

**Park Point Community Club
QUALITY OF LIFE COMMITTEE REPORT**

Presented to Duluth City Officials
December 3, 2003

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(1) Background to the Problem

Park Point is, without a doubt, Duluth's most unique neighborhood.

And this uniqueness is our problem. We live on a spit of land—actually the world's longest fresh-water sandbar—that is like a finger stretching 7 miles into Lake Superior, protected only by beach grass and ecologically fragile sand dunes. On Park Point you can witness hundreds of migrating birds fly by on their worldly journeys. You can walk along sandy nature trails beneath 200-yr.-old white pines. You can stand and contemplate 400 miles of wilderness water lapping at your feet. Or you can stroll for 7 miles on a sandy beach seeking the perfect sunrise or the perfect sunset.

Amidst all this unique natural beauty lives a community of approximately 1,500 people and 650 residences. We have only one road running the length of our neighborhood for all residents and visitors—visitors who come to access boating, swimming, sight-seeing, bicycling, inline skating, kayaking, bird watching, running, playgrounds, volleyball courts, soccer fields, picnic areas, softball fields, Sky Harbor Airport, and nature trails. During the peak season of Memorial Day through Labor Day, our population balloons 10-fold with people seeking summer recreation. Our single road carries continuous traffic, our neighborhood parks are besieged by beachgoers, our back yards become a playground for the masses. During summer alone, Park Point is host to the annual Rummage Sale, Art Fair, Adventure Duluth race, Park Point 5-Miler, soccer and softball tournaments, Union picnic, July 4th fireworks watching, Grandma's Marathon spill over, marina traffic, and weekend Beach House weddings and parties, to name just some of summer's events. More and more, people are finding their way across the lift bridge to recreate in our neighborhood.

No where else in Duluth do so many residents have their property boundary shared with city park land. In fact, almost 50% of our community is park land (including Duluth city beaches) with public access to Lake Superior focused at the Aerial Lift Bridge, 12th Street, Lafayette Square, and the "end" of Park Point (which includes the play & picnic area, Beach House, and Sky Harbor Airport). Between these well-known park access points are dozens of trails through and adjacent to private property—all leading to the beach. Residents will vouch for the ongoing garbage, noise, trespassing, and vandalism by some beachgoers. On the weekends, late-night beachgoers are particularly troublesome—shooting fireworks, building fires, and holding loud parties. For many Park Point residents, their quality of life has significantly decreased because of these escalating negative behaviors.

We are physically separated from the mainland by Duluth's shipping canal, but many Park Point residents feel this separation is more than just physical. We are acutely aware that the unique concerns of our community and our pleas to city officials have fallen on deaf ears. The intent of this Quality of Life Committee is to start a dialogue with city officials in order to solve some of these problems. Most importantly, we hope that all Duluthians will realize that Park Point is a *citywide* resource—and our problems are not just the responsibility of neighborhood residents. Park Point is a unique and wonderful playground for Duluthians and tourists. For many years we have picked up garbage, planted dune grass, built boardwalks, and welcomed visitors. We need more help—and this committee has worked hard to identify ways in which the city could facilitate solutions to our most pressing problems.

(2) Traffic Recommendations

Park Point's traffic issues are unique. The main 4-mile thoroughfare is two lanes wide, flat and straight with a posted speed limit of 30 mph. The entire stretch is a no-passing zone. Parking is allowed on one side of the street; the other side is a multiple use recreation lane typically used by bicyclers, inline skaters, wheel chair users, and pedestrians.

Park Point's street "begins" at the busy Canal Park tourist district, parallels 4 miles of city beach, and ends at a 320-acre park that is heavily used by Duluthians and tourists. The *only* access to our neighborhood is over the aerial lift bridge.

Residential lots are 40 feet wide, with some homes just a few feet from the street. Traffic counts on summer days can be 10,000-20,000 vehicles driving on Park Point.

Very often this traffic is dangerous—it's not uncommon to witness cars traveling 50-70 mph and passing illegally in the recreation lane. Beachgoers illegally park in the recreation lane, forcing bicyclers and skaters into oncoming vehicle traffic. During summer the lift bridge is constantly raised for recreational boat traffic, causing cars to sit and idle while backed up 1/4 to 1 mile along the street—creating air and noise pollution for residents. When the bridge is lowered and traffic resumes moving, the resulting traffic jams cause huge delays in Canal Park and on Park Point.

These overwhelming traffic issues are the top concern to Park Point residents as voiced at an August 21, 2003 Community Club meeting. Therefore:

For everyone's safety, decrease speeding on Park Point.

