

Overall Summary

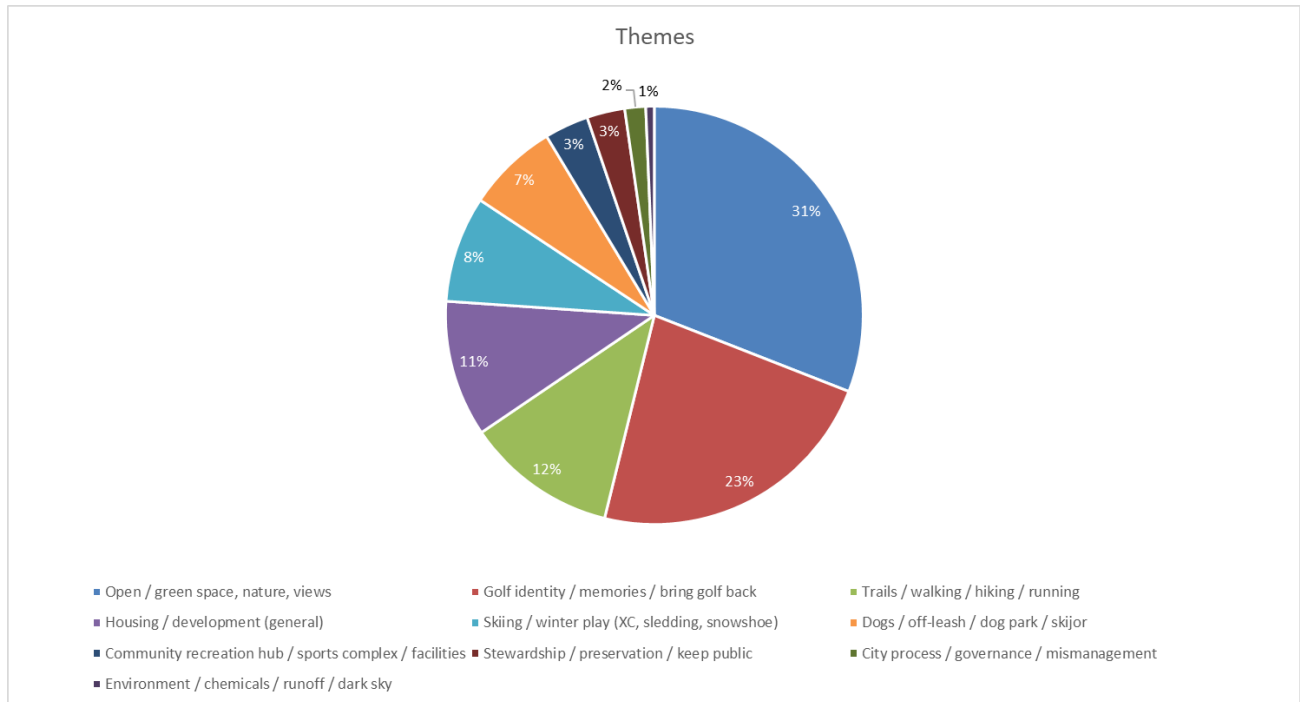
The community sees the Lester Park site mainly as a natural place that people already use every day. Most mentions focus on open space, wooded areas, lake views, and quiet places to walk, ski, skijor, and spend time with dogs. People want these experiences to remain the heart of the site moving forward. At the same time, many people still connect the land to its golf history and would like to see golf return in any form.

When people talk about what they are excited about, outdoor recreation stands out by an exceptionally large margin. Walking trails, winter use, disc golf, and open fields all show strong interest. People are also open to mixed ideas that combine housing with trails or open space, but on a much smaller scale. On the other hand, feelings toward housing alone and commercial development are mostly negative for nearly all the options evaluated.

When people talk about what makes them cautious, the clearest worry is losing public green space and changing the character of the land. Participants see this site as a rare opportunity within the city and do not want it overbuilt or privatized. Concerns about dense or expensive housing, traffic, school impacts, or rushed decision-making drive this fear. Overall, people are asking for a thoughtful and careful planning process that protects the land, keeps public access strong, and responds to community values.

Question 1

When you think about the Lester Park Golf Course, what comes to mind?



Themes

Open / Green Space, Nature, Views: Many people think of this site first as a large, beautiful natural space. They describe the open fields, rolling hills, trees, wildlife, and especially the views of Lake Superior as what makes the place special. For many, it feels peaceful, restorative, and unlike other spaces in the city because of its size and quiet. This sense of nature and openness is the strongest and most repeated impression in responses.

Representative quotes: “Open space for people, recreation and animals. Beautiful lake views for everyone.” and “A great and beautiful open space that I value and use often.”

