



Memo

To: Planning Commission
From: Jenn Moses, Manager of Planning and Community Development
Date: August 5, 2026

Subject: Becks Road Land Use Study (a Small Area Plan) and Future Land Use Amendments (PLCPA-2607-0002)

Over the past 8 months, the City of Duluth, with contractor MSA Professional Services, has been preparing a land use study of the approximately 1,000 acre area shown on the attached map. The study area parallels Becks Road, an arterial connecting I-35 at Midway Road to Highway 23 (Commonwealth Ave.) in Gary-New Duluth. Significant natural features include the dramatic peak and ridge lines of Ely Peak, the headwaters of Sargent Creek (a trout stream) and U.S. Steel Creek, wetlands and forested areas. The area boasts an extensive recreational trail system with the Munger Trail, DWP, and Superior Hiking Trails providing the “backbone.” Existing land uses in the study area include the Vonco landfill and the Ulland rock/gravel quarry, less than a dozen dwellings, and great quantities of public and privately-owned open space.

We interviewed major landowners and gathered other data on utilities, transportation systems, topography, watersheds, recreation and park facilities. We have analyzed infrastructure systems, environmental conditions, and community amenities with a technical committee and assembled a set of draft recommended policies and concept-level maps of possible growth areas.

We held two well-attended public meetings in the neighborhood, the first in December 2025 (26 attendees), to gather initial input and the second meeting last week (33 attendees) to gain input on the plan’s recommendations (see attached summary and comments). Ahead of the first meeting we contacted study area landowners via letter and have used email to maintain contact with landowners subsequently. Notice of the Planning Commission public hearing was also mailed to all landowners in the study area and those within 350 feet. The Gary-New Duluth REC volunteers have provided additional assistance reaching out via social media and flyers.

Major themes in the plan include:

- Though Becks Road has excess vehicle capacity, preserve its function by limiting driveway connections.
- Much of the study area has no utilities and extensions should be limited to those areas immediately adjacent to the Gary-New Duluth neighborhood.
- Open space future land use should continue to dominate the study area with only slight adjustments to accommodate existing business uses at the northwest corner of the study area and neighborhood extensions in the southeast corner to provide needed housing and a few business sites.

- The Ulland quarry can continue for decades providing aggregate resources important for land development with updated land use permits utilizing refined zoning standards.
- Provide trail connections between the Gary-New Duluth neighborhood and existing Munger, DWP, and Superior Hiking trails and improve the legal structure of recreation resources not on publicly owned land.

Recommendation:

Staff recommend that, based on the findings and recommendations found on Pages 47-74 of the Becks Road Land Use Study (a Small Area Plan), that the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map be amended as shown on Page 68 (attached) and as summarized below:

