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Citizen Forum Meeting

The Western Waterfront Trail is a 3.5-mile multi-purpose trail along the waterfront in West Duluth. Beginning near the Spirit Lake Marina, the Western Waterfront Trail connects the Riverside neighborhood, the Willard Munger State Trail, Tallas Island, Indian Point Campground and Park, the Lake Superior Zoo, and Kingsbury Creek. The Trail is comprised of areas that are former rail lines, and has a history that intertwines with the industrial waterfront of Duluth. Today, this area is valued as a quiet sanctuary for viewing nature, as well as valued for recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

A Citizen Forum event was organized by the W.J. McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League on the evening of June 29th, 2015. The meeting began at 5:00pm and was located at the Evergreen Senior Center in West Duluth. The focus of the meeting was to generate discussion and gather input from people interested in the future of the Western Waterfront Trail. The event was funded through a grant from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation.

A number of local experts were invited to give presentations, to provide a background to forum participants. These included Richard Staffon (President McCabe Chapter, IWLA), Jim Filby Williams (Director of Public Administration, City of Duluth), Daryl Peterson (Director of Restoration Programs, MN Land Trust), Diane Desotelle (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Area of Concern Coordinator), Clinton Neinhaus (Duluth Audubon Society). Additionally, a photography presentation was shared, “Wanderings on the Western Waterfront Trail.”

Following the presentations, Jody Rader, a community design/planning professional presented an example community planning project (Anderson Park in Isanti County) which focused on ideas of preservation, restoration, and connection. This presentation stressed the importance of gathering community input early in the planning process, and was intended to give participants an example of a successful community engagement process.

Flyer for the Citizen Forum event, courtesy of Connie Moeller
Citizen Input Activity: Overview

The Citizen Forum meeting had an excellent turnout. The meeting space was filled to the 150-person capacity, and there was active discussion and participation throughout.

The second half of the meeting focused on gathering input from participants on how they currently use the Western Waterfront Trail, and how they would like to see the Trail improved in the future. Each table of participants (approximately 5-8 people per table) were given a large printed aerial map of the trail area, along with post-it notes, markers and pens. Each person was also given a sheet of paper with two sets of questions. The first set of questions were designed to be used as a survey, to gather quantitative information about how often and what types of activities people engage with the Western Waterfront Trail. The second set of questions were designed to gather qualitative input regarding the existing assets and areas of opportunity along the Trail and the Western Waterfront area.

Through a variety of methods (verbal, written, artistic), meeting participants held self-directed discussions based on the qualitative questions. After approximately 45 minutes, the entire room held a discussion of the major points and key ideas that were brought up.

This report summarizes the findings from the activity and from the Citizen Forum meeting in general.
1. How often do you currently use the Western Waterfront Trail?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only used it once or twice ever</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never used the Western Waterfront Trail</td>
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2. Do you wish to use the Western Waterfront Trail more?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not sure/maybe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. During which seasons are you most attracted to use the Western Waterfront Trail?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All year around</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. How often do you currently use the Western Waterfront Trail?

- Daily: 8
- A few times a week: 10
- A few times a month: 3
- A few times a year: 16
- Only used it once or twice ever: 9
- Never used the Western Waterfront Trail: 1

2. Do you wish to use the Western Waterfront Trail more?

- Yes: 34
- No: 2
- Not sure/maybe: 1

3. During which seasons are you most attracted to use the Western Waterfront Trail?

- Spring: 27
- Summer: 24
- Fall: 34
- Winter: 13
- All year around: 10

4. What activities do you currently pursue on or near the Western Waterfront Trail?

- Walking, hiking: 31
- Running: 3
- Dog walking: 4
- Birding/bird watching: 11
- Nature watching/identification: 11
- Meditation, sitting quietly: 2
- Agate picking: 1
- Boating (motorized): 2
- Group activities: 1
- Bicycling: 11
- Maintenance work: 1
- Kayaking/canoeing/paddling: 3
- Photography: 1
- Fishing: 5
- Picnic: 2
- Snowshoeing: 1
- Cross-country skiing: 2
1. Describe how views, places of beauty, or visual features are experienced along the Western Waterfront Trail.