Golf Identity / Memories / Bring Golf Back: Golf remains a major part of how many respondents see the site. People shared strong memories of learning the game here, raising their kids here, or enjoying Lake 9 and the views that came with it. Some feel sadness that the course closed, while others are frustrated that it was never reopened or reinvested in. The idea of bringing golf back, in some form, continues to show up more than almost any other particular use.

Representative quotes: “A historic golf course that never should have closed.” and “My favorite golf course! Miss it badly. Selected my living location to be close to it. Then it closed the next year!”

Trails / Walking / Hiking / Running: Many people associate the land with everyday walking and running, quiet strolling, and the freedom of moving through an open landscape rather

than on narrow trails. They describe it as one of the easiest, closest places to get outside for a simple walk with family, friends, or a dog. This everyday recreation identity is a major part of why people value the site.

Representative quotes: “Walking and hiking all seasons with my dog. Gorgeous views. Peacefulness and getting away from city busy-ness.” “Open quiet space, great for walking.”

Housing / Development (General): Some respondents see the site as a rare opportunity for housing needed, especially in an area of the city where land is limited. They talk about the potential for mixed use, new neighborhoods, and increasing the tax base. Others are more cautious and feel the site could support housing only if it fits the landscape and preserves access to nature. The general theme is that development is possible, but opinions vary widely.

Representative quotes: “Prime location for thoughtful development in a city with limited geographic options.” and “Opportunity for an increase in housing with a beautiful green feel!”

Skiing / Winter Play (XC, Sledding, Snowshoe): Winter activities are a big part of how people experience the site. Many describe cross-country skiing, skijoring, snowshoeing, and sledding as some of the best ways to enjoy the land. For some, it is the only place in the city where certain winter activities are allowed with dogs. Winter use gives the land a year-round identity that many want to keep.

Dogs / Off-Leash / Dog Park / Skijor: This site functions as the largest informal off-leash area in Duluth, and many respondents say it is their favorite place to bring their dogs. People value the ability to roam, see far ahead, and avoid conflicts found in small, fenced dog parks. For many, off-leash use is the main reason they visit the area. It is one of the strongest everyday-use themes across all comments.

Representative quotes: “It’s my favorite place to bring my dog off leash. It’s big enough she can run.” “A great spot to walk my dog with peaceful views and off-leash freedom.”

Community Recreation Hub / Sports Complex / Facilities: A portion of respondents imagine the site becoming a more structured recreation center with things like disc golf, rinks, event spaces, community buildings, playgrounds, or mixed recreation areas. These ideas vary widely but share the belief that the site could offer more organized activities for families and youth. This theme is smaller than nature or golf but still appears consistently.

Representative quotes: “Could be used as a great space for community gathering, restaurants, parks, playground.” “A place for golf, recreation and housing. A multi-use area that maintains historical roots yet looks to the future.”

Stewardship / Preservation / Keep Public: People focused on the importance of keeping this land public and protected. They talk about its long history as public parkland, its ecological importance, and the idea that once public land is sold or developed, it can never

be recovered. This theme often overlaps with concerns about access, equity, and the value of large public green space within the city.

Representative quotes: “Important space in our community that should remain in public hands.” “A beautiful piece of public land that should be preserved for future generations.”

City Process / Governance / Mismanagement: A set of responses express frustration with the city’s handling of the site over the years. These comments mention mismanagement of the golf course, too many studies, slow decision-making, and a lack of clear direction. While smaller than other themes, it represents a meaningful level of distrust or fatigue with the process.

Representative quotes: “A waste of public funds spent on multiple, redundant studies and processes.” “Mismanaged public property that has sat idle for too long.”

Environment / Chemicals / Runoff / Dark Sky: A smaller but specific group of respondents connects the site with environmental concerns. They mention water quality, wildlife habitat, the effects of past golf chemicals, the importance of migratory bird areas, and the value of dark-sky conditions for stargazing. These responses show awareness of the site’s ecological role beyond recreation.

Representative quotes: “Watching the aurora. It’s my favorite in-city spot to stargaze and catch the northern lights.” “Unique habitat for migratory birds and part of an important watershed.”

Unique or less-common suggestions:

- (23) Disc golf
- (6) Campground concepts
- A state-park connection was proposed once: “Make into state park with Lester Park and Brighton Beach,”
- Event pavilion or rentable event space
- “Super Rink / indoor turf”
- Community gardens, sometimes bundled with other amenities such as trails and picnic shelters.
- A public pool
- Community land trust or cooperative housing models
- Botanical elements
- A faith-oriented youth facility

Precedents people mentioned:

