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SUBJECT: City Proposes Trail Recommendations in Mini Master Plan

BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer

City Proposes Trail Recommendations in Mini Master Plan

[Duluth, MN] On the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Western Waterfront Master Plan, the City of Duluth Parks and Recreation Division staff is publishing a new Mini Masterplan that includes a renaming of the trail and recommendations for its future. This plan is a result of a three-year process to proceed with a trail extension while retaining the full length of the historic Lake Superior Mississippi Railroad (LSMR) line. The plan represents a balanced approach to preserve cultural resources of the St. Louis River corridor while providing the largest amount of public access to the river as possible.

Renaming the Western Waterfront Trail was essential to increase cultural fluency within the Duluth community. Throughout this process stakeholders had the opportunity to return to the original name of place while honoring the authentic stories of this area came as a gift by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. The gift was a beautiful new name for the Western Waterfront Trail -- Waabizheshikana. Pronounced "waa – bah- zhay – she" meaning marten, and "kuh-nuh" means trail or road. The Marten Clan were the first Ojibwe to form villages along the river. To listen to the pronunciation, click on the following link <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/waabizheshi-na>.

The existing and proposed trail extension intersects historic trails along the river. The Ojibwe made use of existing portages and trails in the area. The name Waabizheshikana (Marten trail) is meant to honor the Marten Clan for their establishment of a foothold on the estuary as well as for the leadership of the hereditary chiefs from the Marten clan as they guided the path of the Fond du Lac people through interactions with fur traders and the US Government in treaty-making.

With nearly \$400 million of federal and state funds invested into cleaning up the river, and as the clean-up efforts near completion, completing the plan that will connect western neighborhoods from Irving to Fond du Lac is timely. Preliminary cost estimates of the trail came in at \$22 million for the first phase of the project and created many stumbling blocks in the planning process. City staff, with intense investigation and study of alternative alignments with stakeholder and expert consultation, was able to bring the cost to five million dollars for the entire project.

Three key values guided efforts to extend the trail; maximum access to the city-owned waterfront, maximize restoration of the river while retaining the LSMR railway, and finally preserving the historic culture resources of the rail. All of these values can be found throughout the plan, which can be found by visiting https://duluthmn.gov/media/8856/final-draft-for-parks-commission-waabizheshikana_110719.pdf.

Recommendations in the Plan include:

1. Rebrand the Western Waterfront Trail as a heritage trail, including renaming the trail to reflect and honor the cultural and historical significance of the area.
2. Initiate a separate heritage interpretive planning process to identify and articulate the stories of the river and the area.
3. Extend the existing trail to connect seven river corridor neighborhoods by way of a trail alignment that traverses the shoreline and nearby ridgeline.
4. Improve three existing water access sites and develop three additional water access sites to increase public riverfront use.
5. Design all these facilities to ensure accessibility, regardless of income, age, or physical ability.

The plan will be reviewed by Parks Commission on November 13, then will proceed to City Council on November 25, 2019.

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