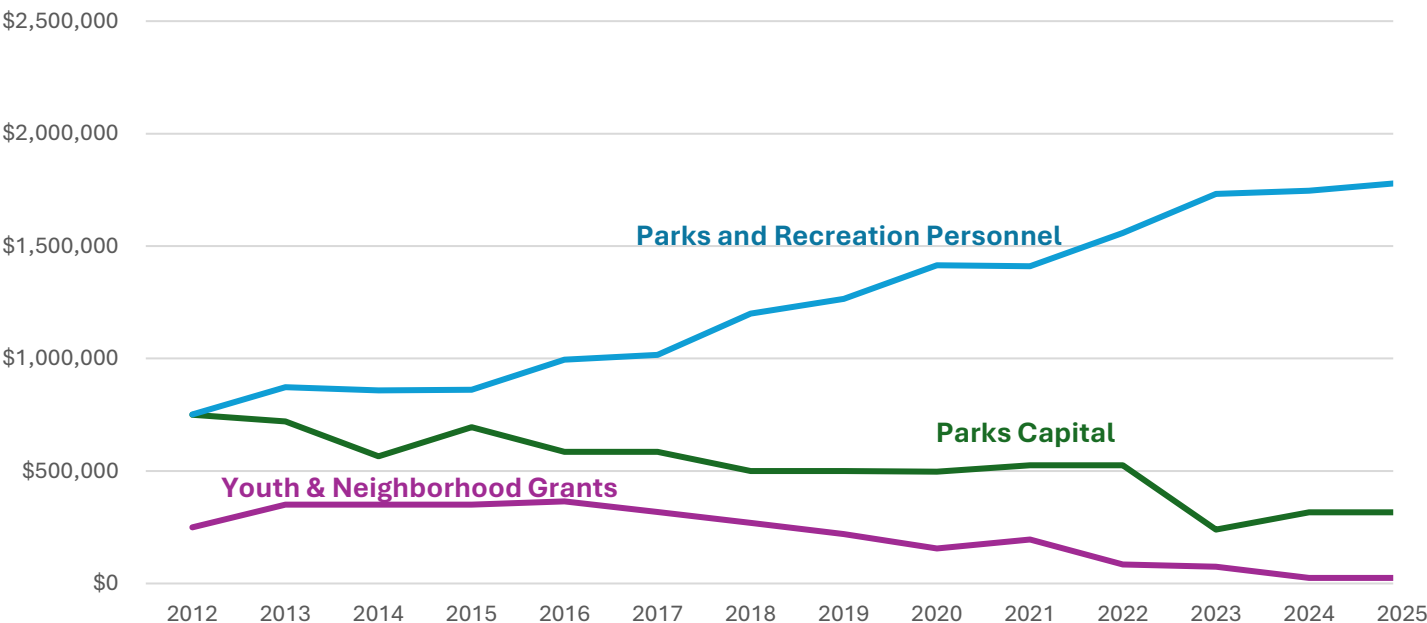


14.45 FTEs + 14 Temps/Seasonals
**Source = Park Fund Levy, General Fund, Revenues

Trends in funding allocations

- From 2012 to 2025, these trend lines illustrate the year over year increases to operating expenses, which are offset in most years by reductions in capital allocations.
- Factors include a “live within your means” budget strategy that requires the Division to almost exclusively support itself on Park Fund levy and revenues, while fielding routine requests and directives to reduce and lower fees for programs, permits, and reservations

Parks & Recreation Capital vs. Personnel 2012-2025



Additional one-time City-sourced capital funding not represented in graph:

