

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN ~ ACTION STEPS

December 13, 2010

Parks Strategies

1. Insure equitable access to quality parks and recreation facilities by working to meet level of services standards in underserved areas such as:
 - A. West Duluth - Enhance existing parks such as Chamber's Grove and Blackmer Park and connect and enhance access to Magney-Snively and Fond du Lac to create premier signature parks in the west Duluth area. Continue to enhance park and recreation opportunities along and on the St. Louis River between Munger Landing and Boy Scout Landing, including a continuous waterfront trail.
 - B. Fill the gap in park service coverage in the northwest part of the City, through dedication of park land as new development occurs in the area and development of the new neighborhood park.
 - C. Improve safety, attractiveness, and use of parks in the central part of the City. Prepare park master plans for Duluth Central Park (at Central Hillside/Washington Center), Chester Bowl, and Observation Park. Prepare a Park Plan for Park Point. See the attached concept plans for Central Hillside and Observation Parks for guidance.
2. Work with the Duluth School District to make sure that City parks near school sites also serve school recreation needs (Memorial, Wheeler Athletic Complex, Longview Tennis, etc.).
 - A. Adopt a master joint powers agreement between the School District and City to define the overall cooperative approach to community use and shared use and staffing of facilities.
 - B. Adopt detailed use agreements for each school site and associated parks that would document access, maintenance, staffing and programming details.
 - C. Designate staff representatives from both the City and School District to prepare the joint powers and use agreements.
3. Preserve and protect priority natural areas such as stream corridors, the lake front, the St. Louis Riverfront and significant woodlands and hillside areas. Secure land along the natural areas with restrictive covenants, and require developers to protect lands along these corridors. Have a higher level of protection for trout streams.
4. Work with St. Louis County to coordinate the preservation of the tax-forfeited lands currently used for recreation (Piedmont, Amity, etc.) and lands identified as high priorities for recreation or natural resource protection.
5. Consider the recreational benefit and evaluate the potential to sell some undeveloped open space land such as Manchester Square, Russell Square, Scott Keenan Park, and portions of Brewer-Bellvue open space.

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6. Evaluate the need for additional City fields based on shared use of proposed new school fields. Plan for projected multiuse turf field needs (soccer, Lacrosse, football, rugby, etc.) by reserving flat land for future turf field development.
 - A. Improve the durability and use of existing high use turf fields through the addition of irrigation and lighting.
7. Prepare a court replacement plan and evaluate the distribution of courts based on need and use. For example, consider replacing the single tennis court at Park Point with a double court.
8. Study the viability and future use of Wade Stadium/fields and determine a strategic plan for use of the property. Include the potential to enhance the pedestrian connection between Heritage Center, Wheeler Athletic Complex, Wade Stadium fields and Western Middle School. See the attached concept plan for Wheeler area connections.
9. Add additional off leash dog parks to serve the east and central parts of the City.
10. In keeping with the regional use of Lake Park Athletic Complex, work with surrounding communities to obtain their funding support for operations and capital improvements.

Recreation Center Buildings Strategies

11. Use Memorial Park/Laura MacArthur Elementary School as a model for joint use of schools and park sites and for school-city collaboration on facilities and staffing. Enter into a Joint Powers Agreement between the City and School District for community use of schools and school use of parks. Use site specific agreements for use, access, maintenance, and staffing details.
12. Continue to seek opportunities for multi-use community recreation places, where feasible, by blending parks, schools, libraries and private enterprises.
13. Evaluate enhancing Washington Center to meet community indoor recreation needs. Options include: Adding a second gymnasium. Convert the existing old pool space to community meeting space. Closing Lake Avenue between 3rd Street and 4th Street to create park and green space connection to a renovated Central Hillside Park. See the attached concept plan for an illustration of the Central Hillside Washington Center possibilities.
14. Make energy and weatherization improvements and handicapped access improvements to the hub and primary recreation buildings.

