

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT



Policy Areas

- Urban Design
- Development Process
- General Government
- Zoning Updates
- Food Access
- Wayfinding and Public Signage
- Green Infrastructure
- Creativity and Innovation
- Heritage Preservation





General development policies and strategies are either new policies that overlap between the focus areas, or existing policies carried forward from the Urban Design and Development Process sections of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan. During the Imagine Duluth development process, the five focus areas (Economic Development, Energy and Conservation, Housing, Open Space, and Transportation) were thoroughly researched, and the community contemplated potential outcomes. Many of the new general development policies come from these focus areas; zoning updates, for example, frequently overlapped across the groups, especially those relating to sustainability.

In each general development subject area, a brief introduction precedes a list of policies. This format differs from the in-depth research analysis summaries found in the five individual focus areas. Because the policies in this chapter may still lack specific implementation actions, further analysis of these issues will be necessary subsequent to plan adoption. Prioritization of general development strategies may in some instances be intuitive: adjustments to the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) based on these policies can follow a standardized process through the Planning Commission. For other issues, such as those related to wayfinding or creativity and innovation, further analysis and collaboration between City departments, boards and commissions, and external partners may be necessary.

Urban Design

Urban design touches almost every aspect of the built and natural forms of the city, including land use, housing, transportation, parks, and open space. Natural landforms — Lake Superior, St. Louis River, creek ravines, the hillside — create opportunities and challenges in construction. Historical development patterns supported mixed-use areas. Successful place-making and mixed-use developments require high standards for site planning and design, including building and parking placement, pedestrian connections, signage, and landscaping.

- SI.** To ensure that different land uses “mix well,” compatible building scale and sensitivity to neighborhood context is essential. The City will develop form-based standards and design guidelines which:
 - a. Allow a variety of uses to coexist within buildings when the building is of appropriate size and character.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR URBAN DESIGN

- 6** Reinforce the place-specific
- 8** Encourage mix of activities, uses, and densities
- 9** Support private actions that contribute to the public realm

- b. Recognize and reflect unique or traditional neighborhood building patterns and street and block layouts, keeping in mind possible modifications to improve accessibility.
- c. Provide adequate transitions to lower-density neighborhoods and districts.
- d. Maintain sufficient separation between clearly incompatible uses, such as between residential neighborhoods and intensive industrial or commercial areas.

S2. Large mixed-use development sites, such as the U.S. Steel site, the group of antennas at the top of Observation Hill, and other sites identified as master-planned areas on the future land use map, will require master planning as market forces start to define possible new uses in these areas. Master plans should:

- a. Be developed in close collaboration with affected neighborhoods and other stakeholders.
- b. Protect critical natural functions.
- c. Consider and enhance off-site natural systems through an evaluation of the surrounding ecosystem and the site's relationship to its surroundings.
- d. Include internal open space and trail corridors and connections to external trail corridors.
- e. Protect cultural resources and viewsheds.
- f. Provide for neighborhood recreation or open space areas in residential or commercial areas.
- g. Provide transitions from more intensive to less intensive land uses within neighborhoods through stepping-down of building heights, reduction in building bulk, and similar techniques.



- S3. Strengthen pedestrian movement between compatible land uses with accessible sidewalks in street rights of way, sidewalks and paths independent of streets, and attractive connections to parking areas and building entrances. Institutional land owners should be encouraged to create connections with pedestrian systems on the perimeters of their properties.
- S4. Encourage site design which includes cohesive elements such as pedestrian access, parking, coordinated landscaping, linked open space, and green infrastructure for stormwater management and water quality improvement.
- S5. Protect natural features and systems, including protection or enhancement of public realm natural systems such as the urban forest (street trees) (*see Chapter 10, Open Space*).
- S6. Avoid surface parking between buildings and the street to reduce the visual impact of parking lots and provide landscape screening from public areas for all surface parking areas.
- S7. Create pedestrian-oriented environments by placing buildings and building entrances close to the street, providing windows along street frontages, and enlivening building facades with the creative use of architectural details or materials.
- S8. Encourage transit and bicycle use by providing facilities such as transit stops, comfortable shelters, and bicycle access and parking in convenient, accessible, and visible locations.
- S9. **(new)** Buildings and other structural elements along major streets or corridors should be designed in such a way as to emphasize streets as identifiable gateways and neighborhood centers.



