



Memo

To: Planning Commission
From: Jenn Moses, Manager of Planning and Community Development
Date: August 4, 2026

Subject: Lester Golf Course Land Use Study and Future Land Use Amendments

In October 2025, City Council passed Resolution 25-0845R, Resolution Requesting A Land Use Study For The Former Lester Park Golf Course Property. This Resolution guided the Land Use Study to incorporate robust public engagement and consider the potential of the Lester Park Golf Course site for both future housing and economic development purposes and parkland or permanent protection.

Subsequently, City staff from Planning and Economic Development, Engineering, and Parks and Recreation conducted the study to assess site conditions, gather input from the public and other governmental entities, create conceptual designs for the site, and identify a preferred future land use vision. Site conditions were assessed through on-site and off-site methods including review of existing reports, discussion with stakeholders, and market analysis. Public engagement was conducted in three phases that included open houses, focus groups, surveys, online engagement tools through a project specific website, and regular meetings with a stakeholder committee and a technical advisory committee. After the data collection phase, three conceptual designs for the site were created. Each scenario tested different degrees of balancing natural spaces, dedicated recreation areas, and development. Feedback on these concepts was gathered through a phase of engagement and favorable aspects of each scenario are incorporated into the final recommendation. A final future land use designation is proposed that identifies 207 acres of the site as Open Space and 63 acres as Neighborhood Mixed Use. Full study findings and recommendations are found in the attached Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan.

Public engagement and comments collected during the Land Use Study are summarized on pages 12 through 14 of the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan and provided in full in Appendix A. Two subsequent comments have been submitted, one from a member of the public and another from the Duluth Energy Plan Commission, both are attached.

Staff finds that the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan was completed in accordance with Resolution 25-0845R and recommend adoption of all findings and recommendations of the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan. Staff recommend the future land use map be amended as listed below and illustrated on page 48 of the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan attached:

- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change 2 acres in the southwest corner of the site from Low-Density Neighborhood to Neighborhood Mixed Use.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change 13 acres in the area near the existing clubhouse from Open Space to Neighborhood Mixed Use.
- Amend the Future Land Use Map of the City of Duluth comprehensive plan to change 7 acres along the northern edge of the site from Rural Residential to Open Space.

Recommendation

The planning commission shall review the proposal based on whether the proposal promotes the best interests of the city and the general health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Duluth:

1. Much of the site remains open space for future recreation or natural resource restoration.
2. Opportunities for housing development are provided to meet the shortage of available units.
3. Development areas have the potential to positively increase the tax base. Negative fiscal impacts are mitigated by limiting development to the area able to be served by existing utility capacity.
4. Recommendations to guide the character of development are included that align with expressed public preference, the comprehensive plan, and best planning practice.

Staff recommends that Planning Commission recommend amendment to the comprehensive land use plan of these future land use map changes to City Council. Staff further recommends that the Planning Commission recommend to City Council approval of the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study and Vision Plan.



Outlook

FW: EPC Recommendation - Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study

From: Gary Olson [REDACTED] >**Sent:** Saturday, August 1, 2026 2:42 PM**To:** planning <planning@DuluthMN.gov>; Kate Kubiak <kkubiak@DuluthMN.gov>; deda <deda@DuluthMN.gov>; Jessica Peterson <jpeterson@DuluthMN.gov>; Diane Desotelle <didesotelle@DuluthMN.gov>**Cc:** Jennifer Ondrik <jondrik@DuluthMN.gov>; Ted Blenkush <tblenkush@DuluthMN.gov>; Katherine Rasley [REDACTED]

Subject: EPC Recommendation - Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study

Members of the Duluth Planning Commission;

Members of the Duluth Natural Resources Commission;

Members of the Duluth Economic Development Authority;

Members of the Duluth Parks and Recreation Commission;

Members of the Duluth City Council;

Greetings,

As the chairperson of the Duluth Energy Plan Commission, I wanted to draw your attention to the resolution that our Commission passed at our May 20, 2026, meeting regarding the Lester Park Golf Course Land Use Study. Our Commission has been charged with recommending policies to help the City meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. We are also not part of the City's Project Management Team for this project. I see that this project will be looked at by all of your Commissions and Organizations in the next few weeks and we wanted this important issue be part of the discussion.

