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City of Duluth - Communications Office

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SUBJECT: Mayor Larson Designates Street Improvement Program and Introduces New Funding Proposal, "Paving the Way for Better Streets"

BY: Pakou Ly, Communications Office

Mayor Larson Designates Street Improvement Program and Introduces New Funding Proposal

"Paving the Way for Better Streets"

[Duluth, MN] – Duluth Mayor Emily Larson is announcing a new long term solution to Duluth's challenging streets. Despite Larson's brief service as Mayor, streets have long been her priority as a business owner, during her time as City Councilor, and more prominently now as Mayor. In fact, 91% of Duluth residents polled in 2015 had little confidence in our streets. Mayor Larson is rolling out a proposal to officially designate the Street Improvement Program (SIP) and add a .5% transportation sales tax for up to 25 years dedicated strictly for the SIP. The proposal will be listed as a referendum on the November 7 ballot and would then need legislative approval prior to implementation.

"I hear from people every day, several times a day, about the poor condition of our streets and their ongoing frustration. I want you to know, I hear you loud and clear. That's why I'm proposing a .5% sales tax to be solely dedicated to fixing our streets and sidewalks. Now is our time and we must act. The traditional funding sources we relied on have diminished. Now it's up to us. Together, we can transform our city and take pride in our streets once again," said Mayor Larson.

The proposal could generate about \$7 million in sales tax annually, tripling the current level of dedicated funding to a total of \$10 million for street and sidewalk improvements. Duluth has 450 miles of roads and 400+ miles of sidewalks and with current funding, the City can only recondition fewer than 2 miles of road per year. That amount of work clearly isn't enough, especially when looking at the current condition of our roads. An industry standard pavement rating system places the majority of Duluth streets at a 36 rating, on a scale of 1 being the worst and 100 being the best. The preferred rating for a healthy street system is 70. The City needs long-term, reliable funding in order to make progress on street and sidewalk improvements to serve residents as well as the 35,000 commuters and 6.7 million visitors to our city.

Expressing his support, State Senator Erik Simonson had this to say. "It's no secret that our city roads are in terrible shape. I support this dedicated revenue source, and look forward to carrying a bill next legislative session to enact this change. I'm proud of our community for embracing this long term sustainable solution."

The public will have opportunities to weigh in and ask questions at three upcoming public meetings prior to the November 7 ballot. A website, www.duluthmn.gov/better-streets has been created with frequently asked questions, current program information, and a comment form.

The meetings are scheduled for:

Wednesday, August 16 – Harrison Community Center, 3002 West 3rd St. @ 5:30-7 PM

Wednesday, September 20 – Morgan Park Community Center, 1242 88th Ave West @ 5:30-7 PM

Thursday, October 26 – Duluth Heights Community Center, 33 West Mulberry St. @ 5:30-7 PM

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