

**From:** [City of Duluth MN](#)  
**To:** [planning](#)  
**Subject:** The Form "Boards - Planning Commission" was submitted  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 15, 2025 4:20:05 PM



# Umbraco Forms

## Form Results

### First Name

Alec

### Last Name

Kadlec

### Email Address

[REDACTED]

### Message

Dear Planning Commission Member, I am writing you in regards to PLOR-2510-0015. I am unable to attend the public meeting this evening due to work obligations. I would like to express my concern with the stated process of conveying this land parcel to DEDA prior to the public input process and land use or rezoning studies. It seems to me that conveying the land to DEDA would be a step towards the sale and limit the options for this land to remain public and open space, as it currently is, and as it is planned to remain per the 2035 vision plan. I personally view this property as important public space with great recreation potential worth considering. I have previously served on the board of Cyclists of Gitchee Gumee Shores, and am currently employed in outdoor recreation in Duluth

(I am writing as a private citizen, not representing my organization). This space is already frequently used as a recreation space, and is worth considering the opportunity that it remains so. If it is determined to be better as developed property, so be it, but you should not wait to hear from the public and analyze if that is the best use AFTER beginning to prepare it for sale, in my opinion that should come before preparation for sale. Further, the previously conveyed 38 acres has not found a sufficient developer that aligns with City goals, and does not yet aim to address the needs of the citizens, such as increasing affordable housing stock in Duluth. Why should we expect a broader parcel, with less access to recreational space, be more attractive to developers that would increase housing stock, and not instead to industrial or commercial means? These inputs and investigations could be determined in public process prior to the preparation for sale. In summary, I encourage you to not move forward with PLOR-2510-0015, and instead pursue a more transparent public process of determining the best use for this land. Thank you, Alec Kadlec

**Recaptcha**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

[PLOR-2510-0015](#)

Resolution of the Clity of Duluth Planning Commission Recommending that the Clity Council Approve Sale of Certain Real Property in the Lester Park Neighborhood to the Duluth Economic Development Authority

Attachments:

[PLOR-2510-0015 Memo](#)

[PLOR-2510-0015 Resolution](#)

[PLOR-2510-0015 Property Area Map](#)

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Land Use Supervisor Report

Heritage Preservation Commission Report

The city council in 2019 promised not to sell Lester Park golf course. This promise to the citizens of Duluth needs to be upheld. Period.

Dan Rau  
204 E 6<sup>th</sup> St.  
Duluth.

**From:** [City of Duluth MN](#)  
**To:** [planning](#)  
**Subject:** The Form "Boards - Planning Commission" was submitted  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 14, 2025 6:02:30 PM



# Umbraco Forms

## Form Results

### First Name

Julie

### Last Name

Maurer

### Email Address

[REDACTED]

### Message

To the Duluth Planning Commission, I am writing to oppose the sale of Lester Park Golf Course, which would allow the sale of a beloved and used public space to a private developer. The Lester Park Golf Course provides more than just public golfing. It is a community green space where people can walk, forage, and enjoy beautiful views of Lake Superior. As a new resident to Duluth, I was immediately drawn to the abundant green spaces this city provides and I hope to continue to love living here for that reason. Please do not sell off ANY of our public spaces to private developers.

Sincerely, A concerned resident

### Recaptcha





# W.J. McCABE (DULUTH) CHAPTER IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

P. O. Box 3063 • DULUTH, MN 55803

October 14, 2025

Dear Planning Commissioners,

Our great parks and green spaces are what make this city and the state of Minnesota such a unique and special place to live; if we lose sight of that, we lose our identity. Lester Park Golf Course is one of these great parks, with great potential to serve the public. The proposal to sell the entirety of this 230-acre public park is out of conformity with many of the adopted Governing Principles<sup>1</sup> of the City's Comprehensive plan, and we feel the need to remind you that Lester Park Golf Course is public parkland owned by every citizen of Duluth. With that in mind, fair governance should reserve any sale of public parkland as an absolute last-resort and be subject to a robust, transparent, and public process where all citizens have a chance to participate and offer ideas for the public use of that land. This was the process when the city considered the sale of this 230-acre park in 2019.