Development Process

Development and redevelopment is an element of long-term sustainability, and the development process must have clear guidelines. Development standards and approval processes should balance the need for research and due diligence with providing customer service to land owners and developers. While land use regulation is needed to protect important natural and community assets, areas where development is supported should be clearly identified and communicated to avoid unnecessary delays.

- S1. Ensure that land use regulation sets clear expectations for development, redevelopment, and protection of Duluth's natural, cultural, economic, and social assets.
- S2. In order to keep the regulatory burden reasonable and equitable, the City will implement the Comprehensive Plan through cooperation, incentives, and education, in addition to regulation.
- S3. Explicitly base land use decisions, including development and environmental review, Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment administrative decisions, and public realm investment, on Comprehensive Plan principles and policies.
- S4. Provide for public review and comment on development, preservation, and investment proposals, and meaningfully address public responses.
- S5. *(new)* Continue to streamline City development review, permitting, and licensing to facilitate property development. Provide more options for submitting electronic applications and more clarity in the estimated time needed to review projects, as well as consistency in City licensing and fees.

General Government

Certain elements from updated chapters have been grouped together under the category of "general government." Each topic in this category will necessitate collaboration across many parts of the City's organization, but specific individuals, departments, or groups will need to be identified and associated with individual policies in order to develop implementation actions.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

- 12** Create efficiencies in delivery of public services





GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR GENERAL GOVERNMENT

- 5** Promote reinvestment in neighborhoods
- 10** Take actions that enhance the environment, economic, and social well-being of the community
- 12** Create efficiencies in delivery of public services

- S1.** Promote efforts to restore the “garden city” concept of Duluth with recreational corridors of parks, trails, and open space located along streams.
- S2.** Consider developing a central City office or division responsible for receiving, tracking, and responding to all complaints which are not related to public safety.
- S3.** Improve citywide communication about the risks and limitations of development in floodplains and shoreland areas.
- S4.** Evaluate whether consolidated waste management contracts for service within the city, whether citywide or on a district-specific basis, would result in improved outcomes for residents.
- S5.** Expand efforts to reduce blight and graffiti. Consider best practices for graffiti removal.
- S6.** Expand resources and prioritize blight removal and vacant property nuisances, including a focus on absentee property owners.
- S7.** Continue the work of existing neighborhood plans and, when appropriate, implement those of their strategies that align with ongoing neighborhood priorities and the Imagine Duluth plan.
- S8.** Continue partnerships with local institutions and transportation providers to plan for weather-related community emergencies and to increase community awareness of emergency protocols.
- S9.** Enhance delivery of the Comprehensive Plan through expanded communication and public education and outreach efforts.
- S10.** Promote awareness of accessibility measures in City Hall and City proceedings.

Zoning Code Updates

Zoning regulations for the City are included in the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) of the Legislative Code. Zoning stipulates not only uses allowed in various districts, but development standards such as parking, landscaping, pedestrian connections, and stormwater management. Targeted changes to zoning regulations are needed to guide future development towards the Imagine Duluth 2035 vision.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR ZONING CODE UPDATES

