

Parks and Recreation Division Report

October 2025

PROGRAMMING

Duluth Parkinsons Group

Staff from Parks & Recreation spoke at the Duluth Parkinsons Group on September 15, which is a support group for individuals and families affected by Parkinsons Disease. The presentation encouraged folks to stay active through local parks, trails, and programs. It also covered senior center activities and new programs coming up this fall.

Defensive Driving

Defensive Driving returns as a partner program with Precision Driving Center. Drivers ages 55+ can save 10% on their auto insurance upon completion of the 4-hour course. The program was held at Evergreen Community Center on September 29 and was full with 20 participants.

Hiking Programs

The harvest moon of September brought us to the Kingsbury Trailhead adjacent to Fairmont Park for the month's Full Moon Hike. Twenty folks joined for the hour-long hike up to the vantage point overlooking the St. Louis River Valley.

On September 7, we wrapped up the final segment of our series hiking every mile of the Superior Hiking Trail within the City of Duluth. Participants met at the end point of the hike on Martin Road, then took the shuttle to Hartley Park and hiked back to their cars. Many of the hikers started this series back in June and hiked the entire SHT route through Duluth with Parks & Recreation this summer. This year, these hikes were led by seasonal staff, many of which are UMD students in the Environmental and Outdoor Education program. Giving these students opportunities to lead hikes like this helps them gain hands-on experience in their chosen field.

On September 18, Parks & Recreation once again partnered with Duluth Foot Trails Alliance for a hike through Hartley Park. John Lindgren from the MN DNR joined to educate on the science of projects happening in the park. First, we went through the stormwater retention ponds, then headed into a thicket of white cracked willow trees, hiked up the old box car racetrack and ended up overlooking Hartley Pond/Tischer Creek. This hike was loaded with information, and our partnership with DUFTA continues to be a great addition to parks programming.



Fishing at Lester River

The fall season brings many great things, including fishing for salmon and steelhead at streams along the north shore. On a Wednesday morning in September, seven people joined Parks & Recreation for an education on how, when, and where to fish for salmon and steelhead trout at the mouth of the Lester River. Participants left with the tools to fish for these species within City limits later this fall and next spring.



Forest Bathing

We kicked off September with the start of our forest bathing sessions, an opportunity for participants to slow down, reconnect with nature, and enjoy a guided, meditative walk with Barbara Miron of Abundant Wellness. Held at both Chambers Grove and Indian Point, these sessions offered peaceful moments of reflection in two scenic park settings along the St. Louis River.



Birding 101

We launched our fall Birding 101 classes, just in time to catch the fall migration. Participants learned the basics of bird identification while spotting a variety of winged visitors making their seasonal journey through our parks.

Women Hike Duluth

Women Hike Duluth continues as a monthly gathering of hikers beginning from a new trailhead each month. In September, the group explored a more challenging hike up and down Keene Creek on the Superior Hiking Trail. In October, we are hosting a twilight hike along the newer gravel section of Waabizheshikana – The Marten Trail (Slag Point Delta Cap) in Morgan Park and will be offering a social afterwards in the Morgan Park Community Center for all who attend.

Youth Programming

Highlights in activities for youth throughout the month of September included afterschool mountain biking with Lincoln Park Middle School, fishing with kids from Myers-Wilkins at Twin Ponds, the start of fall Music Together sessions, and more! Coming up later this fall are even more activities: toddler playtime, homeschool gym time, fall colors hiking field trips, archery classes for youth and adults, and much more.

OPERATIONS

PERMIT TYPE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Park & Building Rentals	58	67	93	73	102	198	150	218	126
Commercial Operator Permits	1	1	5	2	6	8	3	0	1
Alcohol Consumption Permits	8	5	0	8	12	16	21	16	6
Total	67	73	98	83	120	222	174	234	133

Social Media Statistics

Here is a little peek into our social media and marketing over the summer.

