

Parks and Recreation Division Report

February 2024

PROGRAMMING

Cold Front 2024

The 7th Annual Cold Front took place on Saturday, February 3 at Bayfront Park, and although our warm winter made things look a little different than normal we still had plenty of fun for the whole family. Our Park Maintenance team was able to truck in snow before it melted and build out a sledding luge and snow mounds with tunnels that were a huge hit! The steady flow of people throughout the day enjoyed snow play, yard games, ice skating, adult snowshoe kickball, s'mores, hot chocolate, and more! We look forward to more snow and fun next year on Saturday, February 1, 2025 (mark your calendar!).



Youth and Family Programs

Archery continues to be a popular program offering. All archery classes in January filled to capacity, as well as two additional youth groups who paid for private archery sessions.

Toddler Playtime has typically been held once a week at Washington Center Gym. This year, Toddler Playtime is expanding to three times a week at different sites: Monday mornings at Morgan Park, Wednesday mornings at Washington Center Gym, and Friday mornings at Portman, which began on February 2. Attendance at Morgan Park continues to grow, with 19 kids on January 22!

Bayfront Ice Rink

The Bayfront Ice Rink and Warming House opened in January, with folks enjoying the ice laid down by the Park Maintenance team along with the fire pit to roast marshmallows. Before the current warmer temperatures leading to the ice thawing, one evening saw more than 65 people skating!



Science Hike

Parks and Recreation teamed up with Duluth Foot Trails Alliance for a night hike out on Park Point to look for Beach Volcanoes. While we did not find any beach volcanoes, we did have a great hike despite the -4 degree weather. A mom and her daughter along with a couple new to Duluth had an enjoyable evening.

Adult Volleyball League

The winter season of athletics has begun with the second Adult Volleyball League, which started mid-January. Eighty participants on ten teams will compete each Sunday night at Washington Center Gym for eight weeks.



Develop Skills to Skate

Develop Skills to Skate continues to be a very popular program. This six week class on Monday nights has 22 participants ranging from 5-13 years old. We offer this program in partnership with Duluth Figure Skating Club members, who serve as instructors.

55+ Programs

Seventy people attended the Senior Holiday Party on December 8, 2023 at the Morgan Park Community Center. Attendees enjoyed socializing with friends, eating a meal together, and listening to a live band performance. Snowshoe Social walks have been modified into hikes due to the lack of snow. This series of four hikes has taken place at Waabizheshikana, Lester Park, and Chambers Grove, with a Hawk Ridge hike scheduled in mid-February.



OPERATIONS

| PERMIT TYPE | Jan |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Park & Building Rentals | 65 |
| Commercial Operator Permits | 1 |
| Busker Permits | 0 |
| Alcohol Consumption Permits | 2 |
| Total | 68 |

Community Center Updates

Since mid-December, a variety of updates have occurred at Community Centers. A projector, screen, and speaker system has been installed at both Evergreen Senior Center and Morgan Park Community Center. This new system will be available to citizens renting these spaces and will enhance Parks and Recreation programming at these locations.

Portman Community Center, Harrison Community Center, and Morgan Park Community Center have each received new chairs, replacing heavy and outdated chairs. The new chairs are lighter and stack easier, allowing janitorial staff to move through the space quicker and reducing the heavy lifting. Additionally, Harrison Community Center had new tables installed with flip-up table tops and casters.

Bayfront Management Agreement

In January 2024, City Council approved a management agreement with Winterfell Management to provide event management services at Bayfront Festival Park in 2024. This agreement was put in place after the conclusion of the previous agreement that was held by the DECC through December 31, 2023 for provision of Bayfront management services. Winterfell's agreement will run through December 31, 2024, during which time the City intends to issue a competitive RFP to solicit applicants for future years of operations at Bayfront Festival Park. While a new company holds this agreement, Winterfell is staffed by two long-time former DECC employees, Jeff Stark and Dan Russell, who have deep knowledge of event operations at Bayfront and have quickly begun work to ensure a high-quality event season.

Social Media Numbers 2023

2023 was a great year for Parks and Recreation's social media, which consists of a presence on Facebook and Instagram. As of early February, there are 12,358 Facebook followers and 3,641 Instagram followers. The audience averages 75% women and 25% men.

As compared to 2022, we reached 37.9% more people this year, with a total of 228,000 people who saw content from our Facebook page. This page received nearly 42,000 visits, compared to 12,950 visits in 2022. Instagram profile visits grew 22.5% from 3,071 in 2022 to 3,761 in 2023.

Looking at individual post performance, it is clear that our audience values and shares trail and park construction updates as well as general programming and event posts. The top three performing organic posts in 2023 were:

- October 31: Freeze/Thaw Cycle Trails Closed – 23.1 K reached
- August 10: Brighton Beach Construction Update – 14.6 K reached
- December 22: Post Luminary Hike Thank You – 7.9 K reached

PROJECT UPDATES

Athletic Venues Reinvestment Initiative (AVRI)

The Indoor Athletics Venues Task Force held their inaugural meeting in December 2023. Since that time, Mayor Reinert has added three new voting members, for a total of 22 voting members and four ex-officio members. The updated Task Force will reconvene in February 2024.