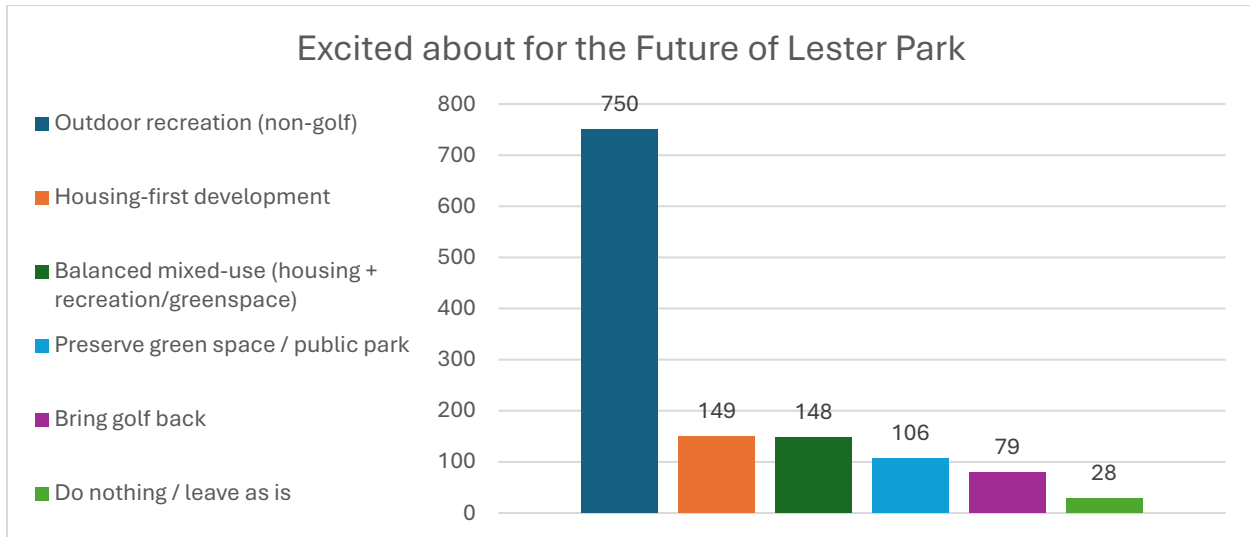
- Hermantown’s YMCA & Ice Arena
- Hawks Ridge
- Amity Creek and Seven Bridges Road
- Enger Tower Park, Enger Park, and Enger Park Golf Course together were cited four times—comparisons on management, access, and basic site care.

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- Disc-golf exemplars included Mont du Lac Blue Ribbon Pines in the Twin Cities metro, Kensington Metropark in Michigan, and “The Preserve” designed by Cale Leiviska in Clearwater, MN.
- An Urban mixed-use precedent was named explicitly: Biltmore Park Town Square (Asheville, NC)

Question 2a

When thinking about the future of the site, what, if anything, are you excited about?



Overview: People are most excited about keeping the site a beautiful outdoor place where they can walk, hike, ski, and enjoy nature throughout the year. They also look forward to improved trails, open views, and a safe off-leash dog area that supports the way people already use the land. Many are excited about the chance to protect wildlife and natural spaces while making the site easier and more welcoming for everyone to enjoy.

Outdoor recreation (non-golf): This is by far the largest category. Most respondents want the site to remain a major year-round recreation area with activities that are free or low-cost and accessible to all ages. Top desires include expanded walking trails, hiking, skiing and ski-joring, general winter use, sledding, mountain biking, disc golf, and especially a formal off-leash dog area. The common theme is that people already use the land this way and want it to be improved, not replaced. People described this area as one of the few large open spaces in Duluth where recreation feels “easy,” uncrowded, and close to nature.

Representative quotes: “Hiking, walking, xc skiing” “Quiet, rolling hills, lake views, wildlife, beginner friendly ski trails, long walks, golden hour, wildflowers.”

Balanced mixed-use: This group wants both housing and preserves public space, not one or the other. These responses explicitly call for a thoughtful mix. That includes new homes along with trails, open space, and sometimes a smaller golf aspect. Many emphasize “best of both worlds,” the need for intentional planning, and the desire to protect views, habitat, and public access while still expanding the housing supply. The sentiment here supports development, but carefully designed, walkable, and connected to nature.

Representative quotes: “A golf course with homes, townhomes. A community on a golf course with different amenities” “Nature, open space, public, a place for locals to enjoy. Multi-use, versatile.”

Housing-first development: This group focuses primarily on addressing Duluth’s housing shortage, strengthening the tax base, and using this rare parcel inside city limits for residential construction. Mentions include market-rate housing, middle-income units, senior housing, and efficient land use. A small group explicitly oppose golf or single-use recreation on fiscal and ecological grounds. The key frame is “the city needs housing more than anything else,” and this parcel is an opportunity to meet demand.

Representative quotes: “An available space for new development.” “Closed course. Extremely valuable space could help drive tax revenue and provide important housing within our city limits.”

