

## Chapter 13 - Transformative Opportunities

### 1. How to use this chapter:

This chapter relates to potentially transformative opportunities for the city. Concepts presented in this chapter differ from the policies and strategies elsewhere in the Imagine Duluth 2035 plan because of their unifying elements between issue areas, or because they represent stand-alone actions, requiring varying levels of resources to consider or implement.

Consideration of one element of this chapter relies upon itself only, and is not necessarily dependent on coordination between other prospective actions. Implementation actions are included below each action, rather than together at the end of the chapter: because they are individual ideas, there's likely a need to prioritize and consider these ideas separately on their merits. Some opportunities may be determined to prioritize and construct more quickly than others; some opportunities may be evaluated and determined to be better deferred until circumstances change.

We know ideas will keep coming up before 2035 - through economic boom times and changes in the city - so Section 5 of the chapter outlines a process to amend and change the document and outline new opportunities.

### 2. Why consider transformative opportunities?

Duluth has a history of identifying opportunities, however complicated, to achieve outcomes that will directly benefit its residents, commerce, and the livability of the city. Such projects result in transformative, long-term change. And they cannot be completed overnight: coordinated and long-term commitments are needed to generate public awareness of the opportunities, thoughtful analysis of financial components, and development of partnerships. *(sidebar - list of historic projects)*

The projects selected for this chapter are mostly opportunities to build or change *things* that will influence how the city grows and develops. That decision was intentional: addressing major social matters, especially current issues, is beyond the scope of the Imagine Duluth 2035 process. But it doesn't mean that such ideas aren't transformational in their own right, and should not suggest that they are of lesser importance.



### 3. Core Investment Areas

At the outset of the Imagine Duluth process, we began hearing from residents about a desire to have stronger connections to vibrant, walkable neighborhood centers. Most of the city’s neighborhoods were established during the pre-WW2 streetcar era; as a result, the historic fabric of many traditional neighborhoods reflect a typical mixed-use design with a modest or high level of density and opportunities for commercial activities. However, a reduction in population density owing in large part to smaller household size paired with changes in spending habits has resulted in vacancies - though this has been changing for the better over the past few years.



Through the planning process, themes emerged about what a Core Investment Area should include: functional, modern utility infrastructure to allow for new construction and business expansion; quality streets and sidewalks; bicycle access and parking; none or few illegal uses and dilapidated properties; transit service with good pedestrian connections; and opportunities for higher density multi-story housing with retail, services, and offices facing the street.

Twelve Core Investment Areas (“CIAs”) have been identified initially, based on existing character of the neighborhood node and redevelopment potential. The final boundaries of these areas have not been determined. Initial steps for the CIAs will include phased implementation steps to create opportunities for further public involvement in establishing specific boundaries for each neighborhood area. New areas can

Core Investment Area Name	Approximate Location (streets / avenues)
Gary New Duluth	Commonwealth & Gary
Morgan Park	88 <sup>th</sup> & Edward
Spirit Valley	Central & Grand
Piedmont	Morris Thomas & Chambersburg
Lincoln Park	Superior St. – 22 <sup>nd</sup> to 17 <sup>th</sup> Ave. W.
Mall Area	Matterhorn / Decker
Duluth Heights	Central Entrance & Arlington
Hillside	4 <sup>th</sup> St. – Lake to 6 <sup>th</sup> Ave. E.
Kenwood	Kenwood & Arrowhead
Mount Royal	St. Marie & Woodland
Woodland	Calvary & Woodland
Lakeside	Superior St. – 43 <sup>rd</sup> to 46 <sup>th</sup> Ave. E.

also be added through a process initiated either by a neighborhood group or by the city, based on potential for growth as a small neighborhood center meeting the defined characteristics.

Following the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan update, many Small Area Plans were completed that included land use analysis for some of the CIAs. In some neighborhoods, major zoning updates were adopted, including establishment of form-based zoning districts to streamline opportunities for new development. In other areas, Duluth LISC completed neighborhood plans. The work coming from these plans

remains valid and in most cases should be carried forward and incorporated into the next steps for CIAs. As the process for each CIA is considered, capital improvement needs should be evaluated. That analysis should consider whether utility services are of an adequate quality and how well transportation networks

servicing the CIA function for all street users. Changes to street design should be considered where the existing street network does not function well for development or redevelopment, including potential for major changes to parcel or right of way design.

Downtown is not included as a Core Investment Area, as it is the historic and current core of the entire city. CIAs are intended to serve as neighborhood focus points; though downtown Duluth functions as its own distinct neighborhood, it is of statewide and regional importance as a core area in its own right. For this reason, individual transformative actions that are created purposefully for downtown are included separately in this chapter.