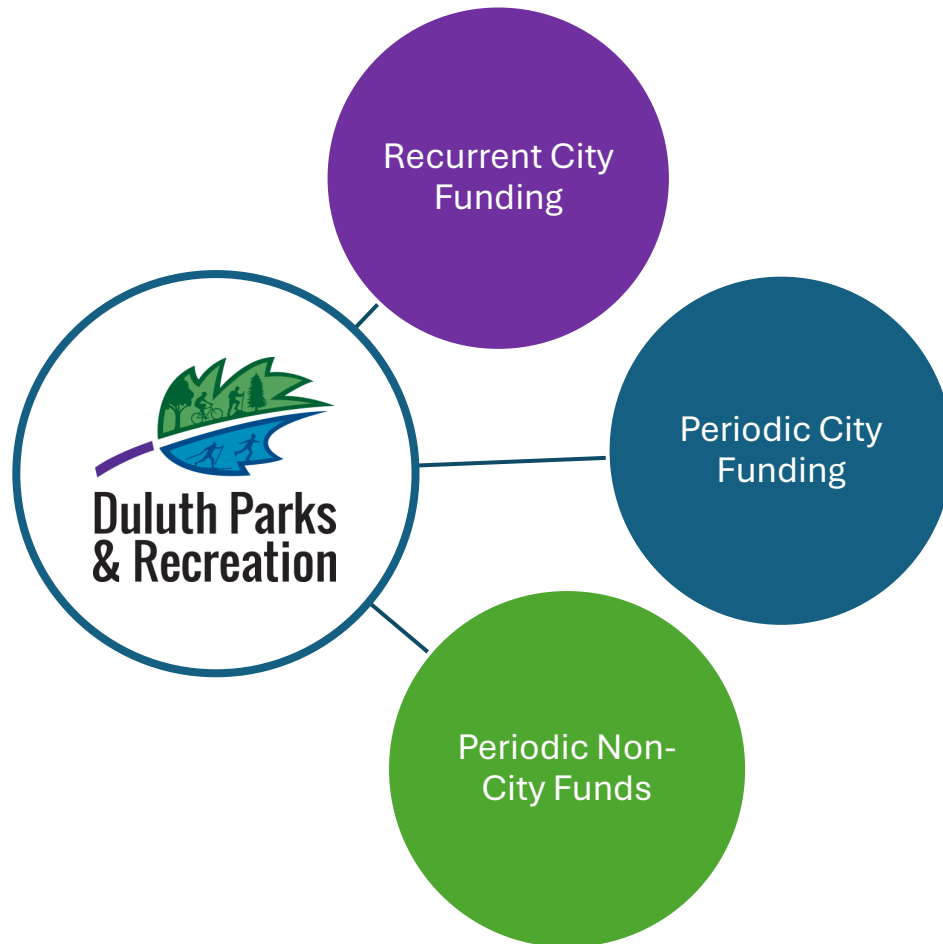
2020 bonded for \$5.5 million for Lakewalk repairs, paid back annually via \$550,000 from Tourism Tax

2024: \$750,000 from Cirrus asset sale

(\$500,000)

Wait...But Parks is always talking about these multi-million dollar projects?!

A downward trend in capital funds necessary to prepare projects to be eligible for grant funding, and to use as match for grants, decreases the Duluth Parks's ability to pursue grants and leverage outside funds.



Recurrent City Funding:

- Park Fund
- General Fund
- Revenues

Periodic City Funding:

- General Fund Underspending within Department
- Proceeds from Asset Sales
- Half and Half Funds
- Tourism Tax Allocation

Periodic Non-City Funding:

