

Friends of Lester Park Planning Meeting and Open House

Background

I've been working with the City of Duluth, DXC, COGGS, and other interested groups over the last month to judge local interest and begin coordinating efforts to save the Lester Sports Chalet and revitalize its identity as a trail hub and endurance community center in Eastern Duluth.

I attended a visit of the chalet this fall with Gary Larson, the City's Long-Range Trails Master Plan Coordinator and former TD for the Salt Lake City Olympics, and Joe Miller, the City representative for trails and facilities. From that meeting, I learned that the fate of the ski chalet is dependent on the interest of sports groups in Duluth to renovate and manage the facility.

The city is planning to demolish the building if no interested group steps up to the job of care-taking the building. In my conversations with Duluth ski coaches, skiers, bikers and runners, I have heard quite a bit of individual interest expressed about having an indoor facility available in Lester Park. I feel with the proper discussion, planning and implementation, an endurance sports group or Friends group could effectively manage and benefit from a chalet or similar building in a highly utilized location as Lester Park.

History of the Lester Sports Chalet

The Lakeview Sports building was formerly a hockey chalet that was managed and run entirely by volunteers. The hockey arena was shut down in the last few years due to decreased youth participation in Duluth hockey programming. From the former manager of the hockey program, I've obtained estimated averages of the operating costs for heat and electricity in the building during its operational period. Costs were around \$6000 per year.

Prior to its identity as a hockey chalet, this building was the Lester Ski Chalet. There was a tubing hill across the road, and before that, two ski jumps and a jumping hill. The chalet itself is structurally sound and could be renovated to operating capacity. It has plumbing, electricity, two changing rooms, and a brand new garage for grooming equipment, but there is much work to be done. The city even has the potential for a pilot project at Lester to install energy-efficient LED lighting on the trails at Lester via a grant from Minnesota Power.

Eastern Ski Chalet

Another salient point concerns the future of Snowflake Nordic Ski Center. As much as our community appreciates Snowflake and George Hovland, the likelihood of Snowflake continuing as a community ski center has reached a tenuous phase. Therefore, the Duluth cross country ski community must step up to provide a safe, warm, and comfortable neighborhood ski chalet in which recreational and competitive skiers alike can continue socializing, resting, changing clothing, and

using the facilities after skiing. Though facilities do exist at Spirit Mtn., but they are geographically isolated.

Action Plan

I believe if we as Friends of Lester Park, along with the support of COGGS, DXC, and other interested parties in Duluth, can step up and combine our efforts to revitalize the chalet on Seven Bridges Road. An Eastern Duluth trails hub would be a highly utilized venue for community endurance sports engagement. We, as a group, would need to develop a comprehensive feasibility study and produce a well defined project plan outlining the capital requirements for the facility and the funding available for maintenance, programming, and amenities at this proposed location. This would be presented to the City Parks Dept. to be reviewed and accepted as a parks development project.

Are you interested?

Please let me or Dave know if you'd like to talk further about this prospect. We are planning to host an open house for anyone interested in touring the facility next week sometime -- and we will schedule based on interest and availability.

We would love for you to attend this planning meeting at Sara's Table Sunday, December 15th, at 3:00p.m. Again, please RSVP to me (antofte@gmail.com) or Dave (djohnson@marshallschool.org) if you plan on attending.