Transformational actions for the study of downtown Duluth are included separately in this chapter. While many of the CIAs listed have elements similar to a small-city downtown, most frequently these neighborhood nodes originated as streetcar suburbs. Job density within the CIAs should be adequate to serve the neighborhood, but is not intended to displace more typical job densities and characteristics of the traditional downtown.

The city will seek to create an environment for each of the Core Investment Areas to reach the following goals:

- a. Upgraded or functional utility infrastructure adequate to serve redevelopment;
- b. Modern street networks, serving all users, and walkable for nearby residents;
- c. Well evaluated street and parcel layout, suitable for modern development types;
- d. Opportunities for gathering spaces (these could overlap – see example of Solon Springs Mercantile in Wisconsin!):
  - i. Coffee shops
  - ii. Hardware stores
  - iii. Small restaurant or pub
  - iv. Post office or shipping/receiving company
  - v. Churches or schools
  - vi. Community clubs
- e. Access to food resources (grocery store / bodega);
- f. Shared parking opportunities, where appropriate;
- g. Medical facilities / clinic

#### Adding new CIAs

The initial CIAs were selected based on characteristics associated with traditional neighborhood centers. New CIAs may be desirable in the future as the city grows and changes. Amendments to the plan should be evaluated based on community feedback at such time as deemed appropriate through consultation with the Planning Commission. Addition of CIAs will represent an update to the Comprehensive Plan and should be processed accordingly.

## CIA Implementation Actions

1. Prioritize funding for street improvements in these areas that provide more multi-modal connections, primarily bike and pedestrian, in first five years of new Street Improvement program.
2. Implement higher frequency transit service to improve connection between employment centers and Core Investment Areas. Frequency should be 20-30 minutes during peak times.
3. Evaluate the potential to modify the UDC for developing Master Planned sites or City completing Mixed Use Plan (M-UP) zoned districts.
4. Other actions specific to the individual CIA as determined appropriate through a neighborhood process.

## 4. The Transformational Opportunities

1. Downtown Plans & Investments

**Rationale.** New investments in downtown continue to support growth and change in the city. During the Imagine Duluth process, initial dialogue about downtown's boundaries and inventory of parking availability and other systems began. Resources did not allow for expansion upon past plans, now being implemented through HART district investments, redevelopments at key sites, and major transportation and infrastructure investments in the downtown, such as Superior Street.

Long range planning efforts in the downtown will evaluate changing market demand, opportunities at vacant or prime redevelopment sites, and implications of changing technologies. As housing demand and needs shift and the definition of office employment changes, construction patterns for new development in downtowns will continue to change. Expectations for transportation systems continue to evolve, with new technology and the sharing economy influencing how people commute, shop, and seek entertainment - reestablishment of intercity rail with the Northern Lights Express is expected to be transformative in its own right. A higher level of amenities downtown, at one time considered an added bonus when possible, is more frequently considered a minimum threshold to ensure viability.

Any new plans undertaken will be anticipated to create opportunities for new private investments in the downtown. Such investment will contribute to not only the built infrastructure of the city through new office or residential spaces, but will add to the public amenities serving downtown and Canal Park. Where new public spaces are considered or reevaluated, such spaces should be "active" spaces, where residents and employees can interact and enjoy the city. New opportunities should, where possible, enhance access and views to the waterfront.

The Imagine Duluth process included a detailed look at new opportunities in Canal Park, which is frequently (but not always) considered part of downtown. Imagine Canal Park, a grant funded effort conducted through with the Knight Cities Collaborative, the Duluth Superior Community Foundation, and 8-80 Cities, set forth opportunities for ‘urban interventions’ to improve the

### Historic Transformations

#### *Skyline Parkway*

Skyline Parkway was first envisioned in 1889 by Duluth’s first Park Board President, William Rogers. Constructed in segments between 1891 and 1940, and championed most vocally by Mayor Samuel Snively, the parkway spans nearly the entire length of the city and is a defining element of Duluth - culturally, historically, and even from a practical standpoint. The parkway is not only a means for accessing parks and the vistas of Duluth along its twelve scenic overlooks, but also a useful street serving neighborhoods and providing access points across the city’s many streams at higher elevations within the city.

quality of the tourism district’s built form. Among other things, the Imagine Canal Park process has focused on transportation connections between the city’s traditional ‘central business district’ and Canal Park; over time, continued partnerships between the city and the Minnesota Department of Transportation will improve these connections. The initial Imagine Canal Park work is included as an Appendix to this plan.

**Partners.** Partners in considering the downtown are widely varied; the Greater Downtown Council is a key partner, as is St. Louis County, which remains a major landowner in the downtown. Future planning efforts in the downtown will involve many stakeholders, including residents, property owners, representatives from all areas of the city, and the tourist economy. Priority will be given to ensure inclusive processes that focus on advancing the governing principles for health and fairness in future actions taken in the downtown.