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15. Emphasize quality over quantity in recreation centers by having fewer, but better recreation center buildings. Remove non-viable buildings and replace them with lower maintenance recreation amenities such as picnic shelters, restrooms, natural plantings, open turf play space, etc. Make the remaining recreation centers viable and relevant places and assure that public schools function as public recreation centers. Recommended building actions are listed on the following pages.
16. Continue to monitor and support management partners. Review and update use agreements to assure appropriate return to the City and delivery of quality recreation services.

Trails and Connectivity Strategies

17. Prepare a Duluth Trail and Bikeway Plan. – Work with the public and stakeholder groups to create a plan to realize the potential of existing trails, stream corridors, and Skyline Parkway with new trail and bikeway connections, trailheads and trail way-finding signage.
 - A. Create an interconnected multi-use trail system with off road paved trails, an on-street bikeway network, and an interconnected hiking/walking trail network. Utilize the trail and pedestrian policies and implementation items of the 2006 Duluth Comprehensive Plan. Have all trails be multi-use if the terrain supports it, except for Superior Hiking Trail, which was purposefully built for hiking. The addition of bikeways and sidewalks is supported by the Duluth Complete Streets policy. Have a goal of Duluth becoming certified by the League of American Bicyclists as a Bicycle Friendly Community (see www.bikeleague.org/programs/bicyclefriendlyamerica/).
 - B. Connect the Lakewalk to the Munger Trail (Cross City Trail planning is underway) and complete the Lakewalk connection east to Kitchi Gammi Park. Signs should be installed to delineate where wheels are allowed, versus foot traffic on the Lakewalk.
 - C. Increase the City's paved trail system to allow for better connectivity between residents and parks, parks and school, and between parks.
 - D. Consider merging Magney-Snively and Spirit Mountain cross country ski trails so that both are in the city trail system. Improve grooming of Spirit Mountain Trails.
 - E. Evaluate adding lighted ski trail loops with snow making at Spirit Mountain Campground loop and around the Chester Bowl athletic fields. Consider adding warming shelters at popular cross-country ski trail locations.
 - F. Work to formalize a multi-use trail connection between Fond du Lac Park and Magney Snively Park. Part of the connection would be outside of City boundary so a cooperative approach with Midway Township and area land owners would be needed.
 - G. Connect the Pine City Trail to other City trails.
 - H. Work to minimize trail conflicts and foster trail etiquette through media and signage.

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- I. Utilize the DWP Railroad grade as multi-use gravel surface trail from West Duluth to the north side of I-35.
 - J. Plan for and support a continuous waterfront trail in west Duluth.
 - K. Improve biking and walking in the Mall area.
 - L. Work with the County to strengthen the trail connections through tax forfeited land.
 - M. Work with COGGS on plans for the Grand Traverse Trail and a potential mountain bike park at Arlington Park.
18. Hire a Trail Coordinator/Trail Planner. Trails are the number one desired recreation feature in Duluth (2009 Duluth Parks and Recreation Survey). Trails are also a top visitor attraction and help connect the community. By being proactive on trail planning and construction, Duluth can become known as a national trail destination.
19. There are many trail groups and volunteers that are passionate about trails in Duluth. Coordination is needed to fully realize the potential of the trail groups and to enhance and connect Duluth's trails. Improve trail conditions by enhancing maintenance, making trails more durable, and improving management of trail use. Maximize the benefits of trail groups and volunteers.
20. Establish a system for coordinating cross-country ski trail upkeep that enables volunteers to expand the grooming of the trail system without duplicating efforts.
21. Foster improvement of the Skyline Parkway in accordance with the Corridor Management Plan to make the Parkway less disjointed and to make it safe and enjoyable for pedestrians and bicyclists.
22. Design a single way-finding program for all city trails and install a coordinated and comprehensive set of trail way-finding signs and maps at trail heads and at trail intersections. Create trailheads with parking and signage at key trail access locations. Add signage to direct people to trail heads. Expand awareness of existing park, trail, and recreation facilities through use of in park and at trailhead kiosks with park and trail system maps. Make trails easier to find, use and follow with new trailheads, way-finding signage and trail maps.

