

The Duluth Hillside neighborhood has many benefits, including a central location, a close proximity to downtown Duluth and incredible views of Lake Superior. However, the Hillside continues to spark fear in people who are unfamiliar with the neighborhood.

“I understand why coming from a safe, upper income neighborhood and coming into the Hillside to go to work brings fear in people,” Duluth Mayor Don Ness said. “It’s different and people get nervous about the differences they see.”

While driving through the Hillside, buildings appear run-down, houses are clustered together, and the roads are narrow while covered in potholes. The Hillside has more to offer as a community, such as affordable housing, which is ideal for college students. When looking through a car window as you drive through a neighborhood, the full essence of what the neighborhood offers isn’t in sight.

“There are a lot of misperceptions about the Hillside,” Ness said. “I grew up in the Hillside and I live in the Hillside today. I think people who are driving through the neighborhood will see something and characterize the entire neighborhood by what they saw through their windshield in an unfair way.”

The City of Duluth is working on helping people feel safer in the Hillside neighborhood via Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. CPTED reduces crime by creating healthier environments and improving appearances in a neighborhood.

“If you’re walking out into a neighborhood where there is graffiti, a run-down building, the road is ugly, weeds are growing in a vacant lot and the walkways aren’t lit well, the environment feels unsafe,” said Sergeant Gayle Holton of the Duluth Police Department.

Both Holton and Ness made it clear that random crime is very rare, and there is usually an underlying reason as to why a robbery or shooting occurs. Most of the time, the crimes that appear in the media involve a drug deal that didn’t go well.

“If you’re not involved in the drug trade, you’re going to be safe,” Ness said.

UMD senior Morgan Bretzke has lived in the Duluth Hillside neighborhoods for over three years.

“I do love how I’m within walking distance of at least three parks, including Chester,” Bretzke said. “It makes getting outside easy.” She decided to move to Hillside because few rentals near UMD allowed pets and she needed a place that would allow her to keep her dog.

“I think there’s some assumption that this area is more dangerous or run-down or something, but for the most part that’s a lie,” Bretzke said.

Bretzke only recalls one experience that was frightening.

“A guy who was strung out decided to hang out in our back driveway all night. Other than that most people stay to themselves.”

Crime in Duluth has significantly decreased since The Last Place on Earth closed in 2013.

“It really attracted a lot of people to that area that wouldn’t have been there otherwise — most of them being criminals,” said Holton. “They did their business right there, and they got high right there, on the street corners and in the alleys. They were very aggressive panhandlers.”

In a 2013 survey conducted by One Roof, a community housing organization located in Central Hillside, 84 percent of residents in the Hillside were satisfied with the neighborhood.

In the same survey, 75 percent of Essentia Health employees who work on the main campus stated they felt that the surrounding Hillside community wasn’t safe.

Despite how employees at Essentia Health feel about the Hillside, local business owners admire the community as much as the residents.

Sharon Murphy, the general manager of the Whole Foods Co-Op, has been a resident of the Hillside for 35 years and said that she has a strong commitment to her neighborhood.

“We try to make it a better world because there’s nowhere else to go,” Murphy said.

Murphy said that vacant buildings are bad for the neighborhood, and it makes her happy to see other businesses moving in. Sharon Kangas, the owner of The Red Door, the newest consignment store in the Hillside, agrees that the more businesses that move into the Hillside, the better everything will look.

The Duluth Hillside is divided into two different neighborhoods: Central Hillside and East Hillside. According to the Hillside Neighborhood Revitalization Plan created by the Local Initiatives of Support Corporation, the Hillside is a “working class neighborhood(s) prized by its residents for its affordable housing, closeness to jobs, and convenient transit service.”

“Sometimes a neighborhood can feel unfriendly just because it doesn’t have the trees, it doesn’t have the green spaces,” said Pam Kramer, executive director of LISC in Duluth. “There are some efforts to make people feel like this is a neighborhood, not a drive-by location.”

At LISC, their mission is to “invest in building healthy and sustainable neighborhoods,” Kramer said.

The most recent project that LISC has been working on in the Hillside neighborhoods is the Steve O'Neil Apartments, located in the Central Hillside. These apartments offer a place for those who have suffered with chronic homelessness or persistent offenders that want to get a fresh start.

"Neighborhoods evolve all the time," Ness said. "The Hillside is continuing to grow and evolve as well."

**Mayor Don Ness** (218-730-5230) - I contacted him via email and asked for an interview. We met at his office and discussed his point of view on issues and the perception of the Hillside neighborhoods.

**Sergeant Holton** (218-730-5628) - Holton is the sergeant for the east policing area in Duluth. I contacted Holton via email for an interview. We met at UMD and he talked with me about how the Duluth Police are trying to help make the Hillside area better, and also discussed with me the reality of crime in the Hillside.

**Sharon Murphy** (218-728-0884) - I talked with Sharon Murphy for my last article, The Red Door. I had some good information leftover from that interview that was useful for this article.

**Sharon Kangas** (218-428-3719) - I interviewed Sharon for her store The Red Door. She had good insight about the Hillside community, which included information that was valuable for this article.