Therefore, we urge the Planning Commission to:

**Reject the City Administration's current proposal to sell 230-acres of our public parkland, via conveyance, to the Duluth Economic Development Authority, an entity within the City of Duluth that does not have the correct expertise or oversight to review and develop these 230-acres.**

According to city policy and documentation, before this request should even come before the Planning Commission the following is required to happen:

- 1) The Parks and Recreation Commission<sup>2</sup> has oversight and has yet to weigh in.
- 2) According to the *Duluth Essential Spaces - Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Comprehensive Plan*<sup>3</sup>, a comprehensive 10-year plan, that was approved and adopted by the City Council on October 10, 2022, action item E1 states:

- a) “Develop a mini-master plan for future improvement and use of the 230-acre portion of Lester Park Golf Course that the *City intends to retain as a protected park* following permanent closure of the course.”
  - b) There is no evidence of this mini-master plan for these 230-acres and DEDA is not the correct body to administer tasks specific to urban planning, nor are they subject to the necessary public oversight or scrutiny.
  - c) To date, no work has been done on this important neighborhood planning process. The sale of the Lester Park Golf Course, which could add many dozens or even hundreds of new dwelling units to this neighborhood, should consider the importance and the availability of adequate neighborhood services, including police and fire services, transportation infrastructure and utility services.
  - d) The required mini-master plan would be taking these observations, and many more, into consideration and then directing DEDA and future developers on the public’s agreed upon plan.
- 3) Additionally, this Commission should not overlook DEDA’s current compliance, or lack thereof, related to the 37.5 acres of Lester that was conveyed from the City in 2019.

The Izaak Walton League is a national leader for protection of our soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife. As a chapter of this league, it is a high priority for us to safeguard our public green spaces, but without providing us the opportunity to respond to a mini-master plan, we can’t weigh-in on the good, the bad or the ugly. We believe this to be a disingenuous process to the public, and to any contractor who may bid on this project, to take us to the precipice of this process to sell our parkland and then claim that at that critical point the DEDA will decide whether this is a good idea. That decision should be vetted and agreed upon by the community *before* proceeding with the administrative process for selling any parkland. We encourage the city to take the course they previously communicated because the public should not have to bear such risk to an important community asset.

Sincerely,

Julie O’Leary

McCabe Chapter Board President

## References

1. Duluth City Council (2018) *Imagine Duluth 2035, Comprehensive Plan*. Duluth, MN. Pages 38-43.
2. City of Duluth, MN (2010). *City of Duluth, Parks and Recreation Commission Bylaws and Policies*. Duluth, MN.
3. Duluth City Council (2022). *Essential Spaces: Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Plan*. Duluth, MN. Page 115.

**From:** [City of Duluth MN](#)  
**To:** [planning](#)  
**Subject:** The Form "Boards - Planning Commission" was submitted  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 14, 2025 1:09:17 PM



# Umbraco Forms

## Form Results

### First Name

Molly

### Last Name

Wick

### Email Address

[REDACTED]

### Message

Hello, I'm writing to oppose the transfer of Lester Park Golf Course to the Duluth Economic Development Administration and the sale of the property to a developer. The city based on public input in 2019 transferred 37.5 acres and promised to keep the rest of the property in green space. This area is highly valued for its open space, walkability, views of the lake, and greenery by people across the city. It is one of my most beloved places in town. There is no other place where one can walk open fields and meadows with long sightlines (without sand!), which offer special benefits to psychological restoration, especially for those with mental health conditions like PTSD, anxiety, depression, and ADHD (This is based on my doctoral-level expertise in human-nature



connections). It is so discouraging that with zero public input this was added to the planning commission agenda and may move forward with little publicity or notice. Such a high profile property should have an extensive public input and planning process that allows the community to guide how it is managed and its future. I am requesting all members of the city planning commission to keep the promise that was made to residents of Duluth in 2019 about keeping this property as green space, and vote no to transferring this property for potential sale. I stand with the Ikes who will be present at the commission meeting tomorrow, but unfortunately due to a conflict I cannot be there, so I am sending this instead. Thank you, Molly Wick, PhD