9 Support private actions that contribute to the public realm

10 Take actions that enhance the environment, economic, and social well-being of the community

- S1.** Reevaluate housing regulations in the UDC to expand opportunities for compact development, including new housing types such as the current trend for “tiny houses.”
- S2.** Revise UDC lot size and dimensional standards to determine appropriateness of using small lots, including 25-foot lots, for new development. Consider educational measures about how to execute small-lot development while maintaining consistency with neighborhood form and creating modern, desirable housing.
- S3.** Ensure all new development provides bicycle parking and transit stop amenities as needed.
- S4.** Along transit lines, support development and redevelopment of mixed-use nodes and corridors that increase residential density and commercial square footage. Identify incentives for creation of this development.
- S5.** Except on very steep slopes where perpendicular parking is appropriate, eliminate angled or perpendicular on-street parking. In very steep areas, specifically call for perpendicular parking that is consistent with parking best practices for vehicle and pedestrian safety.
- S6.** Review and update the UDC sustainability point system, considering the following:
 - a. How to encourage more resource protection through the site development process.
 - b. The creation of minimum point levels for existing structures undergoing remodeling or rehabilitation.
 - c. The possibility of offering exemptions, such as reductions in parking requirements, for new buildings attaining high numbers of points.
 - d. Whether points should be required in a broader range of scenarios.
 - e. The awarding of points for residential development in areas with good food access, or non-residential development that improves food access in underserved areas.
- S7.** Work with new developments and sites undergoing redevelopment to install power lines underground to reduce risks of power outages during storms. Consider appropriateness of including this as a mandatory requirement for new development.



GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR FOOD ACCESS

- 10** Take actions that enhance the environment, economic, and social well-being of the community
- 13** Develop a healthy community
- 14** Integrate fairness into the fabric of the community



- S8.** Promote additional options for short-term housing, such as RV parks or camping facilities, as appropriate.
- S9.** Increase the maximum bedroom number allowed by residential rental licenses in order to provide options for large families and multi-generational family groups.

Food Access

Food access is such an important need that it crosses all five of Imagine Duluth 2035's focus areas — economic development, energy and conservation, housing, open space, and transportation. The Lincoln Park neighborhood is identified as a USDA food desert. For more on Food Access, see the Open Space chapter.

- S1.** Continue to ensure transit connections to grocery stores and farmers markets, with on-board use-appropriate design elements (grocery bins, etc.).
- S2.** Support the growth of a local food system. Clarify City standards and regulations for urban gardens and urban farms. Allow agricultural uses that have no land use or health-related conflicts with residential properties (such as orchards, gardens, etc.) as a permitted use in all residential zones. Lessen restrictions on where farmers markets can exist throughout the city (*see Open Space Chapter*).
- S3.** Consider public or community gardens on underused public lands. Support efforts to create a farm business incubator on City open space.
- S4.** Include small-scale agriculture and local food distribution in economic development investments.
- S5.** Incentivize the development of grocery retail spaces within currently-designated food deserts. Consider adopting a Staple Food Ordinance which ensures improved food access in areas without adequate grocery options.
- S6.** Determine where public market space is needed for the sale of fresh food (including space for value-added food products) and other local products and identify the resources needed for creating that space.

- S7.** Increase the community’s access to food-growing resources. Work with Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD) and other partners to ensure all community members have access to compost and other food-growing resources.

Wayfinding & Public Signage

Improving the city’s wayfinding systems rose to the top of the priority list for each of the focus areas evaluated during the Imagine Duluth 2035 process. The community emphasized that in many areas of the city, it is neither intuitive nor even possible to obtain information about how to get from place to place. Individual wayfinding priorities from the focus areas have been combined into the general development section of the plan. With the exception of street signage, wayfinding systems within the city are generally not coordinated, neither across geographic areas of the city nor similar neighborhood amenities.

Technological changes are occurring quickly and access to mobile devices such as smartphones has changed how people navigate cities. These devices, however, do not eliminate the need for place-specific signage, such as signs stating “You Have Arrived *Here*.” Place-based wayfinding remains important. It supports commercial vitality, reduces risks associated with becoming lost or injured, and promotes opportunities for healthy activities like walking and biking. Expansion of wayfinding systems in the city will allow for easier access and visibility for visitors who may not understand how to move through the city, as well as for residents.