- Bonding
- Grants
- ARPA
- FEMA/Emergency Funding

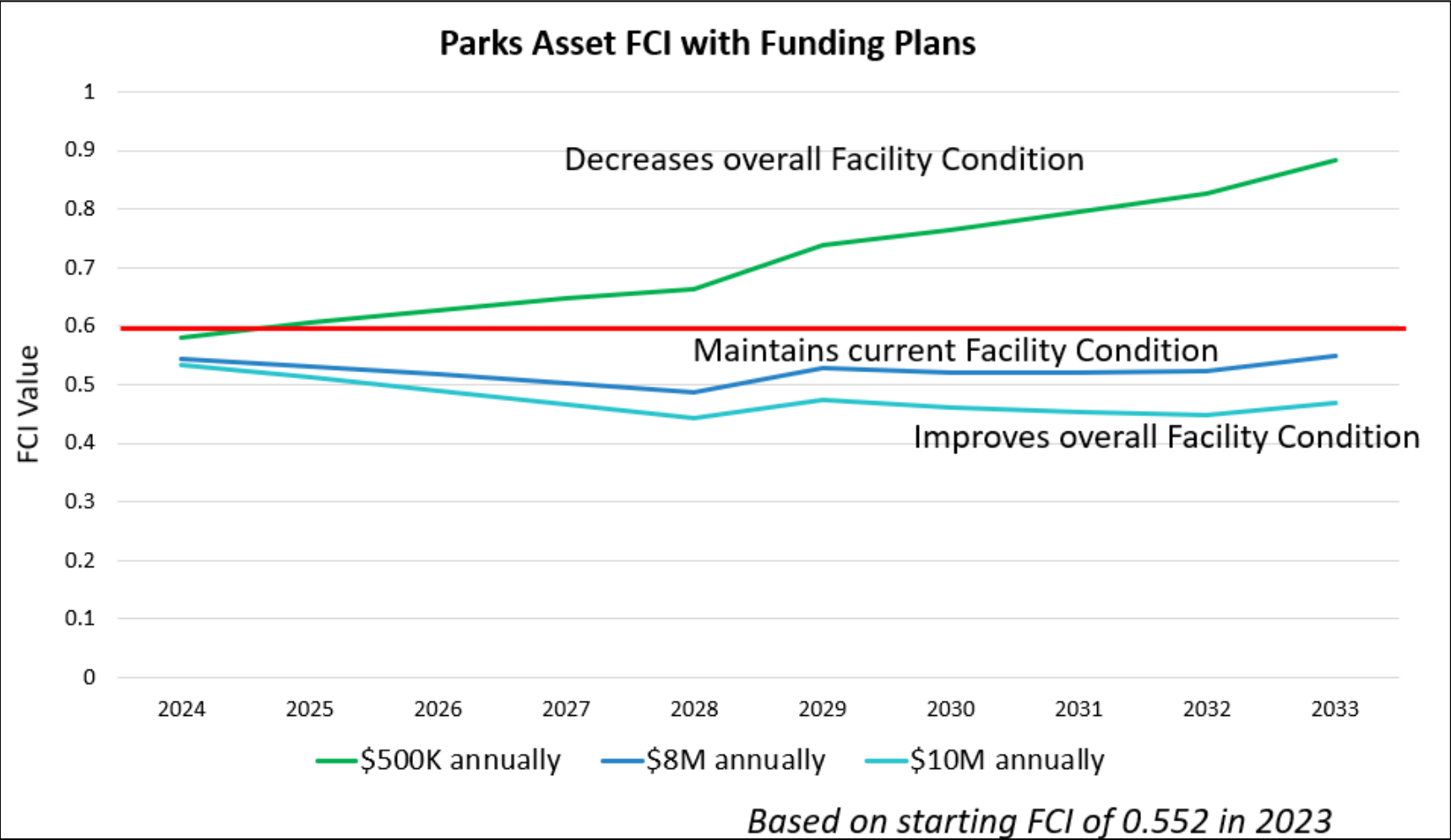
Capital Replacement Plan: What it really costs

Asset Type	Quantity	Total Replacement Cost of Asset Group	Average Replacement Cost of One Asset
Playgrounds	43	\$ 8,362,338.80	\$ 190,053
Bridges	156	\$ 33,079,289	\$ 212,047
Courts	19	\$ 3,139,022	\$165,212
Field + Rinks	45	\$ 14,460,895	\$ 321,353
Paving (Parking Lots)	1,000,000 ft sq	\$ 4,953,466	\$247,500 per 50,000 sq ft
Pavillions & Gazebos	15	\$ 2,164,067	\$ 144,271
Community Center	18	\$ 40,245,978	\$ 2,235,888
Trail Paving	44 miles	\$ 4,413,729	\$100,312 per mile
Skate Parks	5	\$ 1,570,670	\$ 392,667
Totals		\$112,389,456	\$3,908,991

Cost represents material and labor, but not full project cost. Recommend adding 25% contingency to all replacement estimates.

Point in time data sourced from City's asset management system and industry cost-estimating. May not reflect individual project factors, site considerations, etc. Some assets have broad range of type, size, material that greatly impact an individual asset replacement cost. (Ex: Small wooden bridge vs. large historic stone bridge) Some assets have a longer or shorter useful life, depending on routine maintenance cycles.