Preserve green space / public park: These respondents prioritize protection of the land itself. They want the property to stay natural, public, open, and preserved, with minimal or light-touch improvements such as modest trails or habitat restoration. Concerns include loss of wildlife areas, irreplaceable views, water quality, and supporting Duluth’s identity as a city with abundant natural spaces. Several warn against overdevelopment or stress the rarity of such large public green space within city limits.

Representative quotes: “Important space in our community that should remain in public hands” “I’d like to keep it in its natural state with some trails.”

Bring Golf Back: Supporters want some form of golf—often a full 18 holes, sometimes a 9-hole layout—restored to the site. Rationales include honoring the course’s legacy, providing affordable public golf on the east side, youth golf programs, social value, and the belief that Duluth should have more than one public course. Others match golf with winter use, wanting a year-round facility with skiing in the off-season.

Representative quotes: “reopen the golf course already” “Keeping Nine or Eighteen holes for golf.”

Leave as is: A small but distinct group explicitly says “nothing,” “leave it alone,” “keep it as is.” They value the current open, lightly managed state and see any redevelopment, housing, golf, or otherwise harmful. Many in this category simply prefer the land untouched or minimally maintained by the city.

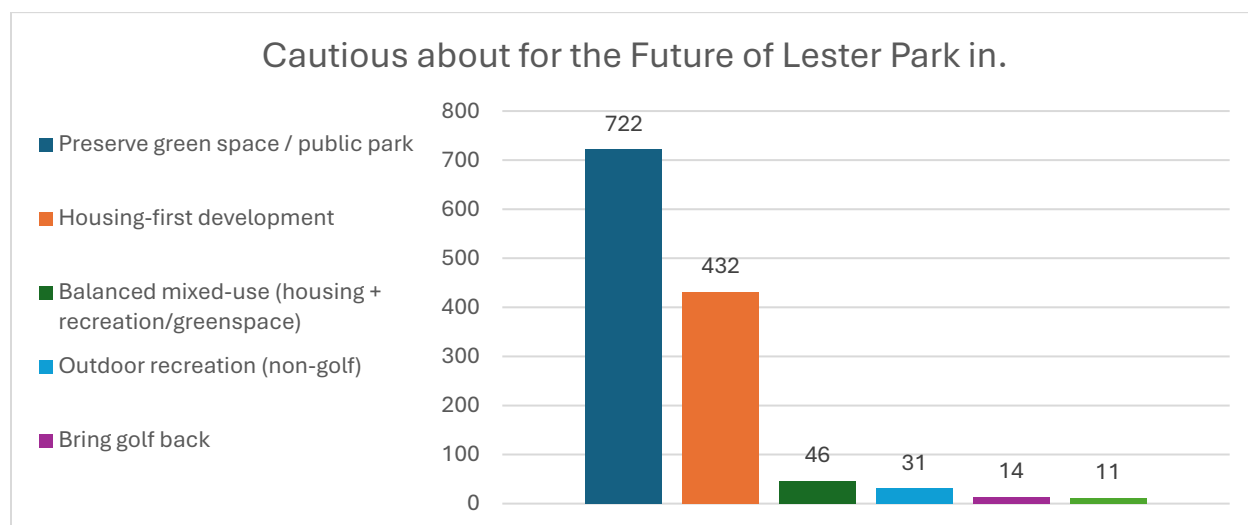
Representative quotes: “Beautiful open green space, the epitome and uniqueness of the city of Duluth. ‘Leave it alone’” “Nothing much. The fewer golf courses that exist the better. They take up way too many resources and are only accessible to those who can afford it.”

Other patterns that stood out

- Disc golf popularity.
- Off-leash dog use is effectively an existing program. Dozens of comments note that the site already functions as Duluth’s largest de-facto off-leash area. People strongly value the wide-open sightlines and low-conflict conditions. They fear losing this if the site is developed.
- Winter recreation is a core expectation.
- Cross-country skiing, skijoring, snowshoeing, sledding, and general winter activity appear constantly.
- The views matter, respondents describe the views of Lake Superior as a major public asset.
- transparent, balanced, fiscally responsible plan that respects the land and community voice.

Question 2b

When thinking about the future of the site, what, if anything, are you cautious about?



Overview: Most cautions concentrate on potential loss of public green space and the risks of housing that is unaffordable, ill-fitting, or privatizes access. A smaller flags process risks (inaction, rushed trail work) and the possibility that golf is excluded entirely. This page captures the main caution themes, counts, and two representative quotes per category.

Preserve green space / public park: This is the dominant caution: once public green space is sold or built over, the loss of habitat, views, and unrestricted access is irreversible. Respondents worry about monetization and privatization of a civic asset, urging conservation as a long-term investment in community health and identity. They want decisions that treat the site’s landscape value as a first-order constraint, not an afterthought.