**Implementation Actions.** Elsewhere in this plan, redevelopment of vacant and underutilized sites is a high priority for implementation; analysis of transportation modes, including consideration for changes to the system of downtown one-way routes, is also included.

Prior to implementation of any planning efforts downtown, attention must be given to scope development and adequate budget and staffing to commence the project. Given existing resource constraints, a multi-year work plan may be necessary to establish realistic parameters to the

scope of work and to ensure that expectations remain aligned with market-driven possibilities.

Ultimately, implementation of actions in the downtown may establish priorities for the total number of downtown jobs or residents, or may focus on opportunities such a creating new public connections to Canal Park, redeveloped plazas, or additional commercial activities along newly named alleyways.

## 2. Year-Round Indoor Public Space

**Rationale.** Activity space in Duluth is at a premium year-round, but especially during the November to April months when there are fewer hours of daylight and the temperatures don’t always lend themselves to outdoor activities. The Imagine Duluth 2035 process led to themes for

indoor public spaces in two areas: an indoor arboretum or winter garden, and a large indoor play area for adults, children, and people of all ages.

Duluth has lots of active space for year-round activities, but few of those spaces are informal in nature and accessible for all residents. Nearly all charge a substantial fee to enjoy. The convention center, while publicly owned, is often unavailable because of its many year-round programming needs - though as part of the skyway system it is open to the public for walking during business hours.

Potential sites for such space could be along the waterfront area. Through longer-term redevelopment planning at the DECC, the bayside could include such space along Shore Drive, or closer to the Duluth Aquarium.

**Partners.** Maintaining indoor public space is expensive, especially during the winter. If any opportunities were to be considered, partnerships with existing groups could help analyze the potential a given idea's financial viability. Non-profit organizations such as the Duluth Children's Museum, the Duluth Aquarium, the Duluth Depot, the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center, local horticultural groups, and private parties such as Adventure Zone should be considered.

#### **Implementation Actions**

1. Determine the lead entity to research this topic area.
  2. Conduct a facilitated discussion with potential stakeholders, including the listed partners and others such as the Duluth Kids Club.
  3. Develop a process document that will lead to completion of analysis for considering overall purpose and scope, project viability, and location analysis.
3. Uphill Connections - Aerial Gondola or Incline Railway

**Rationale.** The community raised the issue of uphill connectivity extensively during the community engagement process. Health and fairness elements were raised, particularly in the area of safety for residents who walk as their primary transportation mode.

While the concept of an incline railway is of historic interest (the original closed in 1939), new uphill transportation options must account for changing travel patterns and population densities. In order to justify the initial capital investment and ongoing operations of an uphill connection, the transportation investment will need to be paired with redevelopment sites and specific levels of connectivity between key destinations. Of critical importance is connectivity through the hillside, particularly at 4th and 8th Streets where transit connections can be made. The location of the historic incline was at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue West; the route evaluation process should consider the most cost-effective location that also serves the maximum number of people.

Tourism has always played a role in uphill access within Duluth. Even at the time of initial construction in 1891, the original incline railway was used as a tourist attraction. While tourism should be considered as an opportunity to supplement the rationale for a new uphill transportation option, it is not clear that it should be a primary factor. Tourism connections and opportunities should be considered, including access to hard to reach tourist destinations.

**Partners.** Potential partnerships should be established to consider the concept of an uphill connection. A Citizens Advisory Group could be developed informally to advise staff about potential partners and routes.

**Implementation Actions.**

- a. Begin a dialogue with stakeholders about the need and purpose for improvements to uphill transportation options.
- b. Review viability of uphill transportation modes in other similarly situated cities.
- c. Conduct an informal alternatives analysis to review route choice and modes to provide a recommendation to Administration about potential next steps.

4. Public Market

**Rationale.** Creation of a Public Market could serve as a redevelopment catalyst for either the Lincoln Park or West Duluth neighborhood Core Investment Area. Such a market would likely be developed as a year-round indoor space with adequate access, including parking areas, to serve the entire community. Its use as a tourism driver, at least initially, would be secondary to three primary goals: 1) serving the commercial needs of the neighborhood and community; 2) acting as a catalyst for additional redevelopment in particular neighborhoods; and 3) creating opportunities for small-scale economic development as vendors are able to use affordable space at preferred rates and broad visibility.

**Partners.** Initially, partners for the initiative include the Business Development division and the Community Planning division. Potential partners include the groups running the various farmer's markets throughout the city, economic development agencies such as SOAR, the Duluth Entrepreneur Fund, and many others.