“The pictures shown tonight are worth a thousand words.”

“Tallas Island provides a destination for me on bike/water. [I will have] to see what will be there [in the future].”

“There are some very peaceful vistas along the river—the trail I very close to the water.”

“Beach overlooking Tallas Island.”

“Must be there—no way to experience Western Waterfront Trail from road or public overlook; requires active (rather than passive) experience.”

“Limited access; I’ve never been by the river.”

“Need for covered areas (Kiosk, etc.) for observation/rest/contemplation.”

“Many areas are water-soaked and muddy culverts need replacement.”

“Walking, listening.”

“Views of the river, waterfowl, flora, wildlife. Just great!”

“Hiking, being there, photography, biking, skiing, snowshoeing. Points of access limited.”

“The views are great but I would like to see less invasives. Trail is grown in = detraction.”

“Buffers of woods between new home developments at the trails at the river. Keep habitat for butterflies and birds.”

“Bays, direction of views.”

“Birds singing, wildlife. Meditation time.”

“Huge underappreciated hillside horizon views.”

“Up close views of wildlife and diverse plant communities.”

“By walking, boating, canoeing, islands. View shed, too.”

“Vistas! Biotic Community.”

“View sheds are important to overall experience.”

“Flora, fauna, view sheds.”

“It’s a place for slow recreation! Binoculars, scopes, and cameras help. And listening is important for birders in wetlands. Meandering and sauntering are words that apply.”

“It is one area that has so much to see year-round in a very small area. I love the flora, insects, trees, birds and animals.”

“This trail is meant for walking and enjoying and quiet. It should be kept as natural as possible.”

“The trail is made for walking and stopping, not for high-speed travel. It is more like a nature trail. Need a buffer zone from the river to new development.”

“Kayaking, canoeing, waterfront trail, houses/businesses with viewsheds, xc ski trails, Spirit Mountain.”

“Immersed diversity, intimate.”

“The water has lots of activities—eagle parents teach young how to fish with ice chunks. Many parent animals teach their young.”

“Walk along and take it all in.”

“Fish activities draw a lot in, some access issues currently exist.”

“Walking, boating, paddling, biking.”
2. Describe the quality of passive recreation along the Western Waterfront Trail. Passive recreation refers to biking, walking, jogging, photography, wildlife watching, and all activities that do not require groups or organization to perform.

“The trail is in very good shape for walking. It is quiet—not many people early in the morning when I walk. In cold weather there are a few icy areas from water/springs flowing down the hill and they can be difficult to navigate.”

“All along the trail, it’s great for all activities.”

“Really good walking. Only problem is you have to walk the path back to where started.”

“Biking, although I don’t think it is important to make a distinction between active and passive recreation.”

“Rolling-in chair/scooter”

“The remote areas are great, pristine places to enjoy all of these activities. Also, the private land owners along the trail do a great job maintaining natural landscapes that connect to the river.”

“The quality is excellent with cleanup of the River since 1975.”

“Storm damaged areas not repaired yet. Overgrown vegetation, dead trees.”

“The pleasure of the Western Waterfront Trail is that people of all ages can enjoy it. Its beauty is wonderful. Keep the bikes and dogs off the trail.”

“Good. Lends itself to industrial usage.”

“Would be better with less invasives.”

“Concern with bikes. Fishing and being able to eat the fish if you are a child or female. No ADA trails on the Western Waterfront, except for new expansion out west to keep hiking trails or bird habitat.”

“Interrupted by obstacles and condition. Quiet is very valued.”

“Popular spot. Access needs improvement. Quiet environment.”

“Hidden Gem, though interrupted.”

“Photo, aesthetics, reflection time, meditation.”

“Very popular, hidden gem, but interrupted by poor sections of trail, industrial sites, etc. Not a good, unified whole. Quiet and peaceful are critical elements to share, but not lose.”

“Very good, but interrupted.”

“Fair to good. Parts of the trail are rough for bicycling with a road bike.”