- A police officer, certified as a radar operator, in a radar-equipped squad car, will be assigned exclusively to Park Point from May 15th to September 15th seven days a week, between the hours of 10pm and 3am.
- Any squad car patrolling Park Point, at any time, will be radar equipped with the officer certified as a radar operator.
- Patroller on duty will write citations on **all** traffic violations: speeding, noise, and illegal passing. There will be zero tolerance for traffic violations.
- Police will provide citizens (through the Park Point Community Club) with monthly reports of number and type of traffic citations issued on Park Point.

Regulate parking to enhance quality of life for residents.

- All parking will be residential^S only between the hours of 10pm and 6am from May 15th to September 15th. All violators will be ticketed by the assigned parking meter monitors. Residents will be able to acquire parking permits to include guests under the same conditions as existing city resident permit process.
- There will be zero tolerance on parking violations.
- Eliminate parking on the street in the S-curve area at the 12th Street beach entrance. Paint curbs yellow on both sides of the street. Tow violators immediately.

(2) Traffic Recommendations, cont'd.

Implement a Lift Bridge schedule to improve safety and reduce congestion in Canal Park and on Park Point and to improve quality of life for Park Point residents.

- Raise the Lift Bridge every half hour, on the half hour. Exceptions will be made for commercial shipping vessels, the Coast Guard, and any emergency situations.

(3) Beach Behavior Recommendations

While the Park Point community welcomes visitors to enjoy the beach, we believe that public access to the beach should be restricted from 10pm to 6am in accordance with existing Duluth law, which restricts access to city parks. Furthermore, to curb negative beach behaviors on Park Point (including loud and drunken parties, shooting fireworks, reckless beach fires, private property vandalism, and swimming without lifeguards present) park hours must be posted and *enforced*.

We believe almost all negative beach behaviors can be eliminated by simply reducing public access to the beach at public parking areas, including street parking, between the hours of 10pm and 6am; this can be easily done by gating off public parking areas and enforcing the current rules.

By enforcing parking rules, we will eliminate the majority of negative beach behaviors now occurring on Park Point, therefore:

Restrict access to public parking lots after 10pm and enforce parking rules in Park Point city park areas in accordance with existing law.

- **At the 12th Street "S-Curve" public beach parking lot:**

Police officer will lock the parking lot gate at 10pm and reopen the gate at 6am. Any vehicle still in the parking lot at 10pm will be ticketed and towed. Public awareness of this action must be made clear through parking lot signage stating the law.

- **At the 43rd Street entrance to the city park at end of Park Point:**

Re-install gate to be regulated with the same park hours as the 12th Street gate— police lockup at 10pm and reopening at 6am, with any vehicles remaining in park at 10pm ticketed and towed. Public awareness of this action must be made clear through park signage stating the law. Because there are two private residences and the Sky Harbor Airport within the city park land, the gate installed at 43rd will have card access to enable these few people to enter the park freely after hours. The Airport will be given an appropriate number of gate cards to be temporarily passed out to visitors. Any person improperly using the access card to allow entry into the park after hours will be prosecuted and their card(s) confiscated.

(4) Infrastructure, Information & Environmental Recommendations

As already mentioned, Park Point is home to a large amount of public park land—about 45% of our entire neighborhood. There are increasing numbers of people coming to Park Point in the summer to enjoy a wide variety of activities; at the same time there has not been any increase in our basic park facilities to support the huge numbers of visitors needing to use toilets and garbage cans, nor has there been an attempt to provide these people information about park rules and safe beach use.

Our recommendations focus on Park Point's six recognized and heavily-used public accesses to the Duluth city beach:

1. Aerial lift bridge—Corps of Engineers green space on northeast side which has walking paths leading over the cement wall to the beach
2. 12th Street (S-curve) public parking lot and beach access
3. Lafayette Square public parking lot, playgrounds and beach access
4. End of Park Point—Playground and picnic area—public parking lot, boat launch, and beach access
5. End of Park Point—Beach house—official city swimming beach, public parking lot, and beach access
6. End of Park Point—Sky Harbor Airport—public parking lot, beach access, and nature trails

At these six access points:

Reduce litter in residential areas, on the beach, and in Lake Superior and increase recycling opportunities by providing more trash and recycling receptacles.

