

Chapter 13 - Transformative Opportunities

1. How to use this chapter

This chapter considers potentially transformative opportunities for the city. Concepts presented in this chapter differ from the policies and strategies elsewhere in the Imagine Duluth 2035 plan either because of their unifying elements across issue areas, or because they represent stand-alone actions which would require dissimilar amounts of resources.

Consideration of any one transformative element addressed in this chapter does not necessarily depend on other prospective ideas. Implementation actions are included below each element, rather than together at the end of the chapter; because of the diversity of the collected ideas, each idea must be assessed independently, on its own merits. Following individual evaluation, perhaps some may be prioritized and implemented quickly, while others may be deferred until a later time.

We know that more ideas will make themselves known between now and 2035, through the city's evolution and the work of passionate citizens. For this reason – because this list is only the beginning – Section 5 of the chapter outlines a process to identify additional opportunities and amend the plan accordingly.

2. Why consider transformative opportunities?

Duluth has a history of identifying and acting upon opportunities, however complex, in order to achieve outcomes that will directly benefit its residents, its commerce, and the livability of the city. Such projects result in transformative, long-term change, but they cannot be completed overnight: coordinated and durable commitments are needed to generate public awareness, to ensure thoughtful analysis of financial components, and to develop partnerships. [sidebar - list of historic projects]

The ideas collected in this chapter are primarily opportunities to build or change *things* that will influence how our city grows and develops. The decision to focus on built and natural environments does not mean that social matters are not equally transformational or of any of lesser importance, however, simply that such subjects are beyond the scope of the Imagine Duluth 2035 process.



3. Core Investment Areas

Since the beginning of the Imagine Duluth 2035 process, residents have been expressing a desire for enhanced connections to vibrant, walkable neighborhood centers. Most of Duluth’s neighborhoods were established during the pre-World War II streetcar era; as a result, the historic fabric of many neighborhoods reflects a period-typical mixed-use design with a modest or high level of density and opportunities for commercial activities. Over time, a reduction in population density – owing in large part to decreasing household size – paired with changes in spending habits resulted in vacancies in these zones. This vacancy rate has been decreasing over the past few years, but opportunities remain for increasing deliberate, planned action in these areas.



Throughout 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; a reduction in illegal uses and dilapidated properties; transit service with appropriate, accessible pedestrian connections; and opportunities for higher density multi-story housing with retail, services, and offices facing the street.

Twelve initial Core Investment Areas (“CIAs”) have been identified based on the existing character and redevelopment potential of individual neighborhood nodes. The final boundaries of these areas have not yet been defined. First steps for the CIAs will incorporate opportunities for community engagement, notably in the process of identifying the boundaries of each area. New CIAs can also be added to this list

Table 1: Core Investment Areas

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

through a process initiated either by a neighborhood group or by the City; the identification process will include the evaluation of potential for growth as a small neighborhood center meeting pre-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 these CIAs. In certain neighborhoods, major zoning updates were adopted, including the establishment of form-based zoning districts to streamline opportunities for new development. In other areas, Duluth LISC completed

neighborhood plans. The work resulting from these plans remains valid and, in most cases, should be carried forward and incorporated into the next steps for CIAs. Capital improvement needs should also be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Analysis should assess whether utility services are of adequate quality and to what extent transportation networks serving the CIA function for all street users, regardless of age or level of mobility. In locations where existing street networks hinder development or redevelopment,

changes to street design, potentially including major changes to parcel or right of way design, should be considered.

Duluth's downtown is not considered a Core Investment Area. The CIAs are intended to serve as neighborhood focal points and though downtown Duluth functions as its own distinct neighborhood, it is first and foremost the historic and current core of the entire city, of statewide and regional importance in its own right. For this reason, individual transformative actions identified specifically for the downtown are included in a separate section of this chapter.



While many of the CIAs listed have aspects similar to those found in the downtown of a small city, these neighborhood nodes originated most frequently as streetcar suburbs. As such, although job density within the CIAs should be adequate to serve each individual neighborhood, the CIAs are not intended to displace more typical job densities and characteristics of the traditional urban downtown.

[*Call-out box*: The City will seek to create an environment in each Core Investment Area which will enable it to achieve the following:

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

Adding new CIAs

The initial CIAs were selected based on characteristics associated with Duluth's traditional neighborhood centers. As our city grows and evolves over time, it may become desirable to identify new CIAs. Amendments should be evaluated based on community feedback at such time as deemed appropriate through consultation with the Planning Commission. The addition of other CIAs would represent an update to the Comprehensive Plan and must therefore be processed accordingly.