**Recaptcha**

**From:** [Ansel Schimpff](#)  
**To:** [planning](#)  
**Subject:** Lester Golf Course Development  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 15, 2025 11:19:26 AM  
**Attachments:** [Vision for Lester Park Golf Course Redevelopment.pdf](#)  
[Untitled attachment 00009.htm](#)

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Good morning all,

I want to provide some insight into the Lester Park Working Group, tasked by the mayor with two main objectives:

**To discuss the inclusion of multiple year-round recreation opportunities including, but not exclusive to, public golf.**

**To evaluate nonprofit and alternative third-party management models where the property is owned by the City of Duluth, but the recreational asset is operated and managed by an external partner.**

To be clear, this was not a transparent or public planning process. Very quickly, several members of the working group began advocating for the sale and private development of high end housing, with very little discussion around either of the objectives the mayor put forward. Shortly thereafter, the Sunnarborg plan was introduced, in concept only. Members of the working group, myself included, were told that the plan was very impressive, unlike anything Duluth has ever seen, and the only viable option for this public park. We were told we couldn't see the actual plan, because it would be politically unpopular, but we should just trust that it was as good as we were being told.

Around this time, I was instructed to create an alternative, recreation focused plan, and in partnership with Duluth Area Outdoor Alliance members, did just that.

We held a meeting in early December 2024 with representatives from:

Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHT)

Minnesota Land Trust (MLT)

Cyclists of Gitchee Gumme Shores (COGGS)

Northern Minnesota Track Club (NMTC)

Duluth Area Horse Trail Alliance (DAHTA)

Duluth Climbers Coalition (DCC)

BIPOC Twin Ports Outdoors

Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (DXC)

Izaak Walton League

Duluth Foot Trails Alliance (DUFTA)

Through this process, we created the attached outline for a community centered redevelopment of Lester Golf Course.

I plan to speak at this evenings meeting, but please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

I look forward to continuing this conversation

Ansel Schimpff  
COGGS Executive Director



OPINION COLUMNS

## Local View: Expand the use of our parks

Creative business models such as a public-private partnership could be used to further enhance the financial success of the park.



Dennis Isernhagen Contributed

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**By Dennis D. Isernhagen, Duluth**

June 16, 2023 at 7:13 AM

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 Opinion

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It's time to expand the use of our parks:

**Status:** In November 2022, the city of Duluth failed to increase property taxes to support our parks.

On June 12, the City Council voted to not reopen Lester Park Golf Course. It had been closed because of costs caused by deferred maintenance, lack of progressive business decisions, and limited revenue generation such as a short golf season. Interestingly, Lester was closed in the two COVID summers when people flocked to nature activities which were considered safer than indoor activities. Golf and outdoor recreation were a huge beneficiary of increased participation. Those courses that made investments in upkeep and improvements reaped the benefit of this focus on golf as a prime recreational and safer opportunity. Previously loyal Lester golfers moved to other courses within reasonable driving distances. Both the failure of better support for parks and the Lester golf issue would invite the obvious question: Is it time to consider other creative ways to enhance and expand the use of our parks?

**Opportunity:** Other outdoor activities, paired with golf, could benefit from Duluth's abundance of wonderful parks that are not utilized to their fullest potential. Duluth and the North Shore of Lake Superior have the reputation as the "go-to-place" for year-round outdoor recreation opportunities. It is a primary reason why individuals are attracted here to live and work. More people seek outdoor recreation and social activities. Throughout the United States, outdoor recreation has grown to account for many billions in economic impact.

**Solution:** Let's revisit the Lester Park area. Lester Park Golf Course and the adjoining properties of Amity Park and 450 acres of designated parkland provide over 1,000 acres of pristine public

parkland. It provides an opportunity for a multifunctional park. It would include outdoor recreation venues of golf, cross country skiing, hiking, biking, among others. This provides year-round outdoor recreation activities, creates community gathering places that generate income that will support the needs of the park, recreational groups and the city. It also keeps the revenue local.