AVRI Phase I funds will support time-sensitive projects that are already in-progress, including: Enger Park Golf Course irrigation system replacement, Gary New Duluth Recreation Area skate park construction, Spirit Mountain Nordic Center snowmaking and lighting installation, and Wade Stadium building repairs.

AVRI Phase 1 funds will also support the planning process for future AVRI-supported projects. A Request for Proposals is expected to be issued in February 2024 to solicit professional consulting services to develop an athletic facilities needs assessment, conduct community engagement, and provide prioritized investment recommendations and site plans for key athletic facilities in Duluth.

Gary New Duluth Recreation Area Skate Park

Between December 2023 and January 2024, the City solicited bids for construction of the final phase of the Gary New Duluth Recreation Area skate park. Of the three bids received, only two were submitted with complete information. Unfortunately, both bids far exceeded the available project budget and the City has rejected all bids. City staff and the GND Development Alliance will work together to review and reduce the project scope and re-bid the project in the near future.

Spirit Mountain Recreation Area Trails

The City of Duluth and the Spirit Mountain Recreation Authority were awarded a grant of \$1,254,471 from the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission in 2022. The will support capital improvements at Spirit Mountain including the development of new trails, installation of a new snowmaking water pump, and Nordic Center facility improvements. The grant is matched by grants from the Federal Recreational Trail Program, funding from the Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, and a donation from the Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club.

Mountain Bike Trails: New downhill trails are slated for construction this upcoming season, as well as rehabilitation of a few existing trails. In all, five new downhill runs will be constructed. These new jump trails will bring a different style of trail not currently found in Duluth. Jump trails are common at lift-served mountain bike parks across the country. Additionally, new cross-country (traditional) style single-track trails are also coming to the far east side of Spirit Mountain, including a trail that will be built to Universal Design Standards to accommodate adaptive off-road cycles.

Snowmobile: Through the project, an old, long abandoned snowmobile trail will be restored to provide connectivity from the Willard Munger State Trail directly to Spirit Mountain, and allow riders to connect to both the lower and upper chalets.

Nordic Center: The cross-country ski trails at the Nordic Center will be expanded with the addition of a new loop, as well as a connector trail leading from the lower Nordic Center to the established cross-country ski trails above (which also connect to Magney Snively ski trails). In addition to the new trail construction, infrastructure for snowmaking equipment and additional lighting will be added. Construction for the Nordic Center improvements went out to bid at the end of January. Special thanks to the Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club, which has provided two donations to support the Nordic Center work totaling \$216,000 in contributions.

Trails

With the mild winter this season, the conditions have been poor for cross-country ski trail grooming. Park Maintenance crews were out early and often as conditions allowed in order to pack snow and establish a base on our 60 kilometers of ski trails. However, until colder temperatures and more snowfall, the City will not be grooming in effort to protect what little snow base we currently have and to avoid damage to our grooming equipment. Users are welcome to ski the trails, but conditions have been poor to fair.

The City expects to move ahead with some work ahead to repair damages sustained from the September 2023 flood event. The flooding damage was extensive and has received State disaster relief designation, but is awaiting approval from Governor Tim Walz. This funding would support restoration of the trails and trail infrastructure (bridges, stairs, etc.) that were heavily impacted by the September storms.

Enger Park Golf Course Irrigation

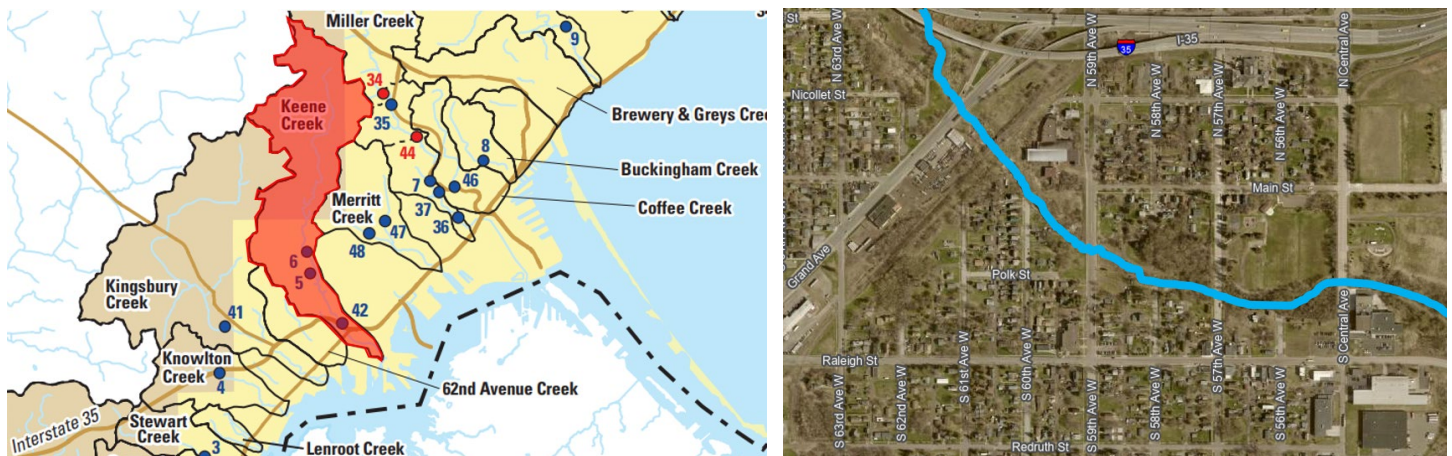
With the addition of AVRI Phase 1 project funds, the irrigation system replacement was expanded from the original scope of 18 holes to include new irrigation for all 27 holes. In December 2023, this update was made official through an executed change order with Commercial Irrigation Inc. The irrigation work is expected to start in May 2024 while ensuring at least 18 holes of golf remain open at all times.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Keene Creek