Priority Actions for Core Investment Areas

1. Identify specific boundaries and priorities for each individual CIA through a neighborhood process.
2. Prioritize funding for street improvements in CIAs to encourage accessibility and multi-modal connections, focused in the first five years of the new Street Improvement Program.
3. Evaluate the potential of modifying the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) to develop master planned sites or mixed-use planned zoning districts within CIAs.
4. Adopt architectural guidelines for the CIAs to ensure new proposals adhere to neighborhood design, or consider minimum building material standards.
5. Support “by-right” development within the CIAs for the following businesses and amenities:
 - a. Multi-story housing, including mixed-use;
 - b. Post offices;
 - c. Clinics;
 - d. Daycare services;
 - e. Churches and schools;
 - f. Fitness centers or other fitness-related activities;
 - g. Neighborhood-supporting elements such as grocers, liquor stores, small professional offices, and restaurants.
6. Support development and redevelopment that increase residential density and commercial square footage along transit lines. Evaluate possibilities for incentives to support this action.
7. Promote commercial development within the CIAs and limit the expansion or rezoning of strip development in surrounding areas. Expansion of strip zoning should be limited until developable land in the CIA is saturated.
8. Enhance the gateway characteristics of the CIAs. Design access points which emphasize the defining character of any given area. Specific aesthetic elements, identification signage, and visual cues should provide a coordinated message to individuals entering a CIA. Examples may include a street design plan, building design plan, or establishment of a neighborhood square.
9. Encourage or provide incentives for new housing developments that are within 1/4 mile of existing public parks, within 1/8 of a mile of a bus stop, and adjacent to public sidewalks.
10. Implement higher frequency transit service to improve connections between employment centers and CIAs.

4. Specific transformative opportunities

1. Downtown Plans & Investments

Rationale. New investments in downtown Duluth continue to support growth and change in the city. Initial dialogues concerning the downtown’s boundaries and an inventory of parking availability and other systems were begun during the Imagine Duluth process. Resources did not allow for expansion upon past plans or extensive analysis of the downtown during the Imagine Duluth 2035 process. The implementation of downtown actions remains a high priority for the future.

Long-range planning efforts in the downtown will evaluate changing market demand, opportunities at vacant or prime redevelopment sites, and implications of new 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 are already evolving, with technology and the sharing economy influencing how people commute, shop, and seek entertainment; in addition, the reestablishment of intercity rail with the Northern Lights Express is expected to be transformative in its own right. A high concentration of amenities downtown, at one time considered an added bonus when possible, is now frequently considered a minimum threshold for viability.

Future downtown plans will see to create opportunities for new private investments. Such investments will not only contribute to the built environment of the city through new office or residential spaces, but will also add to the public amenities serving downtown and Canal Park. Where new public spaces are considered or reevaluated, such spaces should be “active” spaces in which people can interact and enjoy the city. New opportunities should, where possible, enhance access to and views of the waterfront. Downtown planning should also provide recommendations for the downtown skywalk system.

Within the downtown area, many public entities and non-profit providers offer critical services for individuals and families in or at risk of being in poverty, or facing homelessness or challenges related to mental health. Continued coordination between all parties in the downtown should seek to improve services to all people in the city, recognizing the complexities of varying difficult circumstances.

Public services play a major role in the downtown, from the public library to City Hall to the federal building. Continuing changes in how services are provided, including through technological advancement, may simultaneously facilitate improvements while creating new opportunities for redevelopment. The appraisal of any potential changes should engage a broad range of stakeholders and thoroughly evaluate how new public facilities might maximize benefits for all Duluthians.

The Imagine Duluth process included a detailed look at new opportunities in Canal Park, a neighborhood frequently (but not always) considered part of the downtown. Imagine Canal Park, a grant-funded effort conducted through the Knight Cities Challenge, the Duluth Superior Area

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 passage across the city’s many streams at higher elevations within the city.

Community Foundation, and 8 80 Cities, set forth opportunities for temporary “urban interventions” to improve the quality of the tourism district’s built environment. Among other considerations, 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 further improve these connections. The initial Imagine Canal Park community engagement summary report is included an Appendix to this plan.

Duluth’s downtown has, since its inception, been somewhat disconnected from points west of approximately 7th-8th Avenues West to the Lincoln Park neighborhood (formerly the West End) because of the Point of Rocks, a major geologic feature in the city. Updated planning efforts in the downtown should seek to further advance work that has been done to improve those connections.