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Funding Strategies

23. Increase General Fund budget allocation to Parks and Recreation for increased park maintenance and recreation programming.
24. Hold a referendum (vote of the people) on formation and funding of a park and recreation enterprise fund in 2011. The park and recreation enterprise fund would be used for park and recreation improvements and maintenance and it would be funded by increased property taxes. While the amount and specific nature of a Park and Recreation Enterprise Fund will need to be determined, this Plan recommends use of the funds for:
 - »» Capital Improvements to recreation center buildings and park renovation.
 - »» Increased park maintenance (mowing, trash collection, natural resource management, etc.) and park infrastructure replacement and repair – (children’s play areas, handicapped accessibility improvements, etc.)
 - »» Youth recreation programs in partnership with youth service organizations.
25. Identify a limited scope of excess undeveloped city lands and evaluate the feasibility and benefit of selling them with the profits going toward park improvement (See Action 5 for recommendations on undeveloped park land properties). Sale of land is limited by title constraints and requires a super-majority vote of the City Council.
26. Initiate and strengthen funding by:
 - A. Holding fee-based special events (bike rides, 10K and 5K runs, concerts, etc.) with revenue dedicated to parks.
 - B. Adding private concessions in parks (restaurants, vendor carts, etc.).
 - C. Creating rental facilities (weddings, corporate events, family gatherings, etc.).
 - D. Seeking donations and grants.
 - E. Increasing business involvement, sponsorship, naming rights, etc. of parks, recreation facilities and events.
 - F. Designating signature parks and trails that serve a regional role as “regional parks and regional trails.” This will reflect their role in the community and region and enhance ability to obtain State Legacy funding for park and trail improvements.
 - G. Creating a parks foundation to focus on fund raising for park improvements.
27. Work with Duluth Friends of the Parks to raise funds, build advocacy, and carry out park and trail improvements.
28. Increase partnership and volunteer involvement when a City Volunteer/Agreement Coordinator position is established.

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29. Prepare an asset management and replacement plan and fund the capital improvements identified in the plan. Consider renovation of whole parks with greater needs rather than a series of incremental improvements.
30. Evaluate on-going operational and life-cycle costs when making facility capital decisions.

Park Maintenance Strategies

31. As funding and staffing resources allow, increase the level of upkeep and improve the frequency of mowing and trash collection in parks. Improve access to bathrooms with portable toilets and over time add restrooms in high use parks.
32. Formalize and publicize the tiered maintenance policy in the parks and on the City web site to raise community awareness. Increase the level of upkeep and improve the frequency of mowing and trash collection in parks. Improve access to bathrooms. Formalize maintenance expectations and expand outreach to volunteer groups for maintenance.
33. Expand outreach to volunteer groups for maintenance and improvements. Work to expand the Adopt A Park/Adopt A Trail program. Continue Clean and Green Week. Note: this action is related to obtaining a new volunteer/agreement coordinator position and additional seasonal staff to guide volunteer efforts.
34. Prepare an asset management plan identifying priority renovation needs and funding for replacement and improvements. See initial recommendations for priority actions in Chp. 6.

Marketing and Communications Strategies

35. Be the recreation information clearinghouse for all recreation programs and activities in Duluth. The City should function as the “go to” source for recreation programs, special events and facility information. Even though the City has cut its actual delivery of recreation programs it still functions as a coordinator, provider of facilities, and liaison to public and private groups that still deliver recreation programs to children, families, adults and groups. The City should build on the program facilitator role by being the trusted contact and conduit for recreation program and activity information. This can take the form of a web page and paper program guides. This may require redirection of existing staff resources or new staff to perform this vital service. Having one source of information for dozens of providers eases resident’s access to programs and improves participation in recreation programs. Provide current and regularly updated information on the website regarding programs, maps, and events. Ensure that the website is user-friendly.