**Implementation Actions.**

1. Consider need and opportunities for partnership with private development.
2. Create a list of sites in neighborhood locations to serve the community but also minimize negative side effects from a higher level of activity in a new location within the city.

5. Tier 3 Greenbelt Areas / Urban Growth Boundary

**Rationale.** The 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan called for actions to minimize development in Tier 3 development zone areas, outside the core developed areas of the city. Steps to actively minimize development in these areas would cease further infrastructure expansions, and may include removal or privatization of some streets or utilities.

**Partners.** The Community Planning division will work with other governmental agencies, including adjacent cities and townships, as well as St. Louis County. Duluth Airport.

**Implementation Actions.**

- a. Formalize the Tier 3 development areas within the context of the Official Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map.
  - i. Conduct a public process to inform residents and land owners of the intent to minimize development in these areas, including an extensive internal process.
  - ii. Council to act to adopt maps depicting specific boundary lines (urban growth boundary) at a more granular level than the Official Land Use Map.
- b. Adopt updated zoning regulations to govern these areas.
- c. Provide for transfer of development rights.

6. City Flag Update

**Rationale.** Duluth has had a city flag for many years. With a bold green background and identifiable cross pattern flanked by fleur de lis, the current flag is a strong symbol of the city. However, as is the case with many flags developed at the same timeframe, the existing design includes the city seal at its center. The Imagine Duluth process included dialogue about the concept of vexillology, or the study of flags. It was noted that the current flag does not meet key principles for flag design, and as such the flag does not maximize the level of opportunity for recognition of the city.

**Partners.** Local non-profits, funding agencies, marketing groups, and arts-related institutional partners should be involved in considering a process to review the flag's current design and, if determined appropriate, develop a process for an update.

**Implementation Actions.**

1. Create an ad-hoc group to provide structure and oversight to a review process for the existing flag and consideration of a process for its replacement.
2. Conduct a process for replacement of the flag.
3. Broadly collaborate with community groups to ensure that the flag serves to establish a strong identity and brand for the city. Work to use the flag to bolster civic pride and regional and statewide recognition of Duluth.

7. Viewsheds – Views of the Lake, the Estuary, or Landmarks

**Rationale.** A viewshed planning process was described in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan update, but only partially completed. An updated process to evaluate views to important elements of the city is appropriate and would assist in establishing shared parameters about types and heights of development in various parts of the city.

Topography has played an important role throughout the Imagine Duluth process. It creates a unique opportunity for the city. Through the prioritization of viewsheds, various metrics could be established. For example, a future policy action could call for a view of something (the lake, estuary, hillside, or a landmark) from an overlook established within 1000 feet of all housing units in the city. Duluth has substantial and well-appreciated natural beauty, and it is important that all residents of the city are able to enjoy it.

Views from the Skyline Parkway remain important; continued implementation of the Skyline Parkway plans as described in the Transportation Chapter will help to effectuate these priorities.

**Partners.** Parks and Recreation, neighborhood groups, and many others would be key implementation partners.

**Implementation Actions.** In order to proceed with a viewshed analysis, a scope of study is needed. Follow up steps would include evaluation of priorities, establishment of appropriate policy tools, including ordinances, and a determination of the breadth of importance of the issue. If sufficiently important, establishment of viewsheds could include physical changes to the city's built environment.

#### 8. Industrial Waterfront

**Rationale.** Preservation of the industrial waterfront is a priority. As economic conditions continue to change and evolve on a national and even global scale, so does the role of the industrial waterfront in Duluth. It is a priority to ensure a vibrant industrial economy in Duluth. It is also important to efficiently and effectively collaborate with partners to ensure the city's rules and regulations set forth appropriate parameters to ensure new opportunities are fairly evaluated. Due to the quickening pace of economic change, interim activities may in some instances be appropriate. Through partnerships with the Duluth Seaway Port Authority, evaluations are taking place in 2018 to help better understand the industrial economy; if necessary as a follow-up next step, further work should be completed to ensure adequate levels of coordination between city plans and neighborhoods and nearby industrial areas.



**Partners.** Partners in the industrial waterfront areas of the city include the DSPA, other city departments, the Harbor Technical Advisory Committee, and many others.

**Implementation Actions.** Implementation of this transformative action is undefined at present but should be formulated in coordination with planning efforts by the DSPA and HTAC.

### **5. Big Ideas: The Process**

By no means are these all the possibilities for transformative actions for Duluth. Process for adding new big ideas to this chapter; conducting a research process and an alternatives analysis; involving partners; whether generated by Mayor, Council, staff, or citizen initiative.

Ideas that didn't make it into this chapter include reimagining the ore docs in Lincoln Park to create a new public walkway similar to New York City's High Line, as well as others.