Representative quotes: “The idea of private companies being given carte blanche to develop this housing and then either price gouging potential residents or pulling a bait and switch to run it as a boutique hotel or the like.” “Loss of open space, unnecessary development. Monetization”

Housing-first development: The largest set of cautions centers on housing that is unaffordable, ill-fitting to the site, or privatizes access through short-term rentals or gated enclaves. People flag downstream impacts—traffic, school capacity, utilities—and skepticism about promises of “affordable” units that later shift upscale. There is a stress that design, density, and stewardship should hold the same weight as raw unit counts if the goal is to meet local need.

Representative quotes: “Using the property more for dog-walking, skiing etc. which are all available across the street. Also, don't use it for low-cost housing on such a beautiful site.” “Housing not spaced out well. Not preserving green spaces”

Balanced mixed-use (housing + recreation/greenspace): People who want a genuine blend are cautious about extremes: luxury-only housing, all-commercial concepts, or

single-use ideas that crowd out public access. They repeatedly ask for a careful mix that protects views and landscape character while adding homes and small-scale amenities. The shared worry is that without discipline, a “mix” becomes a label rather than a real, well-balanced plan.

Representative quotes: “Expensive/ luxury homes, golf course, entirely commercial space” “Creating the right mix of housing and other amenities.”

Outdoor recreation (non-golf): Respondents are wary of overbuilding or duplicating trails and facilities that already exist nearby, especially if rushed project timelines compromise design or ecological care. Several caution that unmanaged change could degrade the low-key, informal use patterns people value today. The preference is to be deliberate and avoid “recreation for recreation’s sake” if it undermines what already works.

Representative quotes: “Using the property more for dog-walking, skiing etc. which are all available across the street. Also, don't use it for low-cost housing on such a beautiful site.” “Rushed development of any kind, including of bike trails.”

Bring golf back: A smaller contingent caution against plans that exclude golf entirely, asking to keep at least nine holes. Their concern is losing a long-standing public amenity without replacing its year-round, multi-use potential. They also worry that ignoring golf forecloses a balanced solution too soon.

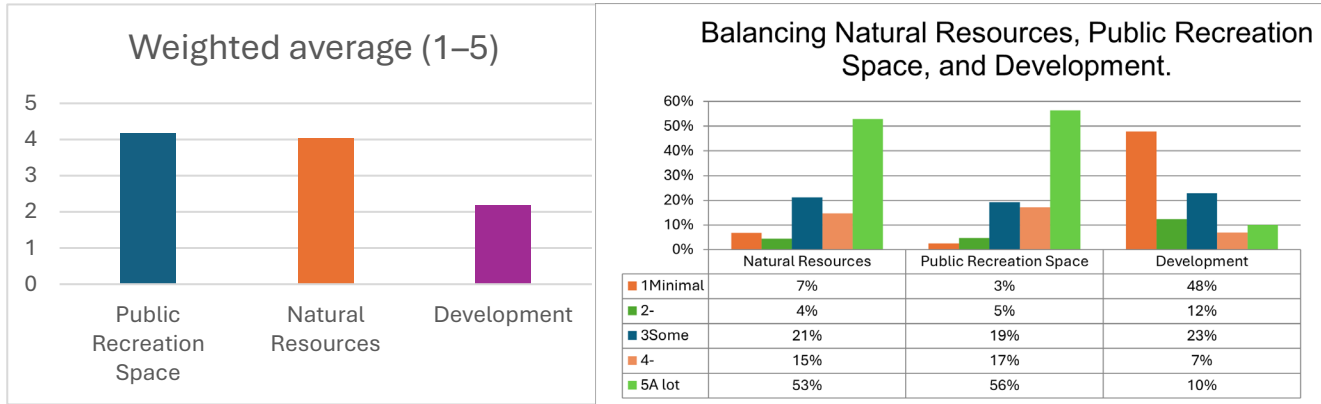
Representative quotes: “Plans to keep golf for a very small group of golfers for a very short window of use” “Anything that is not putting at least 18 holes of golf back.”

Leave as is: A handful of respondents warn about the opposite risk: extended inaction that leaves the site stagnant or functioning as an unmanaged dog-park-by-default. They want to avoid paralysis, lawsuits, or process churn that keeps the land in limbo. The caution is that “no decision” can still produce negative, long-lasting outcomes.

Representative quotes: “the site being developed, especially into large, expensive homes that do nothing to help the housing shortage in Duluth” “Nothing happening at all. Sitting there being a dog park as it is now.”

Question 3

A critical directive for this study is to develop concepts that explore balancing natural resources, public recreation space, and development. For you personally, how much of each would you want in the future of the Site?

