











Taconite Harbor Advisory Committee – Visioning – What We Heard

Overview

- Having completed several educational sessions describing the physical characteristics of the Taconite Harbor site, the environmental and regulatory context, and the economic, market and funding landscape, the advisory committee moved on to exploring their vision for the site.
- Each advisory committee member completed a visioning questionnaire to gather their ideas about their vision for the site, including the greatest assets and challenges, as well as threats and opportunities to achieve that vision.
- At the advisory committee meeting on January 28th, each advisory committee member shared their vision for the Taconite Harbor site with the rest of the group.
- The summary below includes input from both the questionnaire and the vision each advisory committee member articulated in the meeting.

Priority Outcomes for Reuse

Guiding Question: Recognizing that many factors are important and that identifying something as a higher priority than another does not mean that they are not both essential to a successful outcome, please rank the following in order of their relative importance - most important to least important. You will have an opportunity to expand on these priorities in subsequent questions.

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| 1. Reuse that prioritizes economic development, tax base & employment |  |
| 2. Reuse that realizes the full benefits of the harbor as an asset |  |
| 3. Reuse that maximizes opportunities for hospitality, lodging & special events etc. |  |
| 4. Reuse that maximizes opportunities for outdoor recreation, trail head, winter sports, regional features |  |
| 5. Reuse that maximizes opportunities for residential development (ownership or rental housing) |  |
| 6. Reuse that prioritizes the natural & cultural heritage of the iconic location |  |
| 7. Reuse that maximizes opportunities for industrial development |  |
| 8. Reuse that prioritizes natural resource restoration & conservation |  |
| 9. Reuse that maximizes opportunities to accommodate a unique use for the site |  |
| 10. Reuse that celebrates and honors the importance of the site and the role it played in the story of the Iron Range |  |

Challenges identified by advisory committee respondents fell into four overlapping categories:

- **Environmental & Infrastructure Constraints**
 - Uncertainty around environmental contamination.
 - Cleanup levels suitable for industrial reuse but not necessarily for residential or park uses without further remediation.
 - Limited natural gas, and power capacity for intensive uses.
- **Governance & Process**
 - Multi layered regulatory approvals (local, state, federal).
 - Long timelines and bureaucratic complexity.
 - Permitting uncertainty for both industrial and non-industrial uses.
- **Adjacency & Coordination**
 - Cleveland Cliffs' adjacent property and rail corridor, with unknown future plans.
 - Concern about compatibility if heavy shipping or rail activities resume.
- **Economics & Feasibility**
 - High upfront costs for remediation and infrastructure.
 - Difficulty attracting capital without a clear, compelling business case.

Advisory Committee Vision For Taconite Harbor

While visions varied in emphasis, there were some common themes across many of the visions articulated.

- **Strongly Supported Elements**

- Multi use development integrating several compatible functions.
- Active harbor use, potentially including: Marina (recreational and charter), working port functions, marine services and amenities.
- Employment generating uses, particularly: Light industrial or local/small business manufacturing, marine related industries, energy or grid support infrastructure.
- Public lake access, extension of the Gitchi-Gami trail, and shoreline stewardship.
- Honoring industrial and Iron Range heritage through interpretation and design.

- **Frequently Proposed Uses (Not Mutually Exclusive)**

- Light industrial / business park with local ownership and local materials.
- Hospitality scaled to North Shore context (cabins, small lodges, retreat or adventure oriented).
- Marina with associated services (fuel, repair, supplies, food).
- Limited residential tied to employment: Workforce housing, senior housing or assisted living
- Energy and climate aligned infrastructure: Battery storage or grid support, renewable or non-combustion energy, biomass or biochar production linked to forest management
- Public gathering or cultural destination elements: Performance or event venues, learning campus or educational extension (examples – Wolf Ridge ELC or North House Folk School)

- **Key Guardrails Identified**

- Avoid low wage, tourism only outcomes.
- Avoid large scale speculative housing or second home enclaves.
- Ensure industrial uses are modern, clean, and compatible.
- Keep shoreline access largely public and environmentally protected.

- **Key Principles**

- Balance, not single use development.
- Community benefit over extractive profit.
- Living wage jobs first, housing aligned with employment.
- Environmental stewardship equal to economic goals.
- Flexibility over time, recognizing uncertainties and long horizons.

Vision A: Mixed Use Development

Leverage the site's exceptional natural assets, deep-water protected harbor, and Highway 61 visibility to create a compact, walkable, mixed-use development that serves North Shore travelers and residents year-round. The redevelopment will blend a recreational harbor and marina, destination hospitality (resort/hotel and event center), a mix of higher density housing (workforce and/or senior), coastal restaurants and retail, and boardwalk-oriented public shoreline access, supported by gateway services (fuel, convenience, outfitters) and a pedestrian-scaled street grid. Development will be designed to protect water quality and shoreline character, honor the site's history through interpretation and placemaking, and remain adaptable so that adjacent working waterfront and compatible industrial/shipping uses can coexist as market needs and technology evolve.

Vision B: Light Industrial, Energy and Service Hub

Leverage the site's rare industrial zoning, deep-water protected working harbor, existing energy and transportation infrastructure, and Highway 61 visibility to establish a resilient industrial, service, and energy hub that supports high-quality jobs, long-term tax base growth, and regional economic diversification on the North Shore. The redevelopment will prioritize light and modern industrial uses, port-dependent and logistics activities, green infrastructure, and clean energy and grid-support functions - such as energy storage, renewable generation, and utility service - while retaining the harbor's capacity for shipping and marine operations that cannot be replicated elsewhere in the region. Development may include workforce-oriented housing or lodging and supportive commercial development tied directly to employment needs, located and designed to avoid conflicts with industrial operations. By balancing working-waterfront functions with carefully selected complementary uses, the site will remain a productive industrial asset while contributing meaningfully to the economic stability, energy resilience, and quality of life for Cook County and the broader North Shore community.