- S1.** Create a uniform citywide wayfinding program with consistent and clear signage.
- S2.** Consider sign density when planning for and evaluating wayfinding systems, because sign density sometimes contributes to transportation system confusion. Include evaluation of visual indicators, simplicity in transportation system design, use of color and tactile treatments, and distinctive art and buildings in development of the city’s wayfinding systems.
- S3.** Implement the City’s *Gate, Wayfinding, and Signage Final Design Plan* to better identify parks, trails, and resources and make using recreation systems more intuitive and equitable.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR WAYFINDING

- 5** Promote reinvestment in neighborhoods
- 6** Reinforce the place-specific
- 7** Create and maintain connectivity

- S4. Improve all neighborhoods' sense of place and desirability as destinations through improved citywide wayfinding systems:
 - a. To increase the sense of place, add recognizable location-specific art and statues in neighborhoods. Promote cultural diversity and landmarks using art.
 - b. Evaluate street names and park and trail names and, when appropriate, consider renaming to emphasize the city's current and past cultural diversity. Use consistent signage for such measures.
 - c. the prioritization of neighborhood safety, so that moving through any given neighborhood is intuitive, memorable, and safe, especially after dusk. Collaborate with neighborhood protection and watch groups in the development of a wayfinding template to be used citywide.
- S5. Support planning for a higher amenity level and more detailed wayfinding system in the densely utilized and populated areas of the city, especially in areas around existing and future tourism and transportation nodes, including the station area for the Northern Lights Express, downtown, in Core Investment Areas, and in Canal Park.
- S6. In coordination with the Duluth Indigenous Commission, encourage multi-lingual wayfinding signage, particularly in the Ojibwe language, and in coordination with local businesses interested in participating.
- S7. Wayfinding systems must be developed in close coordination with transportation systems, especially in areas related to ADA accessibility, continuity of sidewalk networks, and visibility during low-light hours of the day (particularly summer evenings and throughout the winter).
- S8. Long term maintenance of wayfinding systems should be included in the up-front planning efforts to ensure the viability and continuity of the system.

Green Infrastructure

In Duluth, water is everywhere; water is an important part of the city's identity. Green infrastructure is a cost-effective, resilient approach to improving water quality and addressing weather impacts on the city while also increasing safety, enhancing the pedestrian experience, and providing other community benefits. Single-purpose stormwater infrastructure, such as conventional piped drainage and water treatment systems, is designed to move urban stormwater away from the built environment. In contrast, green infrastructure reduces and treats stormwater at its source while delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits. It may be possible to pair green infrastructure with a low-impact development approach in neighborhoods to enhance environmental outcomes and respond to residents' desire for access to natural resources.

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban areas. In Duluth, this mostly manifests itself through sediment making its way into streams and Lake Superior, but also through increased water temperatures. When rain falls on roofs, streets, and parking lots in cities, the water cannot soak into the ground as it would under natural conditions. Stormwater drains through gutters, storm sewers, and other engineered collection systems and is discharged into nearby water bodies. This stormwater runoff sometimes carries trash, bacteria, heavy metals, and other pollutants from the urban landscape. Higher flows resulting from heavy rains can also cause erosion and flooding in urban streams, damaging habitat, property, and infrastructure. When rain falls in natural, undeveloped areas, the water is absorbed and filtered by soil and plants; it runs off the landscape at a slow rate. Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other elements and practices to restore some of the natural processes required to manage water and create healthier urban environments. Green infrastructure ultimately comprises a system of manmade and natural areas that provide habitat, flood protection, cleaner air, and cleaner water; essentially, stormwater management systems that mimic nature by soaking up and storing water.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- 9** Support private actions that contribute to the public realm
- 10** Take actions that enhance the environment, economic, and social well-being of the community
- 12** Create efficiencies in delivery of public services





- S1. Incorporate green infrastructure into UDC requirements for development and redevelopment projects. In coordination with the City's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4), create a mechanism to provide resources to ensure that green infrastructure on privately-owned sites is maintained over time.
- S2. Implement green infrastructure at City facilities and in roadway design, where feasible, and provide resources to maintain this infrastructure.
- S3. Require green stormwater infrastructure in publicly funded projects to enhance surface water runoff rates and to benefit other social, environmental, and economic goals of those projects.
- S4. Consider opportunities to incentivize green roofs, particularly in downtown and institutional/campus settings.
- S5. Evaluate standards for green alleys in order to simultaneously enhance the public experience and provide for water treatment.
- S6. Quantify costs related to weather events and environmental effects in order to better explain the importance of pragmatically addressing water issues through tools such as green infrastructure.
- S7. Consider the importance of climate resiliency and carbon sequestration and their relationship to water management.

