

**PLANNING COMMISSION
BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA
Regular Meeting – April 24, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Don Heinonen called the regular meeting of the City of Bemidji Planning Commission to order at **5:30 p.m.** Roll call was taken, and the pledge of allegiance was recited.

Members present: Faver, Heinonen, Lemmer, McCoy, Peterson (via WebEx), Meehlhause.
Members absent: None.

Staff Present: Planning Director Jamin Carlson, Assistant Planner Melissa Fahrenbruch, Planning Administrative Assistant Ainslee Krause.

Others Present: Troy Gilchrist (via WebEx), Scott Grover, Leslie Grover, Stella Fern, Fred, Lisa Knights, Mark Wilkowski, Tim Marco, Khasi Merseeth.

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

Chair Heinonen called for any amendments to the agenda. Motion by **Lemmer**, second by **Meehlhause**, to approve the agenda. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

MINUTES

The minutes for the **March 27, 2025**, Planning Commission meeting were presented for approval. Motion by **Meehlhause**, second by **Lemmer**, approving minutes as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

VISITORS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA: No appearance.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Hearings:

PLANNING CASE: VARIANCE REQUEST – MURRAY SURVEYING REPRESENTING SCOTT & LESLIE GROVER:

Fahrenbruch presented the planning case request: Murray Surveying Inc., representing Scott & Leslie Grover, is requesting a variance from OHWL setback requirements to build/replace a garage on an existing lot of record. The subject property is located at 5350 Elliot Road NE (PIN 800306900) in the City of Bemidji. This parcel is within the R-3 Suburban Residential zoning district and the Shoreland Overlay (Forested River Segment). The requested variances are as follows:

1. A reduction of 62 feet from the OHW setback per Section 28-355 requirement of 150 feet from the ordinary high-water mark and at the building line.

Conclusions based on the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan were presented in the packet including conditions and findings of fact.

Commission members made no comments.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **5:39 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Scott Grover, applicant, addressed the commission.
- Stella Fern, neighboring property owner to the north, addressed the commission and expressed concern that the septic system is right on the property line. Fern requested that the new garage not encroach on her property. Staff addressed that the proposed structure will be about 24 feet away from the property line at the closest point.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **5:43 PM**.

Motion by **Peterson**, second by **Meehlhause**, to recommend approval of the variance request for parcel 800306900, with the conditions and findings of fact as presented in the packet.

Commission members had additional comments:

- Meehlhause expressed support for the garage being pulled further away from the property line.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **May 12, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PLANNING CASE: INTERIM USE PERMIT REQUEST – VETTER & WALD LLP REPRESENTING NORTHWEST TIRE:

Fahrenbruch presented the planning case request: Vetter & Wald LLP representing Northwest Tire is requesting an Interim Use Permit (IUP) for a semi-trailer exceeding 400 square feet maximum for outdoor storage purposes in the B-2 General Commercial zoning district & Hwy 197 Overlay. The subject property is located at 402 Paul Bunyan Dr SE (PIN 800362900) in the City of Bemidji.

Conclusions based on the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan were presented in the packet including conditions and findings of fact.

Commission members made the following comments:

- Faver inquired if the container is encroaching on the alley right-of-way. Staff clarified that it is not.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **5:48 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Fred, representing Northwest Tire, addressed the commission and noted that they removed their previous container due to the condition and brought in a new one. Fred addressed their need for additional storage and noted there is currently hard packed sand underneath the tires and proper blocking underneath the front foot pads.
- Lisa Knights, 416 Wood Ave SE, addressed that the trailer is not causing problems in the neighborhood and cannot be seen from Paul Bunyan Dr SE and can be seen immediately from 4th St SE. Knights noted that Northwest Tire has been a good neighbor and expressed that the container does not impede the alleyway and that the fence is an unnecessary requirement.
- Mark Wilkowski, 405 4th St SE, expressed that the container is fine and that a fence would be a waste of time and money.

Hearing no further comments, Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **5:54 PM**.