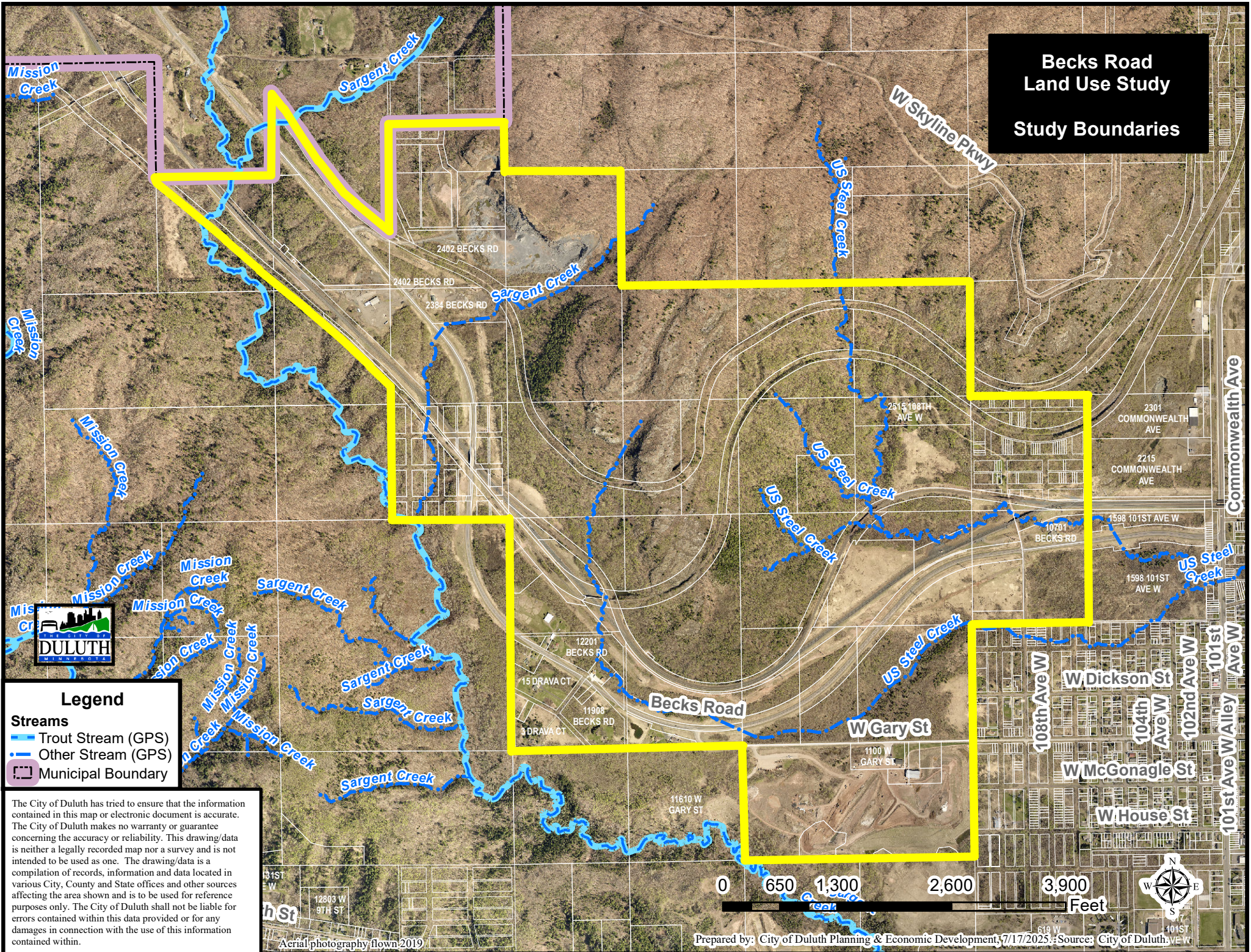
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 100 acres in the northwesterly portion of the study area from Open Space to Rural Residential.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 10 acres in the northwesterly portion of the study area from Open Space to General Industrial.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 23 acres of City land along Becks Road near the Short Line Park trailhead from General Industrial to Open Space.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 13 acres of City land along Becks Road near the 123rd Ave. W. trailhead from Rural Residential to Open Space.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 24 acres of City land along Becks Road near the Gary St. from Rural Residential to Open Space.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 3 acres south of Becks Rd. near Gary St. from Rural Residential to Business Park.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 20 acres of land along Sargent Creek south of Gary St. from Business Park to Open Space.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 18 acres north of Gary St. and west of 110th Ave. W. from Open Space to Low Density Neighborhood.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 13 acres south of Becks Rd. west of 108th Ave. W. from Open Space to Business Park.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change approximately 22 acres south of Becks Rd. east of 108th Ave. W. from Open Space to Low Density Neighborhood.

Based on the findings found in the Becks Road Land Use Study (a Small Area Plan), Staff finds that the proposed Future Land Use Map amendments promote the best interests of the city and the general health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Duluth:

1. Much of the study area is to remain open space for preservation of important recreation facilities, natural resources, and to limit the extension of municipal infrastructure.
2. Opportunities for housing and business development are provided to meet the diversity of the community's housing needs as well as provision of select industrial or extractive uses.

3. Development areas have the potential to positively increase the tax base. Negative fiscal impacts are mitigated by limiting development to compact areas where utilities can be reasonably extended.
4. Recommendations to guide the character of development are included that align with expressed public preference, the comprehensive plan, and best planning practice.