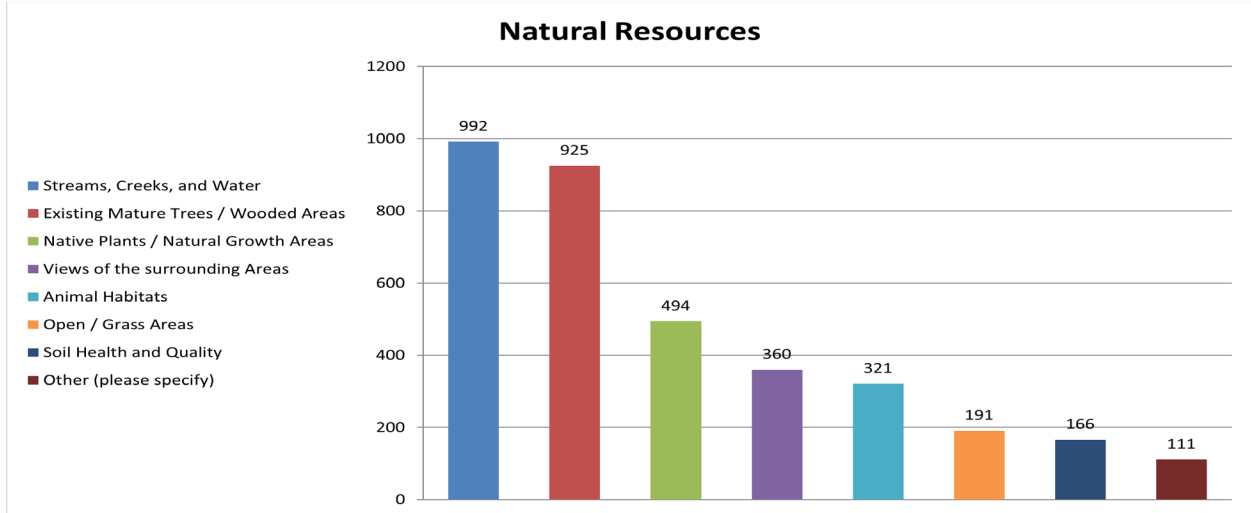


Most people want the future of the site to focus on nature and outdoor recreation, with strong interest in protecting natural resources like forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats, along with providing good trails and places to enjoy the outdoors. Only a small number of respondents want a large amount of development, and many prefer very little or none at all. A smaller group is open to a moderate mix of nature, recreation, and some development, but the overall trend is clear. The community’s personal preference leans heavily toward keeping the site mostly natural, supporting outdoor activities, and allowing only limited development if any at all.

Question 4

When thinking about the site today, what are natural resources that should be protected and/or enhanced? (Select your top 3 options)

Most respondents focused on protecting water and trees, with water resources and mature wooded areas standing out as top priorities. Interest in native plants followed, while views, wildlife habitat, open areas, and soil health appeared less often. Many open-ended comments pushed back on choosing only three options, noting that these natural features are interconnected and should be protected together. Others highlighted specific priorities such as keeping golf, protecting ecosystems, preserving views and dark skies, maintaining public access and trails, or supporting more housing.



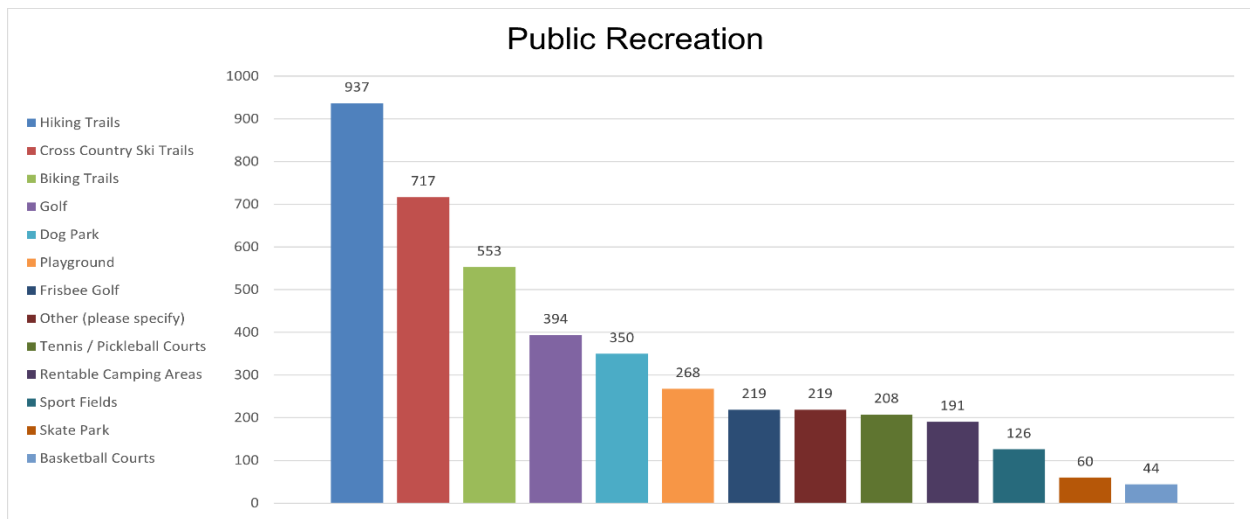
Others:

