



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine a city of vibrant, people-centered neighborhoods – connected by good streets, convenient bus routes, and safe bike lanes – from Fond-du-Lac to the Lester River, up and down the hillside.

Imagine neighborhood places where people can gather to build community. Local places you can go to shop, garden, play with the kids in a park, or simply enjoy time with friends.

Imagine walking to a local coffee shop, a pub, or playground, biking across town to the lakeshore, or taking a bus to work or to a local trail to enjoy a ski, take a walk, or run.

Imagine hundreds of new college graduates connected to local jobs, able to make Duluth their home and raise their families.

Imagine Duluth as a city where housing is affordable, safe, and available to people of all incomes across all neighborhoods.

Imagine a thriving economy with products produced by local businesses, connected to the rest of the country and the world through modern, efficient air, water, and rail transportation.

Imagine Duluth known throughout the state and across the country as a sustainable, prosperous, innovative, and green city, recognized for its thriving urban gardens and locally grown food.

Imagine Duluth's brand as the go-to destination place to enjoy a weekend or week, exploring well-maintained parks and trails, or simply relaxing in the ambience of its history and locally grown culture and talent.

Imagine a city that balances economic growth with its ecology, history, and culture – whose starting values are that no neighborhood is disposable, cities should serve people, and green space has intrinsic value.

Imagine a more connected, more resilient, more accessible, more sustainable, fairer, and healthier Duluth.

Imagine Duluth 2035.



## DULUTH TODAY – AT A GLANCE

### Population and Demographics

86,164 residents

88.6% white

Life expectancy – Chester Park/Congdon = 84.7 years;  
Lincoln Park = 73.4 years

### Economy and Jobs

Median household income: \$45,900

Poverty rate: 21%

45,086 people work in the city – top three industries:  
Healthcare, Retail Trade, and Education Services

6.7 million tourists annually

47% of land and buildings within city limits is non-taxable

### Public Infrastructure

42 streams and 128 parks

178 miles of trails

450 miles of roads

403 miles of sidewalks

### Housing

38,146 housing units – 40% rental/60% home owners

Half of Duluth's homes are older than 75 years

Median property value: \$148,900

### Education

5,300 university degrees granted each year – UMD,  
St. Scholastica, and Lake Superior College

### Transportation

12% of residents have no car

2.8 million annual bus ridership

255,000 air passengers

1,100 lake-carrier and oceangoing ship visits with 38  
million metric tons of cargo annually

\$1,000 per lineal foot to build or reconstruct a stand-  
ard 24 foot-wide, curb and gutter city street

Big, transformational visions have shaped Duluth throughout its history. In 1889 William Rodgers first imagined Duluth's many streams connected by a boulevard winding along the city's bluff. Mayor Snively championed Skyline Parkway and envisioned parks centering residential neighborhoods. Modern streetcars gave birth to Duluth's suburban neighborhoods strung across 26 miles of hillside. Canal Park and the Lakewalk transformed century-old industrial scrapyards and decaying buildings into Duluth's tourist center and one of the city's most used and prized public attractions.

Imagine Duluth 2035 is no less transformational. But unlike previous big ideas, this one didn't come from a singular visionary leader or city planner, but from the collective dreams and ideas of thousands of Duluth residents gathered through an intensive, year-and-a-half long community engagement process. Imagine Duluth 2035 puts people and natural places at its center and shifts away from the auto- and industry-centric development of the past.

Imagine Duluth 2035 balances livability with what it takes to live. It starts with what people love about Duluth – the beauty of Lake Superior, abundant parks, trails and outdoor opportunities, clean air and water, and a deep attachment to place. It connects these with what people need to stay and thrive in Duluth – good paying jobs, affordable housing, good streets as well as diverse transportations options. It deepens a commitment to protect the quiet places that make Duluth unique and emphasizes and focuses more residential, commercial, and craft industrial activities in core investment areas.

Imagine Duluth 2035 connects where people live, work, and play in a vision of vibrant, walkable, neighborhood centers and a thriving downtown, all with diverse housing options and served by modern streets, good sidewalks, efficient utilities, and transit. It positions Duluth to thrive in a future of energy and climate transformation. It

balances preservation and stewardship with growth and development, and it reflects a resilient, forward-looking city that both builds on tradition and welcomes innovation and new approaches. It is grounded in collaborative community partnerships.

Imagine Duluth 2035 addresses our hardest challenges and barriers:

- Persistent inequality
- Significant amount of non-taxable land and buildings
- Challenging geography, geology, and weather
- Aging infrastructure – housing, sewer and water, streets, and public buildings
- Lack of density for efficient transportation and utilities
- A big hill

Imagine Duluth 2035 is more than a land use plan or simple road map for future development. It envisions a wholistic, engaged, inclusive community with all its complexity and diversity. It builds on the hard work and planning from the past 15 years – 2001 and Beyond, the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and numerous Small Area and Neighborhood Strategic Plans. Imagine Duluth 2035 unites, amplifies, focuses, and builds on these previous efforts. It connects big ideas like year-round indoor public spaces, aerial gondolas, tree-lined pedestrian friendly boulevards, and a city flag update, with the prosaic details of good city planning: street width and maintenance schedules, building codes, efficient infrastructure, clear signage, water flow and retention, and energy efficiency incentives, to name but a few. All of these issues are viewed through the lenses of health, fairness, sustainability, and accessibility for everyone – for Duluth will only move forward if we move forward together.