Our resolution is as follows and we hope that you will incorporate this into this project as part of the requirements for any residential and commercial development:

EPC Motion: Regarding Any Lester Park Golf Course Development

May 20, 2026

Mayor Reinert, City Administrator Culhane and City Council:

The Duluth Energy Plan Commission (EPC), in keeping with (1) the City of Duluth's stated goal of eliminating greenhouse gases (GHG) by 2050, recommends the following with regard to any possible commercial or residential development of the Lester Park Golf Course area:

- 1. Do not extend any new natural gas infrastructure to any residential or commercial development project in the Lester Park Golf Course area.*
- 2. All energy needs should be provided by either grid supplied electricity and/or new clean energy sources with backup storage as needed.*
- 3. If the property is sold to a private developer, these requirements should also be included in the agreement.*
- 4. The Planning Commission shall evaluate whether the proposed development advances Duluth's climate resilience, protects public investment, and reduces long-term environmental and infrastructure risk, consistent with the Duluth Climate Action Work Plan.*

Duluth Energy Plan Commission

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Gary Olson

Below is a link to a serious study being performed on a course that was closed in 2020 due to City of Duluth MN financial constraints, representing 27 holes of golf in a truly world class setting on the northern shore of Lake Superior, the largest lake in the world.

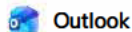
On an absolutely gorgeous setting with spectacular lake views and elevation changes in a city and region famous for tourism, with 7 million visitors annually, next to the only expressway to the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior National Forest which is the only major international commerce highway in the middle of the nation between Canada and the US. Duluth is the busiest port on the Great Lakes, serving commercial ships from around the world that can be seen from the course, is home to the world's largest fresh water sandbar and the world's largest natural harbor, and lives on two elevations up to more than 800 feet above the lake providing spectacular views of Lake Superior, the harbor, and across the lake to Wisconsin on the other side that is also viewed from the course.

The course, Lester Park Golf Club, has been left alone by a city from financial challenges and they're trying to come up with a solution to save it, which is proving to be very short on real insight of what it needs and can truly become for the course, the region, and the game of golf in general. That was my course where I grew up and learned to play and love the game from by dad and brother, walking a significant distance from home to the course and back with my clubs through the wooded paths of the also beautiful and large, river enhanced Lester Park area immediately adjacent to the course to play. It's an indescribably wonderful, clean fresh air, bird singing, beautiful and refreshing surrounding for playing golf and simply enjoying that needs to and is waiting be brought back for all to appreciate and benefit from.

I believe the vision of you and your team can both save this tremendous course and make it a desirable and impressive destination for all who seek a world class experience along with those who would like to live next to it. Attached are some pics of what it used to be and can be again and more with your help.

The city is also desperate for new housing development of all types, and I like others have a vision for everything from attractive entry level to luxury class housing being built alongside to satisfy those needs to become a very successful and industry leading model for others.

Please consider this opportunity and let me know if there's interest.



FW: Nicklaus Design Reply Lester Park Golf Course

From: Randy Peterson [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 4, 2026 10:53 AM
To: planning <planning@DuluthMN.gov>; deda <deda@DuluthMN.gov>; Wendy Durrwachter <wdurrwachter@DuluthMN.gov>; Fox21 News [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: Nicklaus Design Reply Lester Park Golf Course

Everyone,

As a native resident of Duluth and Lakeside / Lester Park who deeply appreciates the truly unique quality of life this area provides and who learned to play golf from age 8 at the true gem of a course that Lester has been, that property deserves to serve the overall community with sport and housing development at all levels along with providing strong economic vitality and support for the entire region.

Below you'll see interest from one of the world's greatest course designers, Nicklaus Design, in the opportunity that the Lester Park course and property provides, in response to the attached message sent to them that included pictures and the published planning study.

With a vision of the course being renewed to a world class standard including entry level, mid level and upper level housing developments alongside, the opportunity to accomplish some of the city's housing objectives along with having a long term world class destination for increased tourism dollars and recognition is a win win for all.

Here is Nicklaus Design's reply:

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Ray Ball [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 4, 2026 at 08:44:43 AM CDT
Subject: FW: nicklausdesign submission from Contact Form

Dear Pete,

Thank you for reaching out and for your email regarding the 27-hole golf course. We appreciate you thinking of us and taking the time to share the opportunity.

The property certainly sounds unique, and a golf course situated along the shoreline of the world's largest lake has the potential to be an exceptional destination.

While Nicklaus Design is a golf course design firm and does not invest in or acquire distressed golf course properties, we would be pleased to explore the opportunity to collaborate with the eventual developer or ownership team on a redesign or redevelopment of the golf course.

If the project moves forward and the developer or ownership group is considering engaging a golf course architect, we would be happy to discuss how our team could contribute to the vision and success of the project.

Thank you again for contacting us, and we wish you the very best with this exciting opportunity.

Warm regards, RB

Ray Ball
Senior Vice President
Nicklaus Design, LLC



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DES

May this conversation continue?

Thank you

Pete

Randy 'Pete' Peterson