“The Waterfront Trail is very special and should only be treaded lightly. Walking, bird-watching, nature groups, photography are all acceptable. But higher speed activity—no!”

“Not good for biking. Should be a quiet, natural trail.”

“Quality is good for walking, jogging, and photography. Could use a little maintenance. Quality is marginal for biking and should stay that way.”

“We could really use a spot that is save to launch non-motorized water craft, but otherwise access is easy. Areas that are quiet, dark & dark should be protected00this is very valuable and rare in Duluth.”

“Dogwalkers garbage can for clean-up.”

“Excellent.”

“Some access issues.”

“Good overall, homeowners do a good job of keeping it up. Parking, signage, marketing needs to be better.”
3. Describe the quality of active recreation and events along the Western Waterfront Trail. Active recreation refers to activities that are organized, such as kayak rentals, sporting events, and special events like weddings.

“Spirit Valley Marina provides rental.”

“Indian Point? I normally bring my own equipment. Spirit Lake Marina has kayaks.”

“Need more [active recreation and events]. Need for actual ‘trail’ programs, to involve/engage people.”

“Would like the buoys put back on the river past the marina.”

“Not much access. Not an issue when there are organized activities. More high quality vegetation would improve.”

“Poor: very little access, not many rental opportunities.”

“ Needs strategic improvement. Low impact, quality access.”

“Kayak/canoe/boat activity is popular because of access.”

“Some kayaking and boating—don’t want to see it become too commercial. Need good access points. Access needs improvement, but strategic.”

“Access needs to be improved but not developed.”

“I need to try renting a kayak or canoe. I would like more water-based opportunities.”

“Bird walks with Duluth Audubon and the annual cane excursion with St. Louis River Alliance have been my two main group experiences of the trail.”

“Interpretation with knowledgeable people really enriches the experience of this trail.”

“Very limited—large groups would be a negative to this area. Each time of the year is significant and when there are large, uncaring groups, nature suffers.”

“Minimal, to my knowledge. I think we need organized events and activities on the waterfront. The St. Louis River Days last fall were a good first step.”

“Where? Will it be near the water or over an overlook? Sporting events where? When? They hurt/scare animals from nesting areas. Boat site? Near Bong Bridge. Will there be patrols for people, protection of wildlife from humans?”

“Not aware of any.”

“Not very good. Munger bike rental. Running groups, fun runs.”
4. Describe the quality of winter activity along the Western Waterfront Trail.

“Would be wonderful to have a tracked trail for x-county skiing.”

“Winter birds (ducks), access to the ice/water; skiing on it is great. Hiking in winter is awesome—you can get access to the sky with access out on the open river.”

“Unknown.”

“Snow shoeing, skiing.”

“Skiing”

“Depends on severity of weather-potential to grow.”

“It would be nice if it was plowed. It gets real icy and dangerous to walk.”

“Good for ‘fat biking’. Little maintenance, could use some organized grooming.”

“Very little—some fat tire biking and birding.”

“Good potential for fat biking, snowshoeing. Needs grooming.”

“Low quality; the only work that the SLRA does is with the walk on the SNO Event—maybe they could do more.”

“Exploring the frozen river, snow shoeing, ski, no bikes.”

“High interest in a relatively low number of activities: cross-country skiing and ice fishing.”

“Ice fishing.”

“Ice fishing, snowshoeing, skiing.”

“Ice fishing is very popular on WS side. Good hiking/snowshoeing in winter. Better views.”

“Skiing, fat-ire biking, ice fishing, snowshoeing.”

“I have not been there then.”

“The past couple of years the trail has not been open.”

“Could use more snowmobile and fishing access points to the River.”

“Not sure! Need some more experience on the trail in winter.”

“I like—excellent.”

“Birding, ice fishing.”

“Don’t use the WFT in winter; trail gets icy.”

“Hard to walk and run if we have a lot of snow.”
5. Describe the quality of wildlife throughout the Western Waterfront Trail area.

“Very diverse – I try never to get between a mother bear and her cubs.”

“Lots of geese.”

