



2026 DIGIN Midwest Project of the Year – Award Submission

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- **Project Name:** Lead Water Service Replacement, Fairmount 1
- **Project Location:** Duluth, MN (Fairmount neighborhood)

Project Description

Lead Water Service Replacement, Fairmount 1 was a complex public utilities project completed for the City of Duluth to replace aging lead water service lines throughout the Fairmount neighborhood. Veit replaced lead service lines at 534 locations, including 454 residential properties and 80 public sites, while also constructing 19 water main extensions to modernize infrastructure that no longer met current standards. The work included installation of more than 20,000 linear feet of HDPE water service while coordinating a daily workforce of approximately 25 people, including Veit employees and subcontractors.

What made this project exceptionally challenging was the scale of coordination required. Veit was not only working for the City of Duluth but effectively serving more than 450 individual homeowners and stakeholders, each with unique schedules, property conditions, and expectations. Crews worked through dozens of city blocks while maintaining a production rate of more than four homes per day over approximately seven months. The project ran from April 15, 2025, through November 26, 2025, with a contract value of \$7.8 million.

This project was part of Minnesota's statewide initiative to identify and replace all lead service lines by 2033. The effort is supported through a combination of state and federal funding, including \$240 million appropriated by the Minnesota Legislature in 2023 and



approximately \$40 million in annual federal funding. As one of the largest lead service replacement efforts in northern Minnesota, the Fairmount project directly contributed to improving public health, modernizing critical infrastructure, and advancing the state's long-term clean drinking water goals.

Veit's goals for the project were to safely remove lead service lines, modernize aging infrastructure, maintain high production, minimize disruption to residents, and restore each property to a condition equal to or better than when work began. Successfully balancing production, precision, restoration quality, and homeowner experience was critical to the project's success.

Project Challenges

The greatest challenge was coordinating a high-volume construction operation across hundreds of active residential properties while maintaining production, safety, and customer satisfaction. Before work could begin at any residence, the team needed to complete utility locates, inspections, pre-construction documentation, traffic control measures, and homeowner communication. Simultaneously, crews had to manage outdated contact information, ownership changes, rental properties, homeowner scheduling conflicts, and last-minute reschedules while keeping a fast-moving production schedule on track.

The project also required navigating highly congested underground utility corridors. Crews encountered unknown, abandoned, and inaccurately documented utilities throughout the work area, creating new challenges at virtually every location. Across the project, Veit excavated and drilled around more than 2,000 known utilities while maintaining zero at-fault utility strikes, a result that required meticulous planning, verification, and execution.

Execution inside occupied homes added another level of complexity. Every property presented unique conditions, including varying basement depths, crawl spaces, access limitations, and different service replacement requirements. Crews were required to drill from distances ranging from approximately 5 feet to 100 feet while accurately hitting an approximately 1-foot by 1-foot target inside occupied basements. At the same time, the team needed to manage pedestrian traffic, maintain safe public access, complete restoration work throughout active neighborhoods, and ensure long-term installation quality.



Project Innovation and Solutions

The most innovative aspect of this project was not a single piece of equipment, but the integrated planning and execution system developed to manage over 500 sites and hundreds of stakeholders simultaneously. Veit created a planning model that translated dozens of unit-price bid items into estimated quantities and durations for each individual site. This allowed the team to strategically sequence neighborhoods, forecast production, coordinate subcontractors, and provide reliable scheduling information to the City of Duluth and homeowners. The result was a predictable and transparent process that helped maintain production while minimizing disruption to residents.

Field innovation also played a significant role. Due to the narrow streets, tight setbacks, mature neighborhoods, and heavily congested underground utility conditions, traditional directional drilling methods were often impractical. Veit utilized pit-launched directional drilling, allowing crews to work within confined urban environments, reduce restoration impacts, and maintain the precision necessary to connect to residential services within occupied homes. This approach significantly minimized property disturbance while meeting the City's high expectations for restoration quality.

Collaboration was another key contributor to project success. Continuous communication between Veit's field and office teams, City of Duluth representatives, inspectors, subcontractors, and homeowners allowed the team to adapt quickly to changing site conditions and maintain production. Daily coordination meetings, quantity reviews, homeowner outreach, door-knocking efforts, and proactive schedule management helped keep all stakeholders informed and aligned. This collaborative approach enabled Veit to sustain a production pace of more than four homes per day while maintaining exceptional quality and safety performance.

Anything Else About the Project You'd Like to Share?

This project stands apart because it combined critical public infrastructure improvements with an exceptionally high-touch customer experience. Veit crews were working inside occupied homes every day, protecting personal property, maintaining cleanliness, and striving to leave every residence in a condition where homeowners felt "like we were never there." The team's commitment to professionalism and communication helped build trust with residents throughout the project and generated positive feedback from homeowners and city representatives alike.



Safety performance was another defining achievement. Over the course of the project, the team conducted 242 safety meetings, including Job Hazard Analyses (JHAs), toolbox talks, and subcontractor orientations. The project was completed with zero injuries and zero at-fault utility strikes, despite crews excavating and drilling around more than 2,000 known utilities within the project limits. These results were achieved through strict adherence to positive utility verification practices, detailed planning, and a culture that prioritized safety, quality, and eliminating rework.

Beyond successfully replacing lead service lines for hundreds of Duluth residents, this project established a repeatable delivery model that Veit has since leveraged on four subsequent lead service replacement contracts totaling more than 2,000 additional service replacements. The combination of strategic planning, homeowner coordination, innovative trenchless construction methods, collaboration, and industry-leading safety performance demonstrates how complex utility infrastructure can be delivered efficiently while maintaining public trust and minimizing community disruption.

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/8nxnl8c7shujx2q760fws/AHvJO_I-QDIZba43XOSggwM?rlkey=6v0cqfpxasgj15flki60r0dti&st=z52yl9hz&dl=0