Partners. Partners in planning for the downtown vary in size and focus; the Greater Downtown Council is a key partner, as is St. Louis County, which remains a major downtown landowner. Future planning efforts in the downtown will necessitate the involvement of many stakeholders, including residents, property owners, representatives from across the city, and partners in the tourist economy. Priority will be given to ensure inclusive processes that focus on advancing the governing principles for health and fairness.

Implementation Actions.

- a. Prioritize the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized sites.
- b. Analyze transportation modes, including consideration for changes to the system of downtown one-way routes.

See Chapter 7, Economic Development, for additional details on these implementation actions.

Prior to the implementation of any planning efforts in the downtown, attention must be given to the scope of development and adequate budget and staffing. Given existing resource constraints, a multi-year work plan may be necessary to establish realistic parameters for the scope of work and to ensure that expectations remain aligned with market-driven possibilities.

Duluth’s medical district, which encompasses both the Essentia and St. Luke’s campuses, comprises an integral part of the downtown. Steps in downtown planning processes should seek to enhance connectivity between the medical district and points west, as well as between the medical district and Lake Superior.

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 as 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 ideas for indoor public space in two forms: an indoor arboretum or winter garden, and an indoor play area for adults, children, and people of all ages.

Duluth has a variety of spaces available for year-round activities, but few of those existing spaces are informal in nature and accessible for all residents. Nearly all such spaces charge a substantial fee for their use or enjoyment. The convention center, while publicly owned, is often unavailable because of its year-round programming (as part of the skyway system, however, it is open to the public for indoor activities such as walking during business hours).

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

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

Implementation Actions

- a. Identify a governmental entity, nonprofit, or developer to guide and coordinate activity related to this topic.
- b. Conduct a facilitated discussion with potential stakeholders, including the partners listed above and others such as the Duluth KidsClub.
- c. Develop a process document to direct analysis of a potential project's overall purpose and scope, viability, and location.

3. Uphill Connections - Aerial Gondola or Incline Railway

Rationale. The community raised the issue of uphill connectivity extensively during the Imagine Duluth 2035 outreach process. Questions of health and fairness were evoked, particularly regarding the safety of residents who use walking as their primary mode of transportation.

While the concept of an incline railway is of historic interest (Duluth's original incline railway 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 operation of an

uphill connection, any such transportation venture should be paired with redevelopment sites at key destinations. Connectivity throughout the hillside is of critical importance, notably at 4th and 8th Streets where multi-modal transit connections can be created. The location of Duluth's historic incline railway was 7th Avenue West; a new route evaluation process should consider the most cost-effective location that would also serve the most people.

Tourism has always played a role in uphill access in Duluth. Even at the time of its initial construction in 1891, the original incline railway was used as a tourist attraction. While tourism should be considered an opportunity to supplement the rationale for a new uphill transportation option, however, it is not certain that the novelty of any such proposal should be a primary factor in its evaluation. Factors like the creation of additional tourism opportunities and the accessing of hard to reach tourist destinations, however, should be fully considered in the appraisal of any uphill connection proposals.

Partners. Potential partnerships should be established to consider the concept of an uphill connection. A Citizen Advisory Group could be developed informally to advise staff on potential partners, sites, 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, reviewing route choice and modes, in order 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 Core Investment Areas. Such a market would likely be developed as a year-round indoor space with sufficient access, including parking, to serve the entire community. Its potential contribution to the tourism economy, 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 redevelopment in particular areas; and 3) creating opportunities for small-scale economic development by providing affordable space and broad visibility to vendors.

Partners. Key partners for the initiative include the City's Business Development and Community Planning divisions. Potential partners include those groups in charge of the various farmer's markets throughout the city, economic development agencies such as SOAR, and the Duluth Entrepreneur Fund.

Implementation Actions.

- a. Consider possible benefits from and opportunities for partnership with private development.
 - d. Create a list of sites in neighborhood locations. Site criteria should include consideration of which locations would best serve the community while minimizing possible negative side effects from a heightened level of activity. Current 2017-2018 opportunity sites should be evaluated for appropriateness, such as the Lot D site, the Duluth Armory, or the Spirit Valley Core Investment Area.
5. Tier 3 Greenbelt Areas / Urban Services 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. Taking steps to actively minimize development in these areas would discontinue further infrastructure expansions and may include the removal or privatization of some streets or utilities.

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

Implementation Actions.