The DNR recently secured a \$1,000,000 award from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to construct a Green Infrastructure Project near Keene Creek at 59th Avenue West, and to investigate the potential for restoring a ditched part of the creek downstream of Grand Avenue, near Irving Park. Keene Creek is a designated trout stream and is one of the City's Priority Watersheds under the Natural Resource Management Program. It is currently impaired for e. coli.

The upper reaches of this designated trout stream are located in Hermantown, and Trout Unlimited has been working with that community to restore over two miles of eroding, degraded reaches over the past several years. The lower part of Keene Creek is surrounded by much more development than its upper reaches. The DNR will be working closely with City staff over the next three years to determine the feasibility of restoring Keene Creek through the lower reaches, and to design and construct a green infrastructure practice to treat stormwater off of 59th Avenue West and other impervious surfaces before it discharges into the creek. The creek's watershed is outlined in red on the map below left, and map of the creek's lower reaches near Keene Creek Park and Irving Park is below right.

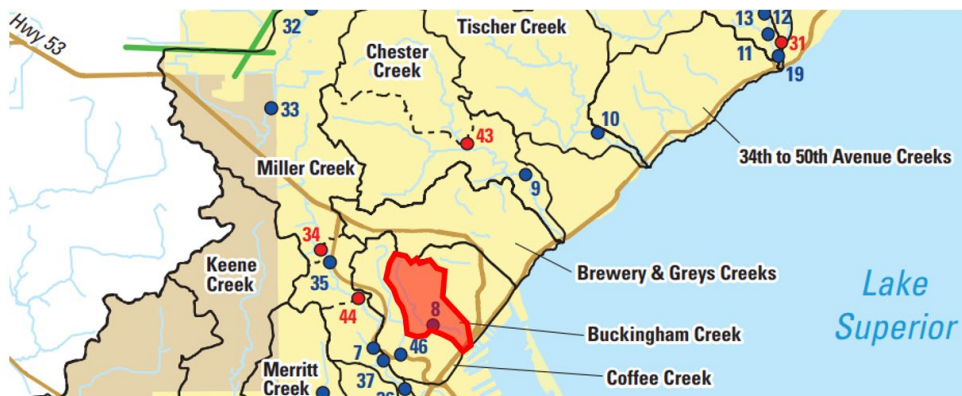


Buckingham Creek

Buckingham Creek runs through the Enger Park Golf Course. During the summer of 2024, the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will restore roughly 3,500 feet of Buckingham Creek, the coldest designated trout stream in Duluth. Undersized culverts will be replaced with bridges, the riparian area will be replanted while accommodating course standards, habitat features (pools and riffles) will be added, and appropriate stream geomorphology for this size watershed will be restored.

Buckingham Creek was once the source of irrigation water at Enger Golf Course under a surface water appropriation permit with the DNR. The source of that water will now be through pipes, instead of the creek, an outcome desired by the DNR and the City for many years. This will produce more consistent water availability for the golf course irrigation and protect the trout stream. The City, SWCD, and DNR have been working together for more than a year to plan these projects and will continue to work together to achieve the best outcomes for both the golf course and the creek.

This project is being completed concurrent with the City's irrigation project at Enger Golf Course. Restoration work is funded by a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant and funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. This project will result in a more resilient creek, better trout habitat, and a more aesthetically pleasing course. The creek's watershed is outlined in red on the map below, and a rendering of how the restored creek will look at Enger Golf Course is provided on the right.



PARK MAINTENANCE DIVISION UPDATES

Over the warm and low-snow winter thus far, Park Maintenance activities have looked a bit different from last year. There was some snow clearing, ski trail grooming in early January, and continued support and grooming at Chester Bowl. Other activities have included graffiti removal and covering, painting garbage barrels, refurbishing Big Belly solar compactors, remodeling the maintenance shop to improve functionality, and reorganizing the process for managing sign replacements and installation across the parks and trails system. Staff have coordinated closely with Parks and Recreation programming staff to support Cold Front, including hauling 300 yards of snow from Wade Stadium to Bayfront, flooding the skating rink (which has since closed due to unseasonably warm temperatures), and other site preparations. Summer work groups met to discuss staffing models and plan and prioritize maintenance projects to be completed in 2024. Six staff attended the Northern Green Expo to get continuing education and keep up to date with industry standards and practices.