Category	Count
<i>All-of-the-above / Interconnected</i>	42
<i>Bring golf back / Keep golf course</i>	30
<i>Protect ecosystems (water, wildlife, soils, biodiversity)</i>	20
<i>Preserve views / quiet / dark skies</i>	8
<i>Recreation access (trails, dogs, public access)</i>	8
<i>Housing-first / maximize development</i>	6

Question 5

The Study will be exploring different types of year-round public recreation uses that may be part of the final vision, while balancing city costs and maintenance needs. What types of public recreation would you want to see on the site?

Most respondents prioritized trail-based recreation, with hiking, cross-country skiing, and biking emerging as the most common choices. Golf, dog areas, playgrounds, and other activities specific facilities appeared less frequently. In open-ended comments, many people expressed interest in low-impact, nature-oriented uses such as gardens, quiet open space, and educational or interpretive areas, while others highlighted the value of community facilities, indoor recreation, dog-friendly spaces, and winter sports. A recurring theme was concern about balancing recreation with preserving the natural character of the area, as well as ongoing tension between adding new amenities, retaining golf, expanding trail networks, or prioritizing housing needs.



Others:

Category	Count
<i>Passive nature, gardens & education</i>	44
<i>Trails & mobility (walking/biking/winter/motorized/equestrian)</i>	33
<i>Community & indoor recreation facilities</i>	20
<i>Ice sports</i>	17
<i>Dog-friendly / off-leash areas</i>	12
<i>Aquatics</i>	11
<i>Field & court sports</i>	10
<i>Camping</i>	
<i>Benches</i>	
<i>Hunting</i>	
<i>Perfect way it is we have enough park space.</i>	

Question 6 – 13 (Residential Preference)

Residential: When thinking about residential uses — places for people to live in, what types of housing would you want to see

Most survey respondents showed a clear preference for no housing on the Lester Park site, with opposition outweighing support across every residential type. Still, four types performed relatively better than others. Modest-lot single-family homes, co-housing, and senior (55+) housing saw the highest (though still limited) levels of interest compared with all other options.

Type	Oppose % (1-2)	Neutral % (3)	Support % (4-5)	Avg rating (1-5)
<i>Modest-lot Single Family Homes</i>	57.8	24.9	17.3	2.26
<i>Co-Housing</i>	66.2	19.3	14.4	2.06
<i>Senior 55+</i>	64.9	24.5	10.6	2.02
<i>Townhomes</i>	66.3	23.1	10.6	1.99
<i>Small Scale Apartments</i>	72.7	18.8	8.4	1.8
<i>Large-lot Single Family Homes</i>	84.7	10	5.2	1.47
<i>Medium-Scale Apartments</i>	87.4	8.3	4.2	1.41
<i>High-Density Apartments</i>	91	4.2	4.7	1.31

Large Lot Homes



Modest Lot Homes



Co-Housing



Townhomes



Small Scale Apartments



Senior 55+



Medium Scale Apartments



Large Scale Apartments



Question 14 – 17

Commercial: When thinking about commercial uses — places for people to work, shop, dine, and gather — what types of places would you want to see here?

Most respondents suggested they do not want commercial development on this site, with strong opposition across all categories, especially for places to work and shop, which received the lowest levels of support. Two commercial uses performed relatively better than others, with places to dine and places to gather showing the highest (though still limited) interest compared with the rest of the commercial options.

Type	Oppose % (1-2)	Neutral % (3)	Support % (4-5)	Avg rating (1-5)
Places to Dine	60.6	28	11.5	2.15
Places to Gather	70	21.3	8.7	1.91
Places to Shop	77	17.6	5.3	1.7
Places to Work	86.4	11.7	1.9	1.43

Dine



Gather



Shop



Work



LPGC Open House Summary

Executive Summary

The March Open House comments reveal a community deeply invested in the future of Lester Park Golf Course, with overwhelming emphasis on natural preservation, outdoor recreation, and maintaining the land as an accessible, quiet, ecologically rich public space. While support for housing exists, it is cautious, small-scale, and highly conditional, and a fair number of participants oppose residential development altogether. Commercial development receives the least support by a significant margin. The strongest unifying themes are rewilding, habitat restoration, dark sky protection, trails, and the continuation of year-round recreation activities that the community already enjoys.

The Site Today

Residents describe the site today as an active and well-loved natural landscape where people regularly walk, ski, hike, bike, run, snowshoe, stargaze, observe wildlife, enjoy views of Lake Superior, and gather informally with friends, family, and dogs. People value the peacefulness, the vistas, the feeling of being immersed in nature, and the ability to access a wild and open space so close to town. The site is viewed not as underutilized land, but as a frequently used neighborhood nature area that serves as an essential recreational and emotional resource for the community.