Therefore, staff recommend that Planning Commission recommend the City Council amend the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map as described above and approval of the Becks Road Land Use Study (a Small Area Plan).



**Becks Road
Land Use Study**

Study Boundaries

- Legend**
- Streams**
- Trout Stream (GPS)
 - Other Stream (GPS)
 - Municipal Boundary

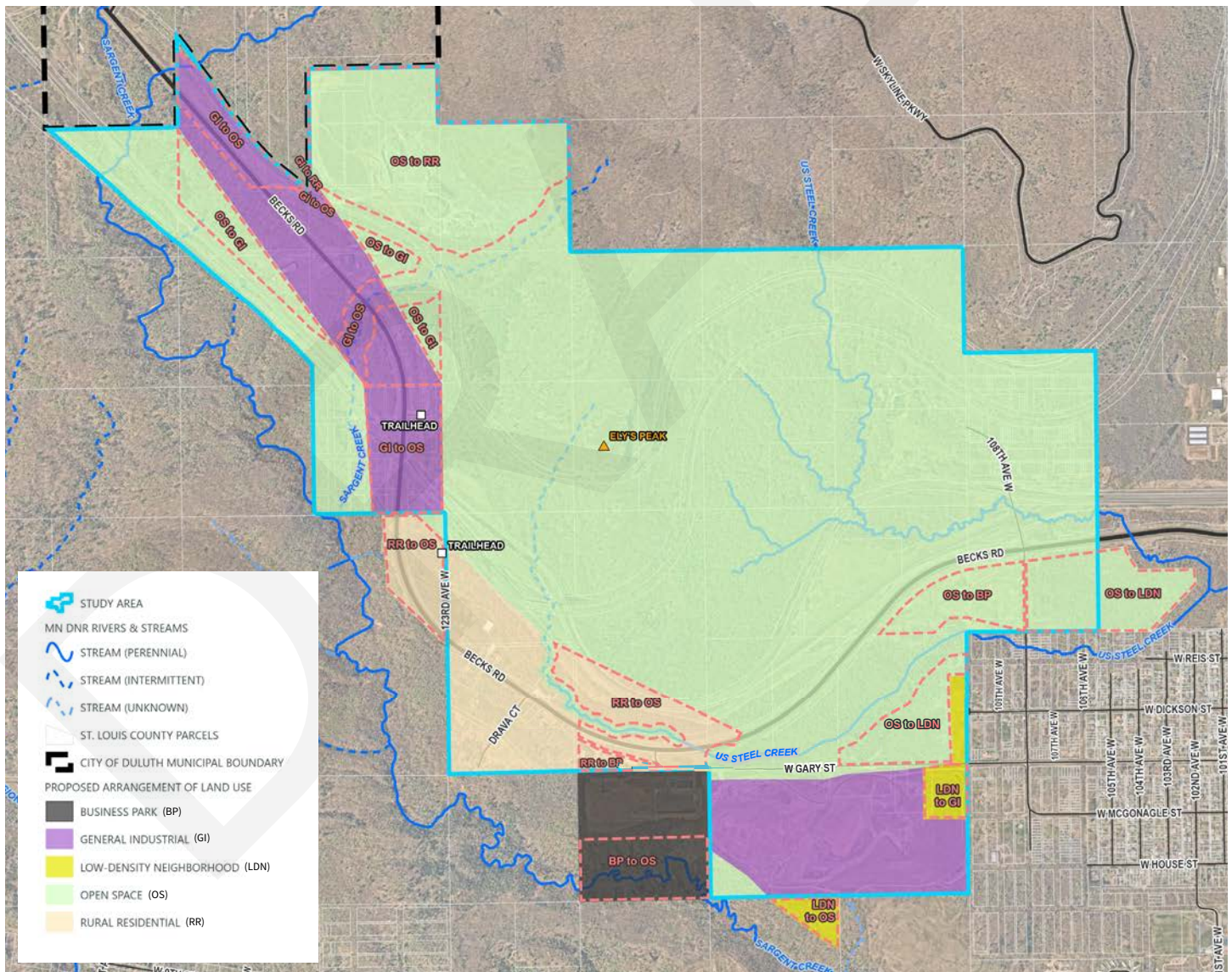
The City of Duluth has tried to ensure that the information contained in this map or electronic document is accurate. The City of Duluth makes no warranty or guarantee concerning the accuracy or reliability. This drawing/data is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey and is not intended to be used as one. The drawing/data is a compilation of records, information and data located in various City, County and State offices and other sources affecting the area shown and is to be used for reference purposes only. The City of Duluth shall not be liable for errors contained within this data provided or for any damages in connection with the use of this information contained within.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The following two maps illustrate proposed amendments to the City of Duluth's current Future Land Use map, adopted in 2018 as part of its most recent Comprehensive Plan, *Imagine Duluth 2035*. The first map, shown below, identifies the specific areas proposed for change, while the map on the following page shows how Duluth's Future Land Use map would appear once those changes are incorporated.