Provide trash receptacles (and recycling containers) consistent with other city parks. While there are some receptacles on Park Point, there are not enough receptacles or service to provide adequate coverage in the summer, especially during weekends. Currently, there are no receptacles at the lift bridge entrance to the beach and not enough receptacles at the 12th Street parking lot. It is not unusual for the one receptacle at 12th Street to be overflowing with trash or even missing, especially after the high-traffic summer weekends.

It is essential that these receptacles are serviced regularly, including weekends during the busy summer.

In addition, there is very high usage of people walking dogs between the bridge and 12th Street, as well as other areas. It is unpleasant and unsanitary to have dog feces present along the city beach. Dog mitts should be provided and available at the six access points listed above.

(4) Infrastructure, Information & Environmental Recommendations, cont'd.

Provide more public toilets.

It is essential that more public toilets be provided to handle the amount of people using public areas. Providing more toilets is more than a convenience for our visitors—it has become essential for public health safety and maintaining the quality of Lake Superior's beach environment.

At the *very minimum*, there should be two permanent toilets at the 12th Street parking lot and Lafayette Square. Currently, the only reliable public toilet for all of Park Point is located at the boat landing area at the end of Park Point. In addition, the Beach House should be required to have their toilets open during park hours (6am to 10pm).

Inform park users of public beach rules in order to preserve the fragile environment, protect Lake Superior, increase safety, and maintain the quality of life for Park Point residents.

We would like to request a general "beach rules" sign posted at the six locations outlined above. This sign should be large and cover the following content:

- Beach open 6am to 10pm
- Pick up litter—if you bring it in, pack it out
- Dog must be on leash; pick up after your dog
- Glass containers are prohibited
- Alcohol and tobacco are prohibited
- No motorized vehicles
- Beach fires are not allowed
- Lake Superior Safety statement: Swimming can be very dangerous. The uneven bottom of Lake Superior can allow a swimmer to stand in waist-deep water at one moment and then be in water over his or her head on the next step. There can be equally dangerous rip currents, which can quickly take a swimmer into deep water. For your safety, always swim at the designated swimming beach with lifeguard at the end of Park Point. The lifeguard is trained to recognize hazardous conditions.

The Park Point Community Club's Quality of Life Committee would like to work with the city as it develops needed signage and specific sign locations.

**QUALITY OF LIFE COMMITTEE - PARK POINT COMMUNITY CLUB
CHAIRPERSON STATEMENT
December 3, 2003**

Economic development is often heralded by politicians and the business community as a key to the future of Duluth. Those words sound hollow in view of how the Park Point neighborhood has been managed. It is a park utilized by tourists, and residents, yet there seems to be an indifference, exemplified by the absence of basic park facilities and their maintenance. Twin Cities news media presentations the summer of 2003 reporting beach closings on Park Point due to pollution, and the tragic death of a swimmer with virtually no beach safety measures in place are sad testimonials.

The lack of beach safety procedures and policies, the behavior of after hours park users, and lack of traffic management and enforcement are the gauges upon which indifference is measured. The issues are public safety, public health, and peace and quiet of a neighborhood. Residents literally live with these conditions. Not one public official or other residents of the city would tolerate what Park Point residents have. Not only has the quality of life of residents who occupy this area been ignored, but a prime resource for tourism and consequently economic development for the city of Duluth.

Are we asking to be treated differently than other Duluth neighborhoods? No, just the opposite, we ask to treat this neighborhood, park, and economic development resource as the city has treated other such resources. Look at Canal Park, Brighton Beach, and Lake Walk. On the downtown side of the aerial bridge starts the 4 mile linear park Lake Walk. Observe how this park is provisioned, managed, and cared for. Look across the canal, where the other 4 mile park starts, Park Point beach. Simply treat this 4 mile linear park the same as Lake Walk. Treat us like other neighborhoods.

This committee spent significant time the last few months developing specific action plans toward solving community problems. Our goal is meaningful results. Resident's ideas should be considered critical input toward developing solutions. Our expectations include city officials working with us to solve these problems. We deserve a safe, healthy, and peaceful neighborhood.

We anticipate reasonable time lines toward implementing action plans. Some of the committees suggested solutions may require budget realignments. Additionally we hope the city will utilize funds under city ordinance Article II, Sec 42-A-50, the hotel and motel tax. Funding from outside sources such as grants through the Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program (\$800,000) are available. City officials have background and experience pursuing such funding. Another source of outside funding is the National Trust For Historic Preservation, who recently toured Duluth.

As a committee we are committed to working side by side with city officials. We ask for your written responses to the first set of action plans presented today by December 17, 2003. We thank you for your cooperation and look forward to a working partnership on these projects.

Dennis Hoelscher, Chairperson