

## Winter Storm Warning

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# Plan tackles Park Point development

By [Peter Passi](#) Today at 1:51 p.m.

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### Proposed Park Point plan



**PDATE:** The city of Duluth Park Point Small Area Plan Open House and Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Wednesday afternoon have been postponed; meetings rescheduled for Wednesday, April 30 - Park Point open house from 3:30-4:30 p.m.; Planning Commission at 5 p.m., both at City Hall.

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After about 1½ years in the making, a plan to guide Park Point’s development could finally be nearing completion, with the Duluth Planning Commission slated to weigh in on the document tonight.



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Despite the long lead time, Sharla Gardner, who represents Park Point on the Duluth City Council, defends developing the plan as a worthwhile endeavor. That’s not to say

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it has been easy.

“Most of the people who live on Park Point are very involved in their community and they are concerned about its future. But many of them have very different views in regard to what should happen,” Gardner said.

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“When people see this plan, they realize we’re eventually going to have to deal with the reality of more development on the Point, and some residents don’t want that to happen. So this is upsetting,” Gardner observed.

But like it or not, developers continue to eye Canal Park, where a 68-room hotel is scheduled to open this summer, and still other projects remain on the drawing board.

“We’ve got to do something to cope with the commercialization that’s happening in this area,” said John Judd, a senior planner for the city of Duluth.

The Planning Commission is expected to make its recommendations regarding the Park Point plan tonight, but the Duluth City Council will ultimately decide whether to adopt it.

**A curve in the road** In putting together a plan for Park Point, efforts have focused on moving traffic away from the densely populated residential area on South Lake Avenue toward Minnesota Avenue, where the existing right-of-way is sufficient to support a wider roadway along with a multi-use recreational path.

Judd said staff will recommend that traffic coming off the Aerial Lift Bridge onto Park Point be redirected from South Lake Avenue to Minnesota Avenue by way of an S-curve at Eighth Street South. The city wants permission from the state to allow it to build a 20 mph curve. Two homes would have to be removed for the option to work, but Judd said the city probably won’t have money to

tackle the proposed road reconfiguration until after 2020 at best.

If the state requires the city to install a gentler 30 mph S-curve, it could require more homes.

Judd said the city generally tries to avoid disrupting existing homes but must occasionally look at removal for the greater good.

“From a future planning standpoint, we need to look at ideas that make sense for the whole area over the long run or we would be remiss in our jobs,” he said.

Gardner said she does not take the potential loss of two homes lightly.

“Homes represent not just a financial investment but an emotional investment for people,” she said.

But Gardner said additional development on the Point probably will be the trigger for any reconfiguration of traffic.

“This is only a plan, and plans can change,” she said. “Nothing will be written in stone.”

**Improved recreational amenities** If through-traffic can be rerouted to Minnesota Avenue, leaving South Lake Avenue closed to all but local motorists' use, Judd said both roads can be made much more inviting to bicycles and pedestrians.

Plans call for an 8-foot-wide multi-use path to be installed past the curblin on the bayfront edge of Minnesota Avenue.

Parking on South Lake Avenue would be restricted to the lakeside-facing side of the road, leaving extra room for dedicated bicycle lanes on the street.

An S-curve now linking Lake and Minnesota Avenues between 12th and 13th could be removed, eliminating what Gardner sees as a potentially dangerous situation involving speeding traffic, an unforeseen curve and a playground at Franklin Park that could potentially put young people in harm's way.

Judd said plans also call for a lighted pedestrian crossing to be installed at 13th Street South, improving access to Franklin Park and the beach.

**Waterfront connections** While the city plans to promote the Franklin Park, Lafayette and Minnesota Point beaches as primary public access points to the lake, Judd said the city also proposes to designate about eight street ends on each side of the Point as secondary access areas.

He said the plan would lead to the establishment of access points at three- to four-block intervals along the Point, meaning people would generally be within a couple of blocks of a path to the water.

The city has historically maintained public shoreland easements at every street that dead-ended at the waterside, but over time, many residents have come to put this property to their own personal uses. Some people even have built structures in these public easements.

Judd said that where the city has made public improvements to those easements, property owners are required to provide unimpeded access to the water. Where no improvements have been made, the issue of access becomes much thornier, however; and several conflicts have arisen in recent years between visitors and property owners who contend providing public access infringes on their rights to privacy.

“We have a real dichotomy of folks who want more waterfront access and others who want less,” Judd said.

Gardner said she supports the plan developed by the city in hopes that it will

bring better clarity to the scene and will minimize future conflicts, and she said that gravel paths and boardwalks could be installed where appropriate.

“We want to make it clear where people can access the beach, especially when we have so many tourists coming to visit for a week or even a month on Park Point. They want to know where they can safely go. They don’t want to be trespassing,” Gardner said.

**If you go** What: Park Point Small Area Plan open house and discussion, with meeting of Duluth Planning Commission to follow.

When: Open house/public comment from 3-4:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 30. Commission meeting to begin at 5 p.m.

Why: To discuss proposed long-range plan that would guide future development on Park Point.

Where: Duluth City Council Chambers, Third floor of Duluth City Hall, 411 W. First St.

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