These changes are intended to refine the City-wide future land use guidance for the Becks Road corridor based on the area's specific physical conditions, infrastructure and environmental constraints, and land use compatibility considerations. As future land use decisions, Comprehensive Plan amendments, zoning updates, and development proposals are evaluated, the City should consider the proposed changes as a more detailed policy framework for the Becks Road area.

Recommended Updates to 2018 Future Land Use Map



Becks Road Land Use Study

Community Meeting – Monday, August 3, 2026, 6-8 p.m.

Gary-New Duluth REC building, 801 101st Ave. W.

Introductory presentation and Q&A (6:00-6:45 p.m.):

- 33 event attendees plus staff (Emily Herold, Sam Avery – MSA staff, Kyle Deming – City)
- Emily Herold, project planner from MSA Professional Services, presented a summary of the project timeline, community engagement and disciplinary analysis takeaways, and recommendations (namely the growth subareas and future land use map)
- Emily and Kyle answered attendee questions, primarily concerning:
 - Property ownership of identified growth areas
 - Clarified that, while DEDA owns land within the southeast subareas, DEDA is not a developer and would coordinate with a developer for future site improvements; there is no planned development at this time
 - Future use of the VONCO landfill site
 - Clarifications regarding future land use vs zoning, and that the plan's proposed future land use amendments do not automatically equate to rezoning and/or developing properties
 - Ulland Brothers' ownership of 80 acres with recreational license agreement

Open house activities (6:45-7:45 p.m.):

- Display Boards:
 - Board outlining all six proposed subareas with a summary of policy guidance from Chapter 6
 - Two boards with the proposed future land use map amendments and an annotated map showing the proposed change areas
- Digital and printed copies of the draft plan for more in-depth review of the findings and recommendations
- “Policy Recommendations Feedback Form” (see response summary below) that lists policy recommendations (Chapters 5 and 7) relating to four overarching themes, and participants marked their opinion on a spectrum from “love it” to “can live with it” to “hate it”
- Participant comments (sticky notes) on future land use map board:
 - *“Business park land by 108th [subarea 2b] please no business, leave land to conservation or use for housing, individual or apartments”*
 - *“Land developed/for sale as individual properties, for purchase, not rented townhomes/apartments” – follow-up conversation confirmed concern about transience/lack of investment in neighborhood that could result from new rental properties*

Policy Recommendations Feedback Form:

Response Summary (11 worksheets completed):

- *Respondents generally “can live with” proposed development recommendations and transportation/utility recommendations*
- *Respondents are very supportive of environmental preservation and protection/acquisition of trails and recreational assets*

Compatible Development

- Focus new development within the identified growth areas while keeping most of the corridor open, wooded, or in its existing use.
- Use buffers, screening, building placement, and lighting controls to reduce conflicts between development, neighborhoods, trails, the quarry, and the landfill.
- Encourage development projects to incorporate additional elements to reinforce the natural character of the Becks Road corridor, such as rustic materials (e.g. stone, timber, etc.), natural colors, and simple/low-profile building forms.

Love it		Can live with it		Hate it
2	2	5	1	2

Comments:

- *Supportive of industrial/commercial development to support community*
- *Preservation of area’s natural beauty is important*

Environmental Preservation

- Protect streams, wetlands, steep slopes, wildlife habitat, and wooded buffers as development occurs.
- Use native landscaping and stormwater practices that reduce runoff, erosion, and pollution reaching Sargent Creek and US Steel Creek.