- a. Give priority to development and redevelopment where utility services can be provided at an average or less than average cost, particularly in locations where existing utilities are under capacity. Development where utility installation would be more expensive will be discouraged. *[see map, "Potential Development Transportation and Utility Analysis"]*
- b. 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 landowners of the intent to minimize development in these areas.
 - ii. Duluth's Planning Commission should audit and adopt maps depicting specific boundary lines for the tiered areas with more precision than the Official Land Use Map.
- c. Develop a process to provide for the transfer for development rights.
- d. In both development and redevelopment, prioritize sites that would increase the utilization of Duluth's existing infrastructure and favor the maintenance and reconstruction of older infrastructure, as opposed to infrastructure expansions. Discourage development in locations where the initial installation and provision of utility services would require lengthy extensions without intermediate connections.
- e. Encourage appropriate investment on previously-developed lands: incentivize infill development over greenfield development when staging development, rezoning for development, or providing public support.
- f. Support new development that incorporates multi-story buildings and parking ramps on reduced footprints.

- g. Engage in discussions with Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD) to evaluate and potentially amend their Urban Services Boundary. *[MAP - excluding Tier 3 areas and some Tier 2 sites]*
- h. Consider a City Urban Services Boundary defining minimum densities or levels of economic growth which must be attained in order to obtain City support for the extension of new urban services in areas with tracts of ecologically significant lands.
- i. Amend the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) to increase the minimum lot area required for development in those areas planned to remain rural, in order to maximize water storage capacity and to reduce the amount of lives and property at risk to wildfire.

6. City Flag Update

Rationale. Duluth has flown its current city flag since 1979; with a bold green background and identifiable cross pattern flanked by two fleurs-de-lis, the current flag is a symbol of the city. The Imagine Duluth 2035 process included dialogue about vexillology, or the study of flags, during which it was noted that the current flag does not meet key principles for flag design: among other critiques, the existing design includes the city seal at its center. In its current iteration, 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 how to review the flag's current design and, if determined appropriate, develop a process for an update.

Implementation Actions.

- a. 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.
- b. Conduct the agreed-upon process for replacement of the flag.
- c. Collaborate with community groups to ensure that the flag serves the purpose of establishing a strong identity and brand for the city. Endeavor to use the flag to bolster civic pride and regional and statewide recognition of Duluth.

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

Rationale. A viewshed planning process was described in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan update, but only partially completed. An updated process evaluating important views would support the establishment of parameters regulating development types and heights across Duluth.

Topography has played an important role throughout the Imagine Duluth process and creates a unique opportunity for the city. Through the prioritization of viewsheds, a variety of metrics could be created. For example, a future policy action could call for a scenic view (the lake, the estuary, the hillside, or a landmark) from an overlook to be maintained within 1000 feet of all housing

units in the city. Duluth has substantial and well-appreciated natural beauty, and it is crucial that all residents of the city are able to access and enjoy it.

Views from Skyline Parkway remain equally important; continued implementation of the Skyline Parkway plans as described in the Transportation Chapter will help to maintain this resource.

Partners.

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

8. Industrial Waterfront

Rationale. Preserving and expanding opportunities within the city's waterfront and fostering a vibrant industrial economy in Duluth is an important component of the city's economic activity and an area where international coordination is commonplace. As economic conditions continue to evolve on the national and global scales, so too does the role of the industrial waterfront. Due to the quickening pace of economic change, opportunities to consider uses on an interim basis or changes to zoning districts (such as better coordination between Industrial General and Industrial Waterfront) may arise. In such instances, land uses should be evaluated in coordination between the City, DEDA, and Port Authority; collaboration between partners is fundamental for redevelopment. In 2018, evaluations to help better understand the industrial economy will take place through partnerships with the Duluth Seaway Port Authority. If necessary as a further step, additional work should be completed to ensure adequate coordination between actors and across plans.



Partners. Partners in industrial waterfront area activities should include City departments, the DSPA, the Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC), and many others.

Implementation Actions. Implementation of this transformative action will involve coordination of planning efforts between the City, DEDA, the DSPA and HTAC. Steps may include development of employment targets, improved connectivity for redeveloping sites, and analysis of service and utility provision in industrial areas.

5. Big ideas, transformative opportunities: the process

By no means is this chapter an exhaustive list of each and every possibility for a transformative action in 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.*

Other ideas that didn't make it into this chapter include reimagining the Canadian National ore docks in Lincoln Park to create a new public walkway similar to New York City's High Line, developing a water shuttle or taxi service, building canals throughout the city for east-west transportation, creating a dedicated space for outdoor fitness activities along the lake shore, and placing a cap or development directly over the freeway between downtown and the DECC.

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