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36. Create maps of existing trails and planned major trails and post and distribute these maps through partners, business, at public places, etc. Note: trail maps should be coordinated with partner groups.
37. Work/team with neighboring communities to be aware of their recreation programs and marketing efforts, both locally and nationally.
38. Identify and tap into existing national organizations that foster parks and recreation programs.
39. Expand awareness of the benefits of parks and trails – community, individual, health, economic, and environmental. Promote Duluth Parks and Recreation at special events and festivals.

Partnerships and Volunteers Strategies

40. Hire a Volunteer/Agreement Coordinator. Duties to include:
 - A. Focus on efficient and beneficial partnerships.
 - B. Administer facility use agreements.
 - C. Enhance customer service around partnerships.
 - D. Improve recruitment, training, scheduling, and recognition of volunteers and volunteer groups.
 - E. Implement School-City joint powers and site specific use agreements.
 - F. Work to minimize barriers, as reasonable, to non-profit organization facility use, such as insurance liability issues.
41. Improve and renovate existing hub recreation center buildings with the increased efficiency found in the school and community group partnering or closure of non-functional buildings.
42. Expand promotion of Duluth parks, trails, recreation attractions, and natural areas for tourism, quality of life and economic development. Potential partners include Visit Duluth, DEDA economic development, Explore Minnesota, Spirit Mountain, and Fit City Duluth.
 - A. Strengthen relationship with St. Louis County and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission.

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Stewardship Strategies

43. Prepare a tree replacement plan in order to minimize the impact of urban tree diseases and to increase the scale and quality of the urban forest.
44. Transition to more naturally functioning landscapes (native vegetation, rain gardens, community gardens, butterfly gardens, etc.) in all parks, regardless of their size, in order to improve water quality, increase habitat, and reduce maintenance.
45. Proactively manage natural resource areas and cooperate with others on aquatic resource management actions. Prioritize invasive species management actions. Stabilize steep slopes in park area and work to mitigate/correct storm water runoff issues as appropriate for the conditions and work to prevent erosion thorough education, enforcement, and management actions.
46. Promote the proper disposal of waste and the importance of recycling by providing adequate opportunities for recycling within parks - including properly signed and located recycling bins; and timely pick-up and removal.
47. Improve awareness and enforcement of park regulations including, but not limited to: dumping and littering, trail use (motorized use on no-motorized trails and in parks, bicycle use on pedestrian trails, and creation of unauthorized trails), off leash dogs on trails and in parks, and park land encroachments (private facilities built on public park land). Use park and trail signage, on-line, outreach, and the local press to inform people of regulations. Focus enforcement efforts on problems hot spots.
48. Improve existing trails with erosion or surface quality issues. Construct new soft surface trails to meet IMBA (International Mountain Bike Association) standards or other accepted sustainable trail standards. For paved trails, include a pavement management plan for regular seal coating, overlay and/or replacement.
49. Set the example for wise resource use by creating tangible demonstrations of rainwater gardens, pervious paving, native landscaping, recycling and re-use, erosion control, stream bank restoration, vegetative buffers, energy use and other appropriate practices.

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Recreation Programs Strategies

50. Fill gaps in youth and senior recreation programs through continued work with partner organizations for delivery of programs.
 - A. Work with cultural communities to define and address program needs.
 - B. Continue to work with and recruit community organizations to fill gaps in access to youth and senior recreation programs.
 - C. Create a mobile recreation program with youth service agencies to be able to flexibly and cost effectively deliver recreation programs and activities to youth in under-served areas of the City.
51. When additional City funding and staffing are available and/or through additional partner groups, offer youth and senior recreation programs at recreation hubs.
 - A. Restore summer youth program in areas with concentrations of youth. Offer and promote programs as collaborative effort between the City, schools and partners.
52. Formalize programs for assisting community groups and organizations at ice skating sites. Consider further enhancing ice skating at Bayfront Festival Park by adding a loop skating route. Enable more part time rink staffing.
53. Obtain more flexibility for use of part time staff through negotiation with the employee union.
54. Clarify field maintenance expectations for league and program use.