“Variety is large.”

“I’ve seen deer and birds there.”

“Can see large variety of wildlife.”

“Wide variety—TO PRESERVE!”

“Very good variety of native, migratory animals and birds.”

“I have seen hundreds of different birds ducks, etc. Love the beavers. Have seen muskrat, deer, bear, fox, wolk, blue heron, otter, hawks, eagles, turtles. So much.”

“Wonderful, lots of natural habitat. Great birding.”

“Unbelievable.”

“Variety.”

“Very good; habitat restoration will improve fall waterfowl migration.”

“Wonderful, especially for bird watching, hiking, snow shoeing.”

“Excellent!”

“It’s a great place for migratory birds.”

“It is great, but I have seen a reduction in habitat and do not want to see any further reduction.”

“Diverse, vibrant, thriving. A lot of activity.”

“Good to excellent.”

“In the process of restoration.”

“Amazing in diversity, both resident and visiting wildlife.”

“Bear cubs, birds, fox cubs, frogs, brushwolf, turtles/eggs, fish, snakes, bats, bees, fireflies.”

“Outstanding.”

“Excellent everywhere!!”
6. Describe plant communities or special areas of natural/ecological value. Try to recall any specific species (plants or animals) that define these special areas.

“Wild roses, trillium cowslips, raspberries”

“Milkweed”

“Need to spend more time there.”

“Marsh birds”

“Lady Slippers, Water lilies, Wild roses, Milkweed. Streams feeding into river.”

“Lady Slipper.”

“Could use some significant natural restoration.”

“Remove exotics. Restore native vegetation.”

“Milkweed.”

“Good diversity interrupted by degraded areas and areas with invasives.”

“Most species can be seen.”

“Excellent.”

“Islands of excellent habitat, but many areas degraded by past pollution and current invasive species.”

“Common ferns, piping plovers. Islands of excellent habitat, fragmented as a whole.”

“Golden-winged warbler, Common loon, Bald eagle, Marsh wren.”

“Too many—birds, insects, plants, fish.”

“River Islands, Mission Creek.”

“Importance of plant communities like milkweed as keys to monarchs.”

“Trees for resting birds migrating.”

“Warblers and waterfowl. Blackbirds and deer.”

“Invasive buckthorn. Purple loosestrife.”
7. Describe areas of historical or cultural significance along the Western Waterfront Trail.

“Would like to know more about this [the trail].”

“I am sure there is some [cultural significance] but I’m not aware of what; I would like to know more.”

“Need more signs about the history.”

“Signs for Riverside Golf course, Duluth Speedway, hydro plant, boat racing, boat repair, bar & restaurant, “Connie & Ed’s Landing.”

“Trapping, bathing beach (Kingsbury), Devil’s Lake (AKA Spirit Lake)”

“U.S. Steel Site, Railroads!”

“Railroad, marina/shipyard.”

“There is a Wisconsin corner point next to the trail. Very interesting. Would like to know more about it.”

“Indian Point = major gathering point of western residents. Now all silted-in.”

“Logging, Native Americans, hydroelectric, industrial, commercial fishing, WLSSD-Clean Water Act, local advocates, Munger, etc.”

“Old base.”

“Outstanding, in places, but outstanding doesn’t mean everything is good.”

“Good place to show how pollution affects an area and how expensive it is to clean it up. Learn from our mistakes.”

“History of Morgan Park, also history of development and pollution and degradation—track how not to repeat past mistakes.”

“Indian Point campground. Will Munger’s house.”

“When it extends, Spirit Island, Lake Clough Island.”

“Wild Rice beds in bay.”

“Fishing. History: salvage yards, horse ranch.”

“Need to learn more history!”

“Industry vs. Nature.”

“Archaeological testing. Ice storage concrete on Stryker Bay.”
8. What are the most important things that people can learn about from the Western Waterfront Trail?

“Birders’ paradise.”

“Interesting, safe place to walk.”

“That it is there, and it is wonderful.”

“It exists!”

“It’s a public trail – not just for the neighbors.”