Approximately 50 acres of this parkland have been designated for mixed-use neighborhood housing with business. To develop this property in a way to complement the area and have low environmental impact could be reimaged. Housing development in a village style rather than a concentrated population would provide a mixture of affordable and market value homes. An event center with space for meetings and events, combined with a restaurant, would improve the attraction of the park. The inclusion of a hotel and retail could enhance future opportunities and provide a needed service to the area. Income generated from taxes and fees from the housing development, hotel, restaurant, retail and events could provide significant revenue to the city.

Creative business models such as a public-private partnership could be used to further enhance the financial success of the park.

**Noted successes:** For guidance and management of the park portion, a nonprofit organization could be developed. A successful model is the Loppet Foundation in Golden Valley, Minnesota ( [www.loppet.org](http://www.loppet.org)(<http://www.loppet.org>) ), which is an outdoor-oriented, community building organization. It utilizes input from the community, provides funding opportunities such as grants and donations, and promotes collaboration among organized recreation groups. People of all types would be attracted to events and venues



that previously had been directed at only a small group.

**Plan:** A collaborative effort among outdoor recreation special interest groups, schools, colleges, universities, environmental planners and wildlife organizations would expand the use of the park. It would enhance awareness, increase membership and expand opportunities to generate new revenue sources for the participating organizations. The location of Lester Park at the head of the North Shore provides an opportunity to attract visitors and tourists.

**Future:** How do we improve the use of our “public-owned” parkland? How do we generate sustainable funding to enhance and maintain our parks? How do we assist outdoor recreation groups to attract and expand their membership? How do we expand our parks to embrace the best environmental practices? A project of this magnitude will welcome the input of many individuals. The outcome will have a lasting impact on Duluth, its citizens and the business community.

*Dennis D. Isernhagen*  
*Duluth*

**Isernhagen is retired: president of DSI Work Solutions (1986-2018), director of physical medicine-St. Mary’s Medical Center (1970-1986), and Duluth Park and Recreation Commission (2018-2020).**

 Share

 Opinion

 Tags

**From:** [Terry McCarthy](#)  
**To:** [planning](#)  
**Subject:** Transfer of Lester Park golf course  
**Date:** Wednesday, October 15, 2025 8:44:04 PM

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Hello. My name is Terry McCarthy and I am a native Duluthian who has lived here for 76 yrs.

I am not in favor of the transfer to DEDA. Has there been opportunities for the community to weigh in on this possible transfer? If not, then there should be. And if so, what was the general consensus from the community?

I would hate to have it turned into a playground for the wealthy.

Terry McCarthy  
127 E Calvary Rd  
Duluth 55803  
[REDACTED]

Brian

I am writing to express my thoughts and those of others on the Lester Park Golf Course. I was pleased to see that a hold was placed on making a decision on the future of this piece of property. Lester Park holds a special place in the hearts of Duluth residents. With its stunning views, diverse landscapes and community roots, it offers a unique opportunity to meet a broader range of needs while preserving its natural beauty.

In recent years, with the challenges facing municipal golf courses and shifting recreational trends, there is a growing consensus that now is the time to explore more inclusive, sustainable, and community-centered uses for this remarkable space. Since the pandemic many individuals are seeking opportunities to be outdoors, enjoying nature and participation in recreational activities.

Transforming Lester Park into a multifunctional park would open up possibilities for year-round recreational access—such as walking and biking trails, community gardens, educational programming, cultural events, and winter activities—ensuring the park serves a much wider cross-section of our community. Operated by a mission-driven nonprofit, the space could be managed with flexibility, community input, and long-term stewardship as guiding principles.

I was heavily involved with the early discussions about Lester Park. I had served on the Duluth Park and Recreation Commission when the decision to close Lester was made. I wrote an article (see attachment) that proposed that the city turn the property over to a non-profit organization to develop into a multi-functional park that provided year round outdoor recreation opportunities. I had suggested that a model similar to Loppet Foundation ([www.lopeet.org](http://www.lopeet.org)) at the Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis be looked at. I had met with the founder of that organization, John Willard Munger, on numerous occasions and had conversations with the Executive Director of the Foundation.