Commission members had additional comments:

- Peterson inquired if a fence is required. Staff addressed that screening is required under the Ordinance. Peterson and staff discussed screening options.
- Peterson expressed support for not requiring a fence since the container is not bothering the neighbors. Staff addressed that a variance would be required if the applicant wants to vary from the screening requirement.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, second by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the interim use permit request for parcel 800362900, with the conditions and findings of fact as presented in the packet.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver.** Nays: **None.**

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **May 12, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PLANNING CASE: CONCEPT PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT REQUEST – MARCO MCLANE DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTING GREATER BEMIDJI:

Carlson presented the planning case request: Marco McLane Development representing Greater Bemidji is requesting a Concept Planned Unit Development (PUD) to develop a multi-phase project which would include a YMCA Community Wellness Center and other future developments within the Urban Renaissance (UR) zoning district and the Shoreland Overlay. The subject property is located at 101 Minnesota Ave NW (PIN 800034499) in the City of Bemidji (also known as the rail corridor).

Conclusions based on the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan were presented in the packet including conditions and findings of fact.

Commission members made the following comments:

- Peterson questioned who would maintain the park area. Staff addressed that is not known at this time.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **6:05 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Tim Marco, Marco McLane Development, addressed the commission and reviewed the project. Marco addressed that Marco McLane Development and Greater Bemidji are not the developer of the project, but will be putting together the plan for a future developer to implement.
- Marco addressed the greenspace/potential park is currently planned to be private and not public. Marco expressed concern over the plans required for the preliminary/final phases when the uses for the additional buildings planned have not been teased out yet.
- Marco addressed the plan for the plats and identified that the current plan is to plat lots 1A and 1B separately, clarifying that the building along Minnesota Avenue will be its own lot, the YMCA will be its own lot, and everything east in phase II will be platted as an out lot.
- Lemmer expressed concern over impact on the Veteran's Memorial and Historical Society. Marco clarified that they will not be moving Minnesota Ave and the parking would not change.
- Meehlhause and Marco discussed the history of the project.
- Meehlhause inquired if the MN Energy parking lot is going to be acquired. Marco addressed that it has been discussed, but no purchase agreement is in place.
- Meehlhause inquired if connecting Minnesota Avenue to Midway Drive has been considered. Marco addressed that it has been discussed.
- Meehlhause inquired about the gold medal park plan. Marco addressed that that park plan has been removed from the current site plan, however there is still a pond and open greenspace in that southeast corner.
- Meehlhause addressed support for flexibility within the development.
- McCoy inquired about any plans for screening between the property line and the railroad. McCoy inquired if a complete dig of the site has been done to make sure there are not artifacts or cultural resources that may be impacted and if there is a plan in place for those. McCoy inquired if the applicant had discussed realigning the trail with the DNR.
- Staff addressed that the trail is owned by the city.
- Marco addressed that the city is in discussions with the railroad regarding screening.

- Marco addressed that the city is commissioning the cleanup and noted that the review of the site will be part of the bid package.
- Heinonen inquired about a current business in the corridor and if they would be relocated prior to the soil mitigation. Marco addressed that the city is working with local businesses and buildings.
- Marco addressed the tentative start date for cleanup is July or August and may go into next year.
- Heinonen expressed concern over the proposed section of the trail that will be a 90-degree turn and requested that this be reviewed.
- Heinonen expressed support for including residential or mixed-use commercial in this area and complying with emergency vehicle access requirements.
- Lemmer discussed the benefits of having the trail connecting people to the YMCA.
- Marco addressed that they have alternative plans for the trail and will take this feedback. Into consideration.
- Khasi Merseeth, whose husband owns Downtown Meats, inquired about the corner area. Merseeth expressed concern for construction affecting access to their parking lot.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **6:29 PM**.

Additional comments provided:

- Jessica Saucedo (via WebEx), neighboring property owner at 303 Railroad St SW, inquired about the buffer map. Staff addressed.
- Saucedo addressed no other concerns.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, second by **Peterson**, to recommend approval of the concept planned unit development request for parcel 800034499, with the findings of fact as presented in the packet.

Commission members made additional comments:

- Meehlhause and staff discussed snowmobile use on the trails.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **May 12, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision on the concept phase.

UPCOMING COMMISSION MEETINGS

- Thursday, May 22, 2025 5:30 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by **Meehlhause**, second by **Lemmer**, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at **6:37 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



Ainslee Krause
Planning & Building Administrative Assistant

PC Minutes approved and attested by:



Planning Commission Representative