“History of the Western Waterfront Trail—Talk to Leo Oliver.”

“Riverside access and maintenance”

“Be respectful, interpretation info.”

“Wildlife is great.”

“Interpretive signage; historical, cultural, natural.”

“No roads below railroad, or by Tallas Island.”

“Historical significance, ecological significance…educate and involve youths! Low cost & accessibility.”

“Interpretive signs along the trail with historic/cultural info about the river, neighborhoods.”

“That it is there, that they are stewards.”

“To learn from our mistakes. For instance, logging of white pine to build Chicago.”

“What the area has to offer.”

“The plant and bird communities.”

“That it is there, and we want people, but retain ‘wild’ feel.”

“How beautiful and accessible these resources are.”

“The Minnesota side is about reclaiming and restoring in many places—and people can help.”

“That it is a very special place and one that must not be lost.”

“It is peaceful and relaxing. Good for stress relief.”

“The St. Louis River is a huge estuary that has been greatly restored.”

“Need to protect adjacent habitats.”

“Leave no trace.”

“Quality of experience: slow pace.”

“Where it is, public and available. Education, wildlife diversity, beautiful space to commune with nature.”
9. How would you like to see the Western Waterfront Trail improved?

"The bridge could use work – repair."
"Signage. Phone for information."
"More loops, signs, descriptions of what amenities/features that the trail connects."
"Keep it simple, don’t pave it. Needs Bathroom, access, signage."
"Keep it rustic. Keep the curves."
"More access. Better public information."
"Some entrance points need carved in stairs, some entrance areas need to steep-slippery grass are being eroded away."
"People with bad knees or legs can do stairs, but not slopes."
"Trail head parking; better access, extend trail to the south, better access signage."
"Better surface and access."
"Fix surface drainage infrastructure."
"Wider, dogs should be leashed. No bikes."
"Invasives removed, habitat improved, bring back some of the original habitat, e.g. White pine."
"Maintain Tallas Island area as natural habitat."
"Access; programs led by naturalists or organizations, in addition to birding. Discussing importance of the river ecosystem."
"Extended to Fon du Lac."
"Remove bases along the river."
"Change to St. Louis River Trail"

"Back to natural shoreline"
"Interpretive signage for: AOC, restoration, wildlife, trail history, watershed, history, invasives vs. natives."
"Leave Tallas Bay undeveloped."
"Have info on signs regarding animals, foliage, and fauna."
"Cultural history, natural history, preservation work displayed on signage, through hikes and tours, etc. Interpretative aspects like a center for naturalists."
"Signs—interpretive, historical, cultural. A great way to educate visitors."
"Access without over-development. Use conservative setbacks from the river to prevent development of the waterfront as in past was or repeating past mistakes. Interpretive signage."
"Are boat rentals available at Indian Point?"
"Raingarden—limited disturbance to the Western Waterfront Trail."
"It should be left as natural as possible."
"Guided birding tours. Improvement of water run off (rain gardens from upstream)."
"Rain gardens to manage stormwater."
"Exotic plants removed on natural lands. Native plants restored, protection of key habitats."
"No pavement."
"Extend it! Protect its ‘undeveloped’ character of a gravel path and limited human development."
"Extend it past Riverside."
10. Anything else you would like to express regarding the future of the Western Waterfront Trail?

“Get it expanded to co-exist with the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad.”

“It is a valuable asset and one deeply loved in the neighborhood.”

“Do not replicate the Munger Trail or Cross City Trail.”

“Stormwater control is needed (rain gardens and proper drainage)”

“Erosion control is important.”

“Rename it ‘St. Louis River Trail.’”

“Better access is very much needed. Parking areas.”

“Want to feel comfortable passing residential areas adjacent to the trail.”

“Needs for destinations and info at each, such as a kiosk to observe birds.”

“Remove buckthorn. Keep it maintained. Keep it clean and wide. Clean up the sediment from the bays.”

“Keep Tallas Island.”

“Folks here in the west are just as interested in natural environment, preservation, and restoration as Park Pointers.”