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The bulk of Imagine Duluth 2035 is structured around five topics – Economic Development, Energy and Conservation, Housing, Open Space, and Transportation. Each topic’s chapter lays out a mission, and the key policies and strategies for achieving that mission. In addition to these five areas, Imagine Duluth 2035 lays out a vision for land use and includes chapters identifying both General Opportunities (ideas that cut across multiple content areas) and Transformational Opportunities (big ideas that represent stand-alone actions, even if their unifying elements may cross issue areas). These five issue areas and transformational opportunities are summarized below.

## Economic Development

**Mission:** Duluth’s economic environment will advance the success and health of our community by promoting growth through an expanded tax base and the creation of new jobs and innovative ideas.

### KEY POLICIES:

Policy #1— Invest in people to increase employees’ skills, ensure workforce availability for employers, and promote income self-sufficiency

Policy #2—Foster growth of existing employers and strategically recruit new employers to Duluth

Policy #3—Build on existing economic strengths and competitive advantages

Policy #4— Embrace the outdoors as an economic engine and source of community wealth

Policy #5— Effectively coordinate marketing, communication, and the city’s image



## Energy and Conservation

**Mission:** Duluth will invest in a healthier, more resilient community by using energy more efficiently and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### KEY POLICIES:

Policy #1 – Increase community involvement in decisions about energy and infrastructure investments

Policy #2 – Provide incentives for developers to encourage green buildings and renewable energy use in new residential and commercial buildings

Policy #3 – Incentivize commercial, anchor institution, and large residential building/ facility owners to reduce energy use and increase energy efficiency in existing buildings/facilities and community gathering spaces

Policy #4 – Incentivize households and landlords to reduce energy use and increase residential energy efficiency

Policy #5 – Encourage community-wide investment in appropriate local renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, and biomass

Policy #6 – Adopt energy efficiency and energy saving targets for City owned facilities and City operations

Policy #7 – Increase efficiency of utilities and services

## Housing

**Mission:** Housing in Duluth will promote the essential character of its neighborhoods while providing desired, safe, clean, and equitable living space for all members of the community.

### KEY POLICIES:

Policy #1 – Increase density in and around the designated Core Investment Areas

Policy #2 – Provide affordable, attainable housing opportunities

Policy #3 – Prioritize inclusive housing policies to reflect the city’s social, cultural, economic, and historic diversity and development patterns

Policy #4 – Improve the quality of the city’s housing stock and neighborhoods

Policy #5 – Expand the cohesiveness of “One Duluth” by expanding a variety of housing opportunities throughout the city while maintaining unique community characteristics within distinct individual neighborhoods





## Open Space

**Mission:** Duluth will strive for a sustainable open space system that enriches the lives of all Duluthians. These open spaces will reflect the community's ecological, historic, cultural, and recreational values, and will contribute to the community's resilience to natural disasters.

### KEY POLICIES:

Policy #1 – Improve Duluth's resiliency to flooding and natural disasters

Policy #2 – Examine the value and need for all of Duluth's publicly owned open space

Policy #3 – Remove barriers to accessing parks and open space

Policy #4 – Improve the delivery of parks and open space services to the community

Policy #5 – Encourage urban food growth

## Transportation

**Mission:** Duluth's transportation system will connect all users in a way that promotes safety, health, and quality of life.

### KEY POLICIES:

Policy #1 – Improve street conditions to function better for everyone

Policy #2 – Reduce infrastructure costs through innovation and wholesale design change

Policy #3 – Add to the transportation network by systematically enhancing multi-modal options

Policy #4 – Improve system condition and connections in and between downtown and Canal Park

Policy #5 – Base decisions about transportation infrastructure primarily in the context of improving city and neighborhood vitality, and not solely on automobile through-put

Policy #6 – Protect and enhance regional transportation networks, especially for purposes of expanding opportunities for movement of freight

## Transformational Opportunities

Not all of these transformational opportunities can be pursued, but the Imagine Duluth 2035 process captured these big ideas as a way of sparking continuing discussion, imagining, and planning.

- Identify and invest in 12 Core Investment Areas (CIAs)
- Carry out previously identified downtown plans and investments
- Develop a year-round indoor public space
- Increase uphill connectivity through an aerial gondola or incline railway
- Identify redevelopment opportunity to create a public market and indoor space
- Limit development in Tier 3 Greenbelt Areas and create an Urban Services Boundary
- Update and modernize Duluth's city flag
- Prioritize key viewsheds – Views of the lake, the estuary, the hill, or landmarks
- Preserve and expand economic opportunities within Duluth's industrial waterfront