Top 5 performing posts on Facebook since June 1:

- Park Point boardwalk construction before photo and after video on August 26
 - 97k views, 720 likes/reactions, 84 shares
- Gateway Plaza painting completion on June 2
 - 94k views, 1,342 likes/reactions, 120 comments, 50 shares
- Keep off new beachgrass plantings post on July 3
 - 30k views, 203 likes/reactions, 42 shares
- Lakewalk Detour for sewer work on June 26
 - 25k views, 51 interactions (likes, reactions, comments, shares, and saves)
- Dutch Elm disease tree injections post on July 7
 - 20k views, 199 interactions

Current rising post:

- Toddler Playtime at Morgan Park and Washington Center Gym post on September 20
 - 18k views, 62 interactions

Facebook gives posts with good engagement a boost from the algorithm, which is shown in the audience statistics:

- 87% of those viewing the Toddler Playtime post are not our followers, meaning Facebook displayed this post under Recommended content because of its good performance. It has resulted in 16 new followers just from this post.
- 62% of those who viewed the Toddler Playtime post are ages 25-34, typically a poor performing age demographic on Facebook. The algorithm pushed the content to that group after it initially did week, likely due to that age group being most likely to have young children.

PROJECT UPDATES

Chester Bowl – Thom Storm Chalet Reconstruction

The Thom Storm Chalet reconstruction will be funded through a grant of \$2,312,000 from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources, a Community Development Block Grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and funds raised by the Chester Bowl Improvement Club. The project will reconstruct the Chalet entirely, save the existing foundation walls, to better serve the Chester Bowl Improvement Club and our community.

Due to the federal funding involved in the reconstruction, a National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 Section 106 review of the project is required. This summer, the City contracted a historical evaluation of the Chalet and its role in Chester Park to comply with the Section 106 review process. This evaluation determined that the existing Chalet is not individually eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, but that the Chalet does coincide with other shifts in Chester Park towards alpine skiing in the 1970s. As such, it is a contributing feature in the history of Chester Park. These results were presented during the September 8 Heritage Preservation Commission meeting. The City and Chester Bowl Improvement Club will continue consulting with the MN State Historic Preservation Office to identify next steps as we continue moving towards the proposed Chalet reconstruction.

Incline Stairway Trail

A ribbon cutting was held on Thursday, October 2 for the Incline Stairway Trail to celebrate the addition of new interpretive signage in partnership with the Friends of the Incline, the Duluth Preservation Society, and the Duluth Superior Eco Rotary Club! Immediately following the ribbon cutting, the Duluth Foot Trails Alliance, partnering with Duluth Parks & Recreation, led a community hike along the trail to visit the 4 interpretive sign locations. The signage tells the story of the Incline Railway, which ran from downtown along 7th Avenue West all the way up to West 9th Street; the incline railway was operated from 1891-1939. This trail received official designation in 2023, and fundraising initiatives began to fund the new interpretive signage, which was installed this past August.



Park Point Recreation Area Plan

The results from the August community workshop and survey are informing the refinement of the Park Point Recreation Area Plan. Preliminary results from these engagement opportunities demonstrate that there are mixed preferences, with both favorable and less desired components of each of the three concepts that were presented. The common feedback showed a preference for tighter connections between recreation spaces and an interest in retaining a large naturalized area. The preferred approach will pull the favorable components from the three concepts to create a new concept plan.

Originally, the timeline for finalizing the preferred approach and bringing the results of this planning process to the Parks & Recreation Commission was expected before the end of this year. The draft Plan is still expected to be presented later this year, but the final version would return to the Commission for approval in early 2026. By sliding the timeline out, there will be additional time to review the preferred approach with focus groups attendees and stakeholders to ensure the final documents will reflect a community-supported vision for the Park Point Recreation Area.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hartley Dam Project Agreement

Based on the results of the Hartley Pond & Tischer Creek Feasibility Study completed in 2024, City staff have drafted a project agreement between the City of Duluth and the MN Department of Natural Resources to move forward with a design process. The recommended alternative from the Study is the installation of a flow restrictive culvert, with or without a potential 3-acre pond remaining. The draft project agreement is being reviewed by the MN DNR and will be brought to City administration by the Public Works department for further approval. Funding for the design project has been secured through the Great Lakes Reinvestment Initiative.

Amity Lester River Hawk Ridge Provisionally Designated Natural Area

City staff met with the group bringing forth the nomination for the Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Designated Natural Area to discuss the development of the Management Plan for this area. By City ordinance, a Management Plan must be completed within one year of the provisional approval of the natural area. Partner organizations involved include: Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, and the Minnesota Land Trust.