

Parks and Recreation Division Report

January 2026

PROGRAMMING

Solstice Luminary Hike

We were thrilled to welcome more than 1,300 people and countless dogs to celebrate the season with us at the Solstice Luminary Hike on Sunday, December 21. It was especially rewarding to see the track chair in use and community members of all ages and abilities enjoying the trail together. The evening was clear and beautiful, with more than 400 luminaries lighting a snow-packed path at Enger Park Golf Course. As a special bonus, we caught sight of meteors streaking across the sky and even a faint hint of the northern lights!



Annual Senior Holiday Party

The Annual Senior Holiday Party was hosted at Morgan Park Community Center on December 11. A group of 70 seniors and 10 Parks & Recreation staff gathered to enjoy a dinner, dessert, games, raffle prizes, and an acoustic music set performed by local musician Climes. Officers from the Duluth Police Department and Mayor Reinert also stopped by to say hello and wish our senior community a happy holiday season!



Senior Volunteer Recognition

Donna Swenson was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Donna volunteers at Evergreen Senior Center through Parks & Recreation. She leads an exercise program twice a week and serves on the Evergreen Senior Board. Donna has been volunteering at Evergreen for 15 years!

During the Evergreen Holiday Party in December, two volunteers were celebrated and honored as they are “retiring” from leading Evergreen Bingo. Bud and Jan have been running Bingo every Thursday for 20 years. We are so grateful for their contributions to senior programs through Parks & Recreation!



Open Skate

Open Skate is a year-round program held twice weekly at the Duluth Heritage Center. Throughout 2025, Parks & Recreation hosted six free, themed community skating parties during Open Skate hours. The final event of the year, Frosty's Frozen Skate Party, took place on December 17 and drew more than 100 skaters. In total, 5,038 skaters participated in Open Skate during 2025.



Bayfront Skating Rink Coming Soon!

Preparations are underway to open the Bayfront skating rink and warming house soon! The warming house will be open daily, weather permitting, and will offer limited skates available to use for free, games and activities for indoor fun, and S'mores Nights on Fridays! Backyard curling will be set up to play on the ice during open hours.

Warming House Hours:

- Monday-Friday: 3-7pm
- Saturdays: Noon-7pm
- Sundays: 10am-2pm

Weather closures will be posted on our website.

Cold Front – Mark Your Calendars!

Cold Front is returning for a 9th annual winter celebration on **Saturday, February 7, 2026 at Bayfront Park**. Experience family-friendly winter fun for all ages! Activities will include a luge sledding hill, snow play area, story stroll, ice skating, groomed cross-country ski area, craft and activity stations, fat bike demonstrations, a sensory tent area, and more!

OPERATIONS

PERMIT TYPE	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Park & Building Rentals	58	67	93	73	102	198	150	218	126	103	50	48
Commercial Operator Permits	1	1	5	2	6	8	3	0	1	2	1	0
Alcohol Consumption Permits	8	5	0	8	12	16	21	16	6	3	3	3
Total	67	73	98	83	120	222	174	234	133	108	54	51

PROJECT UPDATES

Chester Bowl – Thom Storm Chalet Reconstruction

The Thom Storm Chalet reconstruction project is continuing through the design and project review process. A shoreline variance, which is required because of the building's proximity to Chester Creek, will go before the Planning Commission on January 13. An amendment to the funding agreement between the City and Chester Bowl Improvement Club (CBIC) is expected to go before City Council on January 26 to allow for the use of in-kind material donations made to CBIC. LHB is actively working on final design and biddable construction documents, which are expected to be completed and posted in late February or early March.

Cross City Trail

City staff continue to work towards completing the development of the Cross City Trail. The western terminus of the trail currently connects to the shared use path along Raleigh Street that Public Works constructed in 2024. The next section of construction will extend the trail from Raleigh Street along Kwik Trip property at 6516 Grand Avenue to the intersection of Grand Avenue and Redruth Street (see map at right). The no-cost easement with Kwik Trip goes to City Council for review and approval on January 12. Next steps will be to complete the environmental review process and enter grant agreements that are funding this extension. It is exciting to see this next section moving forward.



Park Point Recreation Area Plan

LHB is actively working to complete a draft version of the Park Point Recreation Area (PPRA) Plan. The plan is expected to be completed and ready to present to Parks & Recreation Commission in February. At that time, a 2-week public comment period will be open for the public to review and provide feedback on the draft plan. Any necessary updates will be made to the PPRA Plan during the month of March, and the final version will return to Parks & Recreation Commission in April, before going to City Council for adoption.

Hillside Sport Court Park Plan Implementation

The Hillside Sport Court Park Plan, which was adopted in August of 2023, will be implemented this summer! Planned park improvements include enhancing site connectivity and accessibility, replacing the former community building with a pavilion and picnic area, renewing the sport court, replacing the playground, maintaining open green space, allotting space for a community garden, and repairing or replacing other park assets such as fencing, bike racks, signage, gates, trees, vegetation, etc.

Construction and bidding documents will be posted sometime in January, with construction beginning in June 2026. In spring, prior to the start of this project, the City's Public Works & Utilities Department will be replacing a sanitary line that runs through the park. Our teams are working in close coordination.

Funding sources for this project include grant support from the National Park Service/Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program, and Housing and Urban Development/City of Duluth Community Development Block Grant funds. Additional project support includes City revenue replacement funds and City Park Fund dollars.

Norton Park Improvements

The City of Duluth will be holding a community meeting on Wednesday, January 28 from 6:00 – 7:00 pm at the Norton Park United Methodist Church, located at 436 North 79th Avenue West. At the meeting, attendees will see the preliminary designs for the park improvements and share their feedback. This will be a great opportunity for the community to see how the vision for this park will come together ahead of final design and construction later this year. Improvements will include replacement of the playground that is at the end of its useful life, an accessible sidewalk connecting park facilities, regrading the multi-use field and construction of stormwater management features to address drainage problems for the field, a new picnic pavilion, an accessible portable restroom enclosure, and new site amenities.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural Area Management Plans

The update to the Magney Snively management plan is progressing well. Development of the management plan for the newly nominated Amity Lester Hawk Ridge Natural Area is also progressing. Results of the management planning process will be presented for informational purposes to the Parks & Recreation Commission later this spring.

Prescribed Fire Program

An interdepartmental meeting was held in December regarding the development of a more formal prescribed fire program within the City. Collaborating departments and divisions include the Duluth Fire Department (DFD), Park Maintenance, and Property and Facilities Management. Staff are working towards a program wherein DFD conducts prescribed fires on City lands that would benefit from prescribed fire for management, such as pollinator meadows or forested areas with high fuel loads. At the same time, DFD staff get trained in wildland fire techniques.

Tischer Creek

A tributary of Tischer Creek runs through the educational landscape within the Hartley Nature Center leased premises. Several agencies and departments have been collaborating with Hartley Nature Center to identify solutions to blocked flows, invasive species, and sediment transport for this tributary. Two grant applications have been submitted to secure funding for study and design of tributary restoration. Staff expect to hear the results of these grant applications in the coming month.

PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES

Snow removal efforts are well under way keeping our paved trails and City sidewalks clear.



Along with the first snow falls came high winds creating lots of storm damage work keeping the crews quite busy. The age-old spruce around town took the heavy hits.



When it hasn't been snowing, our crews have been busy making progress on boulevard tree pruning.