Preference Boards

Across the Nature Preservation and Outdoor Recreation sections, community members express dedicated support for keeping the land ecologically healthy and publicly accessible. Nature preservation receives remarkably high engagement, with priorities like wetland restoration, climate-resilient species, pollinator support, forest and bird habitat, scenic views, and watershed protection standing out. Comments emphasize rewilding, dark skies, native planting, and the importance of maintaining a continuous natural corridor connected to the river systems.

Outdoor recreation also scores very highly, with hiking, skiing, natural play areas, dog recreation, and accessible trail networks receiving the most support. People value open space, connection to existing trails, and recreational opportunities that keep the land quiet, natural, and lightly developed. Together, these findings show a community that sees the site primarily as a natural area for year-round recreation, restoration, and ecological health.

In contrast, Residential Development and Commercial Development receive far less support. Residential comments are deeply mixed: while support for modest, small-scale, or senior-friendly exists, others oppose any new housing on this land, often citing existing vacancies in Duluth and the belief that this site is too valuable as nature to develop. Commercial development receives the lowest support of any category by a significant margin. Most residents do not want new retail, offices, or restaurants on the site and instead prefer that commercial activity remains in the existing Lakeside business district.

Many express fear of losing natural character, harming local businesses, or inviting large developers.

In 20 Years

In twenty years, people imagine Lester Park Golf Course as a peaceful and naturally rich place where quiet, beauty, and ecological health define the experience. Many describe a setting centered on open green space, forest, trail networks, wildlife habitat, and views of Lake Superior. They imagine a place to walk, hike, ski, snowshoe, picnic, watch birds, sit in silence, see the stars, enjoy northern lights, and find refuge from the fast pace of the city. Several comments describe it as a destination green space that protects dark skies, watershed function, and natural character while remaining welcoming to all ages and all backgrounds. Several participants simply hope it remains undeveloped, free of houses and commercial uses, and protected for future generations who will value the decision to keep an irreplaceable public landscape intact.

Other visions describe a community-oriented landscape that blends trails, gathering places, recreation, and ecological stewardship in a way that keeps nature at the center. Suggestions like small campfire areas for storytelling, places to gather with friends and family, and safe spaces for quiet reflection also came up on the boards. A smaller number imagine integrated housing or an eighteen-hole golf course, though always with nature and trails woven into the setting. Some describe the future site as a place for food growing, cultural connection, or Indigenous stewardship. Across all viewpoints, the shared idea is a place where people can experience nature in meaningful ways and where the land remains a source of beauty, health, and community life.

Lester Park Stories

The stories people shared about Lester Park paint a vivid picture of a place woven deeply into daily life, memory, and community identity, serving as everything from a childhood racecourse to a winter skiing haven, a dog-walking paradise, and a restorative refuge during the pandemic. Residents describe cross-country races, night skiing, skijoring, foraging for chokecherries, watching the northern lights, and experiencing the “pure joy of dogs being DOGS” across the site’s meadows and forests, emphasizing how rare it is to have such wide-open, wild-feeling land within the city. One Participant recounted visiting the area every day since 2020, calling it their “covid sanctuary,” while others note that they have no golf story at all because the forest and trails, not the former course, are what shaped their relationship to the place. Together, the stories reveal how emotionally significant, ecologically rich, and irreplaceable this landscape has become to the community.

What Should Happen at LPGC

Comments about the future of LPGC overwhelmingly prioritize ecological restoration, rewilding, watershed protection, and dark-sky preservation. Many participants emphasize maintaining the site as a natural, lightly stewarded landscape that protects habitats, supports native species, and honors the ecological connections to the Lester and Amity river systems. Residents describe a desire to preserve ponds, forests, meadows, bedrock

shrublands, and wildlife corridors, along with restoring trails and expanding opportunities for quiet recreation. There is consistent emphasis on keeping the area open, green, and minimally developed, with sentiment ranging from cautious interest in limited improvements to strong, repeated calls for leaving the land “as is” to ensure that once-lost natural character is not gone forever.

Ideas for community use center on nature-based gathering spaces like campfire circles, small shelters, accessible trail networks, stargazing spots, and places for storytelling, cultural sharing, and rest. Food sovereignty also emerges as a meaningful theme, with proposals for community gardens, urban farms, native food forests, and local growing initiatives. Opinions on housing vary, with some supporting only modest, small-scale, or senior-oriented development, while many oppose any residential construction at all until Duluth addresses existing vacancies. Residents also raise governance concerns, emphasizing transparency, respect for previous city commitments, and reluctance toward large developers or commercial ventures. Together, these perspectives envision LPGC as a restorative landscape where ecological health, community connection, and cultural stewardship shape the future.