

December 16, 2013

TO: Duluth Planning Commission

FR: City Councilor Sharla Gardner and Planning Commission Representative Heather Rand
Park Point Small Area Plan Advisory Committee Members

RE: Park Point Small Area Plan Advisory Committee Minority Report

For more than 20 years now, the Duluth planning commission and city council have been caught up in patterns of haphazard and reactive land use decision making when it has come to Park Point land use variances, street vacations and parcel re-zonings. Implementation of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan provided some proactive direction, but clearly lacked detail.

It is important for us to be cognizant of the fact that Park Point is an extremely unique area with land use assets and related issues not found elsewhere in the city of Duluth or the state of Minnesota. The land mass is connected to the city's downtown by the ever-developing entertainment district of Canal Park and the city's iconic landmark the Aerial Lift Bridge. It is surrounded by sandy public beaches and the open waters of Lake Superior and Superior Bay. Approximately half of the land on Park Point is designated public open space. Park Point's single roadway thoroughfare culminates into a dead-end at one of the city's largest recreational areas, and more and more residents and tourists are seeking out this rare flat stretch of roadway for biking and walking in a city that is otherwise known for having an overabundance of more challenging terrain.

These and so many other unique characteristics necessitate careful short and long-term land use planning for Park Point. We believe the development pressures will continue to grow in the form of potential new hotels, improved marinas, townhomes and other mixed use commercial developments. It is more than reasonable for the planning commission and city council to take pro-active action now that will guide the development pressures and responsibly optimize public access points to the lake, bay and public parks. It is more than reasonable for the planning commission and city council to take pro-active action now that will protect the character and safety of the residential areas of Park Point in light of these growing development pressures.

For over a year, a city initiated advisory committee of volunteers have been meeting for the purpose of developing a proactive, solutions-orientated Park Point Small Area Plan with professional assistance from city planning staff. From our perspective, a reasonable, pro-active plan of recommendations resulted from this effort that if adopted in its entirety, will strategically provide the land use guidance planning commissioners, city councilors and city staff have been seeking. The critical goals of the plan as we perceive them are as follows:

- 1) Improve motorized and non-motorized transportation on roadways, sidewalks, bike lanes, and publicly improved walkways to specific public water access points and beaches including an extension of the Lakewalk next to the south pier of the Aerial Lift Bridge from Canal Park.

- 2) Encourage better management of existing public parks including the south pier side of the Aerial Lift Bridge and related beach areas, Franklin Square Park/Tot Lot, Lafayette Square Recreation Area, and Park Point Recreation Area. This improved management may include public infrastructure development of the listed parks and a yet-to-be-developed public park/dockage area on the bay side near the yacht Club (18th Street).
- 3) Determine preferred land use densities (single family, townhouse, etc.) through zoning changes on undeveloped bayside parcels on Minnesota Avenues near the hotel/marinas (MU-W, I-W and MU-N zoned parcels). The land use zoning recommendations will encourage future mixed-use commercial development to occur on Minnesota Avenue near the marina/hotels and not in the residential sections of Park Point.

As such, we recommend inclusion of all recommendations listed in the Park Point Small Area Plan Draft as presented at the November 13, 2013 Park Point Advisory Committee Meeting by city of Duluth Planning Staff. More specifically, we are supportive of the transportation recommendations related to the relocation of the “S” Curve and the creation of a new Bike Boulevard, and we are supportive of the recommendations pertaining to the use of public access and improved and unimproved rights of way (street ends) which includes removal of a section of the City Legislative Code Charter pertaining to public dockage.

More specifically, we call your attention to **Goal 4: Provide safe and convenient motorized and non-motorized transportation options throughout the study area - “Recommendations (vehicular) Minnesota Avenue A-E”**. This section includes a recommendation to relocate the “S” Curve from Lake Avenue to Minnesota Avenue, from 12th Street to 8th Street, so long as the city is successful in securing a variance from MnDOT that would allow for a 20 Mph speed limit on the curve, rather than the 30 mph typically required on a MSA road. This makes sense us because the speed limit on the bridge is 15 mph and a transition to 20 mph on the curve would be safer and minimize road construction impacts to 2 or less existing residential properties. This “S” Curve change redirects motorized through traffic from a residential neighborhood to a growing commercial area near the hotels and marinas on Minnesota Avenue.

This section of the plan also recommends the creation of a “Bicycle Boulevard” for Lake Avenue **“Lake Avenue recommendations A and B”** and Utility Improvements **“Utility Considerations recommendations A-C”** pertaining to utility poles and storm and water sewer and water main lines so critical to improving the safety of non-motorized travellers.

Further, we recommend approval of the section called **“Recommendations, non-motorized A-G”** which includes reclaiming and redesigning Franklin Square Park to increase its size, usefulness pending removal of the existing “S” curve and also installing a new crossing signal at 13th Street.

Lastly, this section of transportation related recommendations includes improved connector sidewalks on Lake and Minnesota Avenues, a Lakewalk extension by south pier of Aerial Lift Bridge and the build out of a new recreation pathway from 13th Street to 19th Street that would

provide public access to a proposed city recreation and public dockage area near the yacht club property.

We also would like to call your attention to **Goal 5: Define public access/use of improved and unimproved rights-of-way (street ends) recommendations A-G.**

The purpose of Goal 5 is to implement a carefully determined, categorized Tier 1 and Tier 2 system of publicly improved pedestrian lake and bay side access points that would be developed and managed by the Duluth Parks and Recreation Department. We recommend the Park Point Small Area Plan include **Goal 5, Define public access/use of improved and unimproved rights-of-way (street ends) recommendations A-G.** This includes removing an antiquated section of the City Legislative Code Charter that allows public dockage at all street ends on Superior Bay side. We feel removal of this charter section is appropriate because the language is obsolete and as such, hasn't been enforced on Park Point or Canal Park or by the DECC or elsewhere in Duluth Bay. While we feel it is important for the city to improve and maintain some public dockage areas within city limits, it is also appropriate for the city to determine the locations of such. It is important for the city legislative code reflect this.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of these important recommendations and eventual adoption of a Park Point Small Area Plan.