“Keep access as primitive as possible to preserve the work that is being done. It would be helpful if there was a self-guided tour along the trail—that is highlighted by organizations like SLRA or MN LT or Duluth A. Signs at significant, historical, ecological significant areas, etc.—this is good and bad.”

“Rain gardens”

“1. Preservation, 2. Restoration (How to create diversity, beauty, and ecological integrity.) 3. Strategic access in less sensitive areas.”

“Value of quiet underlay. I would like to see the history and role of the Ojibwe people shared through signs or people to tell their story.”

“Keep it wild, make it accessible enough that it keeps it’s character of quiet calm and accessible.”

“Please don’t over-develop. Make accessible. Don’t destroy bird habitat.”

“Value of quiet, undeveloped paces. Nature/walking trail vs. bike trail.”

“Train ride and walking trail vs. bike trail only.”

“Retain the natural resources and beauty that attracts people to the area and don’t over-develop the areas we love.”

“I would like to see a Minnesota Museum of Natural History on or near the zoo grounds with extensive trails—where the outdoors is the main part of the museum—it would be a trails hub.”

“Trails could include Kingsbury Creek linked to the Western Waterfront Trail.” Please keep it natural—this is the only area like this in Duluth.”

“Don’t change the shoreline or existing trail for recreation (e.g. swimming beach).”

“Museum and Education on River. Keep quiet areas quiet with lower density.”

“Maintain the “nature trail character of the trail, while carefully extending and allowing “soft access to the waterfront.”"
10. Anything else you would like to express regarding the future of the Western Waterfront Trail? (continued from last page)

“Educate residents of another treasure in Duluth’s midst.”

“Keep the waterway open. No building near waterway like out east (homes on edge). Native plants instead. Learning Centers like Hartley with Duluth Zoo to teach what is out there. A place for school children. Please don’t use black top near the water areas!”

“We need to inspire our youth to get out there with the City’s help.”

“Zoo as a hot spot to lead out to trails. Zoo as a meeting place.”

“Not a “user” of the trail but do recognize the importance of diverse areas designed to allow the wide use and non-use to preserve the resources.”

“Need to maintain wildness.”

“Ged rid of buckthorn, better culverts. Are they taking out trees to widen trail? Who is going to maintain the areas that are developed?”

“We would like to see guided hikes, connects to the zoo to play up natural history aspects and provide interpretation, continued “nature trail” aspect, protection of quiet areas.”

“This area needs improved water retention and rain gardens to manage stormwater and maintain trails/roads long term.”
Conclusions

The response to the discussion questions and survey questions far exceeded any expectations that organizers of the citizen forum may have had. The following are observations and highlights of some of the ideas expressed:

1. Keep the ‘natural’ feel of the Western Waterfront Trail.

2. Improve accessibility of the Western Waterfront Trail, especially throughout all seasons and for all abilities.

3. There is a general concern over invasive species and a desire to have plant communities and habitat restored and preserved.

4. There is a notion that this place can be a resource for teaching people of all ages about the history of this place, and that there are many stories to tell.

5. Stormwater runoff and erosion are common concerns. Many people expressed support for more raingardens and improved culverts to help with this.

6. There seems to be a need for multiple trail types, as a way to accommodate conflicting user groups. Many people would like to limit the use of bicycles along the trail. However, bicyclists appear to be one of the main users of the trail.

7. Areas that are considered valuable are interrupted by areas that are considered ‘degraded’. There seems to be a strong desire to create a continuous trail with visual and habitat value along the entire stretch.

8. Similarly, there is a common desire to extend the Western Waterfront Trail further, connecting with more destinations throughout West Duluth.

9. Overall, the Western Waterfront Trail seems to be highly valued and prized amongst those who use it and have experienced it. There seems to be a common desire to bring more people to this place, to experience the quiet beauty. There is generally an opposition to ‘over-development’ or heavy-handed design measures.

10. There seems to be a lack of awareness or knowledge of the full scope of work that has already been proposed for the Western Waterfront Trail. Perhaps some clarification from the City and other involved groups would clarify some of the concerns expressed.