

DRAFT Open Space Focus Area

Mission Statement:

Duluth will strive for a sustainable open space system that enriches the lives of all Duluthians. These open spaces will reflect the community's ecological, historic, cultural, and recreational values, and will contribute to the community's resilience to natural disasters.

Open spaces are more than undeveloped land. They provide places for people and wildlife to breathe, literally and figuratively. They are part of the character of the city, including the green hillside of western Duluth, wetland areas of Duluth Heights and Piedmont Heights, sheltered bays of the Saint Louis River, and the ribbons of Skyline Parkway and the creek corridors that weave the other open space areas together. They are formal parks such as Bayfront, Lester, Enger, and Chambers Grove, the plazas of Downtown, the Lakewalk, and the neighborhood parks found throughout town. Some of these open space areas were deliberately set aside, others are the "left behind" areas of yesteryear.

In the ImagineDuluth2035 plan we base open space policies on the principles of providing for the current needs of the community while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their needs for jobs, housing, food, health, safety, recreation, and inspiration. We recognize that land is a limited commodity that should be preserved in its natural state until needed for cost-efficient public or private development. Some land should be more permanently preserved to meet goals important to the community.

Policy 1. Improve Duluth's resiliency to flooding and natural disasters.

Policy 1 Strategies:

- a. Continue to support coordinated planning efforts for surface water management among jurisdictions through participation with the multi-jurisdictional Duluth Urban Watersheds Advisory Committee and the Regional Storm Water Protection Team.
- b. Once FEMA flood plain maps are updated in 2019 the City should conduct a storm water infrastructure assessment to determine where improvements are need to reduce flood risks and where additional resources should be sought to purchase flood-prone properties.
- c. Retain in public ownership tax forfeited lands needed for storm water management purposes including important wetlands, flood plains, and stream corridors.
- d. To help with water storage capacity above the bluff, conduct a feasibility study on creating one or more wetland preservation areas within the watersheds flowing through Duluth.
- e. Amend the UDC to increase the replacement ratio for impacted wetlands above the bluff to discourage "out of watershed" replacement.
- f. Encourage existing rural residents and businesses to implement National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) *Firewise* principles to make their properties more resilient should a wildfire approach.
- g. The City should employ property and right of way management practices that limit the spread of and promote the removal of invasive species.

Policy 2. Examine the value and need for all of Duluth's publicly owned open space.

Policy 2 Strategies for open space land that is in the public's interest to preserve:

- a. Review all government-owned land in the city and prioritize lands according to ecological importance for more permanent protection. Areas to be protected include forested areas, wetlands, stream courses, and bluff areas as well as lands important in forming the green belt as part of Duluth's urban form.
- b. Identify a private nonprofit entity and/or establish a City land classification system to hold and maintain those ecologically important lands that are not needed for active park purposes and lands that are needed for natural disaster resiliency (i.e. flood plains and wetlands). Options to consider include:
- c. Encourage the use of the Duluth Natural Areas Program to more permanently protect high-quality self-sustaining ecosystems where resource protection is prioritized over human use of the land similar to the States Scientific and Natural Areas Program.
- d. Increase efforts to streamline management of public lands within the City's borders.
- e. Work with tribal leadership, archaeologists, the State Historic Preservation Office and other resources to identify open space sites, districts, and structures of historic and cultural significance and utilize the Duluth Heritage Preservation Commission and Duluth Indigenous Commission to designate these structures and areas as landmarks. Create resource management plans for these designated sites and districts, including interpretative programs, and promote Duluth's rich heritage tourism opportunities.
- f. Partner with groups, public and private, with a mission of preservation and restoration of the Saint Louis River and Lake Superior.

Policy 2 Strategies for open space land that is in the public's interest to dispose of

- g. Create minimum standards for extending new urban services in areas of the city with significant tracts of ecologically significant lands through the establishment of an urban services boundary.
- h. Work with Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD) to review the Urban Services Boundary.
- i. Amend the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) to require more permanent protection of ecologically significant lands (including wetlands, important forested areas, streams, etc.) identified during the development process.
- j. Review studies that have analyzed City-owned and tax forfeited land and prioritize lands according to ecological/ recreational/cultural/historic importance and infrastructure availability. *Lands not needed for protection* should be made available for development after further ecological truthing, including on-the-ground analysis. Use mayor's task force language.
- k. Utilize City authorities such as the Duluth Economic Development Authority (DEDA) and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) to package lands for sale or strategic development to implement housing, economic development, and transportation policies in the Comprehensive Plan.

- I. Create a viewshed plan to identify the most important signature “Duluth views” and establish appropriate tools to protect the views to and/or from these features. Possible implementation tools could include creating a viewshed overlay in the UDC, purchase/transfer of development rights program, and urban design standards. Work with Visit Duluth to promote the “Duluth views” as a tourism resource.

Policy 3. Remove barriers to accessing parks and open space.

Policy 3 Strategies:

- a. Implement the City’s *Gate, Wayfinding, and Signage Final Design Plan* to better identify parks and the resources within parks and potentially expand to general wayfinding throughout the entire city.
- b. Create a wayfinding system directing residents and visitors to regional, community, and special use parks from within neighborhoods and business districts as well as outside the community. This should include roadway and pedestrian-scale signage, as well as Internet resources.
- c. Enhance the physical connections from neighborhoods and business districts to nearby parks, including wayfinding signage, improved pedestrian connections, larger trail systems, and enhanced street crossings.
- d. Provide access to recreation equipment and instruction at community recreation centers. Including activities for all ages; including playgrounds for all ages (including adults in play – see Copenhagen trampoline plaza example)
- e. Utilize public/private partnerships (YMCA at Woodland Community Center model) to expand programming in parks.
- f. Work with community partners to develop a parks ambassador program for outreach to people of all neighborhoods encouraging the use of parks and recreation facilities and programs.
- g. Ensure existing connections to Lake Superior and the Saint Louis River are protected and new connections are established to the waterfront.

Policy 4. Improve the delivery of parks and open space services to the community.

Policy 4 Strategies

- a. Update the 2010 Parks & Recreation Master Plan to reflect environmental, economic, and demographic trends, to incorporate parks and trails project completed, and shifts in recreation center hub status.
- b. Increase Parks Division funding in the city budget to the level approved by the voters in 2011 (\$2.6 million), when adjusted for inflation, and continue the inflation-adjusted funding level in the future.
- c. Investigate the costs and benefits of regional coordination for delivery of parks and open space services through a regional parks district.
- d. Provide resources for the urban forestry management function within the City’s organizational structure to implement and enhance forest resources throughout the City according to the urban forest management plan.

Policy 5. Encourage urban food growth, food security, and healthy lifestyles.

Policy 5 Strategies

- a. Study the demand for community garden lots throughout the city and utilize existing public land where additional space is needed.
- b. Identify barriers to urban agriculture on urban and suburban lots and remove the barriers where possible.
- c. Investigate the need for a coordinating body that maximizes efficiencies and assists in the development of community gardens, urban agriculture, and small-scale value-added food production.
- d. Determine where public market space is needed for the sale of fresh and value-added local food and other local products and identify resources needed for creating that space.
- e. Study where the keeping of animals for food production fits into urban agriculture as well as rural areas and amend the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) accordingly.
- f. Work with the Parks and Recreation Division and community partners to incorporate edible landscapes in parks where appropriate.
- g. Eliminate food deserts in areas of the City that currently meet the criteria for such a designation by working with community development partners to locate markets where needed.
- h. Encourage healthy lifestyles by giving priority to the use of active transportation (walking/biking)