Love it		Can live with it		Hate it
6	1	3	1	1

Comments:

- *Confirm stream buffers with DNR*
- *May need further clarification for how this can be done*

Transportation and Utilities

- Limit new driveways onto Becks Road and prioritize shared access, internal circulation, and connections from local streets.

- Extend roads, water, and sewer strategically as development occurs, based on capacity, feasibility, and community benefit.
- Evaluate opportunities to improve key entry points to Becks Road, including the intersection with Commonwealth Avenue/MN 23, to provide safer and more intuitive access for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, trail users, and other permitted modes of travel.

Love it		Can live with it		Hate it
1	3	5		3

Comments:

- *123rd Munger and SHT trail access to Becks Rd could use improved visibility at intersection*
- *Supportive of limiting driveway accesses on Becks Rd*
- *Focus on infill before extending utilities*
- *Business park expansion isn't great, especially with an empty downtown area*
- *Lower speed limit on Becks Rd*

Parks, Recreation & Trails

- Create connective paths between the DWP and Munger Trails, existing trailheads, Midway Township, and the Gary-New Duluth neighborhood.
- Seek further protections of public access to assets currently available only through easement or other agreements, such as the 123rd Avenue W access road and trailhead and the hiking and rock-climbing areas on Ulland Brothers' property.
- Add public-facing interpretive signage that highlights the study area's historical, ecological, recreational, and industrial significance; consider creating a "Welcome to Duluth" gateway sign at the I-35 access point.

Love it		Can live with it		Hate it
5	3	2		2

Comments:

- *Very important to maintain public access to trails and privately-owned assets (but not at the expense of valuable land within Magney Snively)*
- *Connection from GND to Munger would be great*
- *Secure trails owned by quarry*
- *Protecting trail access and natural areas is highest priority among several respondents*



Comments on the Draft Becks Road Land Use Study

July 31, 2026

Re: Comments on the Draft Becks Road Land Use Study

Ulland Brothers appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Becks Road Land Use Study.

As a Duluth-area company that has operated in northeastern Minnesota since 1934, we recognize the importance of thoughtful long-range planning. We share the City's interest in responsible stewardship of natural resources, orderly growth, safe transportation corridors, and the long-term prosperity of western Duluth.

The Becks Road corridor is a unique area with significant environmental, recreational, industrial, and economic value. We believe those interests can coexist through careful planning that recognizes both future opportunities and the importance of preserving existing community assets.

Aggregate Resources are Essential Public Infrastructure

The Becks Road Quarry is not simply another industrial land use. It is a strategically located aggregate resource that supplies materials essential to the construction and maintenance of highways, bridges, airports, municipal utilities, schools, commercial development, and countless public infrastructure projects throughout the Duluth region.

Unlike many other land uses, aggregate resources are location dependent. High-quality deposits cannot simply be relocated once they are no longer accessible. When access to a significant aggregate resource is lost, the community permanently loses that resource.

While the draft study thoroughly evaluates future residential growth, recreation, transportation, environmental resources, and public infrastructure, it provides comparatively little discussion of the long-term value of preserving locally available aggregate resources.

P.O. BOX 340 | CLOQUET, MN 55720 | P (218) 384-4266 F (218) 384-4110 | WWW.ULLAND.COM
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Given the essential role these materials play in constructing and maintaining the very infrastructure envisioned by the study, we respectfully believe the preservation of significant aggregate resources should be recognized as a planning objective in the final document.

Protection of Mineral Resources

Unlike many other land uses, high-quality aggregate resources cannot be relocated once they become inaccessible due to incompatible development. Once a strategically located aggregate resource is lost to incompatible development, it cannot be recreated elsewhere, and future public infrastructure projects must rely on more distant sources at increased cost to taxpayers.