Creativity & Innovation

Just twenty years ago, cell phones and the internet were in their infancy. Facebook and social media were non-existent, and many people did not trust computers for paying bills or shopping. Big box stores such as Target, Walmart, and Best Buy became the next phase of retail, changing the societal role of 1980s-era shopping malls. At that time, housing trends focused on “bigger is better,” exemplifying the materialistic elements of US cultural norms.

The pace of change accelerated in the early and mid-2000s, at the time when Duluth was adopting its 2006 Comprehensive Plan. Technological advancements including smartphones, internet commerce, and social media now dominate society. Retail continues to evolve: new shopping trends are shifting to on-demand service and large shopping centers' dominance of the market is diminishing. New homebuyers prefer access to amenities over large houses. Individuals

are more aware of how their lifestyles can affect the environment. What trends will dominate by 2035? Duluth will surely change and progress; creativity and innovation will likely grow in importance for the city.

- S1. Expand partnerships with area universities and colleges to learn about new and evolving trends in technology. Use these partnerships to promote opportunities that will benefit the community.
- S2. Expand opportunities for incubators, maker spaces, and craft sales; provide accessible places to make, invent, build, grow, and/or sell goods.
- S3. Provide increased opportunities for students to engage with local government and for them to share and grow their ideas.
- S4. Promote Duluth's Historic Arts and Theater (HART) District, thereby providing employment opportunities, venues for people to showcase their talents, and social gathering spaces. Foster the social connectivity created in these centers.
- S5. Encourage investment in public art across the city.
- S6. Continue to promote neighborhood attractiveness, including through permanent and temporary artistic endeavors in neighborhoods and Core Investment Areas.
- S7. Work with local institutional partners to expand and promote events and exhibits, particularly accessible events in public space.
- S8. Share culture: invest in means to make Indigenous culture and its impact on the city more visible, as well the contributions and impact of other past and present groups.
- S9. Promote programs and partnerships that embrace science and nature, such as the Great Lakes Aquarium, UMD's greenhouses, Hartley Nature Center, local parks, and UMD's Marshall W. Alworth planetarium.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR CREATIVITY & INNOVATION

- 4 Support economic growth sectors
- 5 Promote reinvestment in neighborhoods
- 6 Reinforce the place-specific
- 10 Take actions that enhance the environment, economic, and social well-being of the community

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR HERITAGE PRESERVATION

- 1** Reuse previously developed lands
- 6** Reinforce the place - specific
- 9** Support private actions that contribute to the public realm

Heritage Preservation

Cultural resources define Duluth's sense of place and create both economic and social value. The potential for adaptive reuse of existing building stock enhances historic areas of the city and often supports creative businesses and new entrepreneurships.

- S1.** Where the City has named parks, roads, or neighborhoods in honor of a person or event of significance to the community, develop cultural interpretation to educate the community about this significance.
- S2.** Increase cultural tourism opportunities in the areas of the city where heritage interpretation has been completed, or where it can be developed.
- S3.** Consider updates to regulations for the city's unique historic districts, where modifications to the UDC may allow for a greater level of reinvestment and the preservation or enhancement of specific buildings or the character of the district.
- S4.** Leverage the historic appeal of Duluth to promote tourism throughout the city. To do so, promote heritage preservation efforts through financial and non-financial assistance.
- S5.** Promote the history of neighborhoods. Continue to make these places identifiable, especially based on historical development patterns and commerce.
- S6.** Prioritize partnerships with sovereign tribes to protect and preserve sites of important cultural heritage to Indigenous cultures (*see Chapter 10, Open Space*).