I have had meetings with many local outdoor recreation organizations, City Council members, civic leaders, potential funding groups, environmental organizations and numerous interested individuals about the future of Lester Park. I met with Mayor Reinhart prior to his election. He was very supportive of ideas that I presented. After his election he asked me to co-chair a taskforce to explore the ideas further. I spent several months trying to develop a plan with Tim Meyer's who was the co-chair. We held a community meeting on May 23, 2023 that was attended by over 150 individuals. The interest expressed by the attendees was in line with making the park a multiuse outdoor recreation facility. After months of no progress I terminated my involvement because of frustration and the feeling that politics was taking over.

Numerous communities across the country have successfully transitioned similar properties into vibrant public assets that bring people together, promote health and

wellness, support environmental education, and stimulate local economies. With proper planning and collaboration, Lester Park can follow suit and become a flagship example of adaptive, community-led land use.

Thank you for your continued dedication to our city's green spaces. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this idea further and share the information I have.

Warm regards,

Dennis Isernhagen  
2328 Shore Drive  
Duluth, MN 55812



Dear Duluth Planning Commission:

For the past few years I have talked to many of the City Councilors, DEDA and others about Lester Park Golf Course. I had convinced Mayor Reinert to appoint a group to develop a proposed plan that focused not only on golf but an area that focused on multiple outdoor recreation opportunities. Mayor Reinert appointed Tim Meyer and myself to spearhead a group to address this. We held a public meeting on May 23, 2024 that was attended by over 150 individuals. There was enthusiastic support from those who attended to restore the golf course and to develop a multifunction outdoor recreation facility. The effort to move this forward stalled for a number of months. I resigned from being co-chair because of frustration and the apparent political maneuvers that were slowing any forward progress. A working group was eventually formed who met and developed a report of their finding. Several models were presented to City Council. I'm writing to express a deep sense of frustration shared by many in the Duluth outdoor community regarding the ongoing roadblocks we face in trying to establish a multi-use outdoor recreation facility at Lester Park.

It is both disheartening and perplexing that proposals to create a sustainable, community-driven nonprofit focused on outdoor recreation, youth programs, trail development, and stewardship continue to face bureaucratic inertia, while housing developments in or near parkland seem to move forward with far fewer obstacles.

Let me be clear: affordable and sustainable housing is critical to the future of Duluth. But so is equitable access to high-quality outdoor spaces, especially in a city that prides itself on being an outdoor capital. Lester Park is a public treasure—already beloved by skiers, bikers, hikers, golfers, and families—and it has the potential to be so much more. The terrain, the history, and the community support are already in place. What's missing is the political will and clarity of process.

There are models to look to. The Loppet Foundation ([www.loppet.org](http://www.loppet.org)) transformed Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis into a year-round hub for recreation, youth engagement, and community pride—through a public-private partnership that actually *enhanced* access to nature, rather than threatening it. Why can't we pursue something similar at Lester? Why do community members meet delay after delay, vague answers, or shifting priorities when trying to build something rooted in public good? I have met on several occasions with the founder of the Loppet Foundation, John Willard Munger, and the previous Executive Director of the Loppet Foundation, Claire Wilson. They feel that Duluth's Lester Park would be an ideal place to establish a facility like the Loppet Foundation.

We watch as large-scale developments—often with lasting impacts on our natural spaces—move forward under the banner of progress. This inconsistency sends a message: that creating long-term community infrastructure based on health, recreation, and sustainability is somehow less urgent or viable than building more market-rate housing.

I am not asking to block housing. I am asking for the same level of urgency, cooperation, and transparency when it comes to supporting public-serving nonprofits—especially those that could activate Lester Park year-round, engage youth, promote stewardship, and strengthen the local economy.

If we can fast-track development deals, surely we can find a way to support a community-led nonprofit model at Lester Park. What I am proposing to build isn't a special interest—it's an investment in the public good. The development of a nonprofit organization to lead the development of a multifunctional park that would include the Lester Park Golf Course and potentially adjacent parkland including Amity Park and Hawks Ridge.

The Duluth community is tired of waiting. We need leadership that is willing to say yes—not just to developers, but to the community that already lives here and is working hard to make Duluth a better place for to live.

Respectfully,  
Dennis D. Isernhagen  
2318 Shore Drive  
Duluth, MN 55812