Every highway, bridge, school, utility, airport, and public works project constructed in the Duluth region depends upon a reliable supply of locally available aggregate. Preserving access to these resources benefits taxpayers by reducing transportation costs, limiting truck traffic over longer distances, reducing fuel consumption and emissions associated with hauling materials, and maintaining a competitive local construction market.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the City to expressly recognize the long-term importance of preserving significant aggregate resources as part of its comprehensive land use planning. Doing so does not preclude future growth or redevelopment. Rather, it acknowledges that thoughtful planning should seek to balance competing land uses while ensuring that irreplaceable mineral resources remain available to serve future generations.

Existing Industrial Uses are Longstanding Community Assets

The study appropriately recognizes the presence of existing industrial and extractive operations within the corridor. We encourage the City to view these uses not simply as existing conditions, but as longstanding contributors to the regional economy and public infrastructure.

For decades, the Becks Road Quarry has supplied materials for public highways, municipal improvements, private development, and other critical construction projects while providing stable employment and supporting the local economy.

Responsible aggregate production and thoughtful community planning are not mutually exclusive objectives.



Infrastructure Realities Should Guide Planning

The study correctly recognizes that significant future development will depend upon major investments in sanitary sewer, water service, transportation improvements, and other public infrastructure. Until those improvements are funded and constructed, many of the development concepts identified in the study remain long-term possibilities rather than near-term realities.

We encourage the City to ensure that future land use recommendations remain aligned with realistic infrastructure planning, implementation timelines, and fiscal considerations.

Existing Property Rights Should Be Respected

The draft study recommends evaluating future zoning changes affecting nonconforming industrial and extractive uses.

We recognize the City's responsibility to periodically review its zoning regulations. However, any future policy decisions should carefully recognize and respect the longstanding property rights associated with existing lawful operations.

The Becks Road Quarry, although classified as a legal nonconforming use, has operated successfully for decades and represents a substantial private investment that continues to provide essential aggregate materials for public infrastructure and private development throughout the region. Long-range planning should recognize the quarry's established presence, its continued ability to operate and serve the region, and the associated property rights while pursuing balanced, collaborative solutions that benefit both the community and private property owners.

The Study Would Benefit from Additional Analysis

We respectfully recommend that the final study include additional evaluation of:

- The long-term regional demand for aggregate resources.
- The economic value of maintaining local aggregate production.



- The public costs, transportation impacts, and environmental consequences of importing aggregate from more distant sources.
- The importance of preserving industrial lands that support public infrastructure.
- The economic contribution of existing industrial operations within the Becks Road corridor.

Including these considerations would create a more balanced planning document that recognizes both future development opportunities and the community's continuing need for construction materials.

A History of Collaboration

Throughout its ownership of the Becks Road property, Ulland Brothers has consistently sought to work collaboratively with the City of Duluth to identify practical, long-term solutions that balance community interests with the continued availability of an important local aggregate resource.

Over the years, Ulland Brothers has repeatedly sought to work collaboratively with the City, including proposing a significant land exchange that would have advanced public recreation and long-term planning objectives while allowing continued aggregate production on adjacent lands. Although those efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, they reflect a consistent willingness to commit valuable company property, explore innovative solutions, and work toward outcomes that balance the interests of the City, the community, and private property owners.

We remain committed to that collaborative approach. We respectfully encourage the City to ensure that this land use study remains sufficiently flexible to allow future opportunities for cooperative, mutually beneficial solutions as community needs and circumstances evolve.

Conclusion

Ulland Brothers appreciates the significant effort that has gone into preparing this study and welcomes the opportunity to participate in the continuing planning process.

We believe the Becks Road area presents an opportunity to demonstrate that responsible resource development, environmental stewardship, recreation, and thoughtful long-term planning are not competing objectives, but complementary ones. A balanced planning



approach can preserve valuable natural resources, support continued economic vitality, respect established property rights and maintain access to the construction materials necessary to build and maintain the public infrastructure upon which our communities depend.

We respectfully request that the City revise the final Becks Road Land Use Study to more fully evaluate the long-term importance of aggregate resources and the role existing industrial operations play in supporting the region's economy and public infrastructure. A comprehensive planning document should recognize these considerations alongside environmental protection, recreation, housing, and future development.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments and look forward to continuing a productive dialogue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Carlson", is written over a horizontal line.

Jeff Carlson
President
Ulland Brothers, Inc.