Ten Year Investment Analysis on Facility Condition Index (FCI)



FCI = Cost to fix /current replacement value

The Tipping Point: Once an asset reaches an FCI of .6, the “cost to fix” increases 5x

Graph includes buildings and site amenities for 75 parks

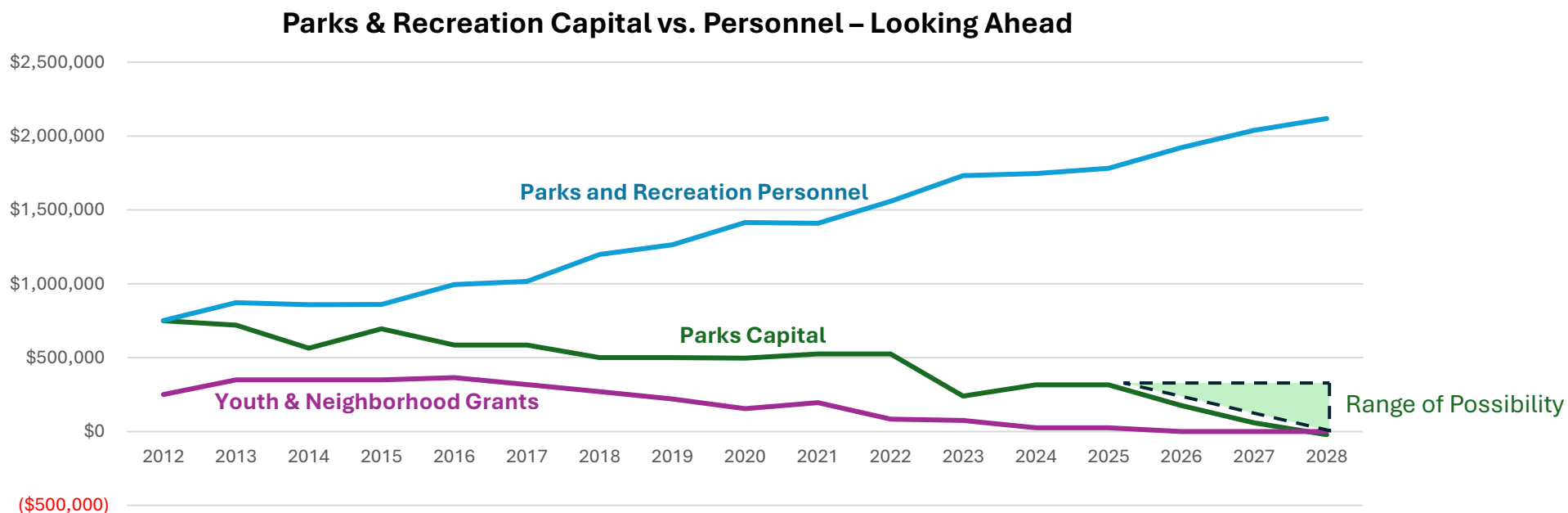
An investment of \$8 million annually is necessary to maintain the current FCI. Of this, currently \$6 million is already being invested in destination assets/parks, **leaving a gap of \$2 million needed to focus on neighborhood parks.**

What does the future of Duluth Parks funding look like?

Based on the following assumptions:

- Flat revenues: Park Fund Levy, Internal Revenues
- General Fund allocation either flat or keeping pace with increased personnel costs (Range of Possibility)
- Contractual wage increases
- Status quo, zero-increase Parks & Recreation Division operating expense and Park Maintenance transfer

Neighborhood parks that aren't tourist destinations nor grant eligible will be most impacted



What is needed to maintain the quality of Duluth Parks?

Answer:

A strategic combination of financial and policy decisions that position Duluth Parks for a brighter, safer, more vibrant future

- Funding for capital, operating, and maintenance
- Staffing complement—cannot steward nor activate park spaces without personnel
- Allow fee schedule and agreement negotiations to reflect rates closer to actual cost for use of park spaces
- Maintain strong partnerships that foster financial capacity to operate and maintain certain park spaces
- Remove excess and/or failing assets without replacement
- Support from other departments for division of duties
- Pursue value-added and large, long-term sponsorships
- Asset sales

Other solutions and ideas...?

