

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA

Monday, June 23, 2025

**City Hall
317 4th Street NW
5:30 PM**



1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

2. BUSINESS

- a) Neilson Reise Facility Use/Grant Update
- b) City Operations Discussion

3. ADJOURN

MEMBER ATTENDING REMOTELY

COUNCILMEMBER RIVERA WILL BE PARTICIPATING VIA WEBEX. Members of the public may monitor the meeting by accessing the remote meeting link on the city website.

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM



Meeting Date: June 23, 2025
Action Requested: Grant Update
Prepared By: Rich Spiczka, City Manager

Background:

On December 16th, 2024 the Council approved a letter of support for Bemidji Girls Fastpitch, Bemidji Youth Baseball and Bemidji Youth Soccer quasi partnership for a grant to renovate the Neilson Reise Arena to turn it into a multi-use space and lease it from the City. They were unsuccessful in their original grant, but successful in a grant from the George W. Neilson Foundation to get their project going. They have also formed the Bemidji Indoor Sports Commission (BISC) since that time and are here as that organization tonight.

Details and information are included in the supplement.

Recommendation:

Council becoming informed enough to create an action item at the July 7th, 2025 council meeting authorizing the City Manager to enter into lease negotiations with the BSIC for the Neilson Reise Arena that is owned by the City of Bemidji.



June 16th, 2025

Bemidji City Council
317 4th St NW
Bemidji, MN 56601

Dear Council Members and Staff,

In July 2024, Bemidji Girls Fastpitch Softball (BGFSA), Bemidji Youth Baseball (BYBA), and Bemidji Youth Soccer (BYS) began exploring the Neilson-Reise Arena as a potential indoor sports facility to serve our organizations and the broader community. In December 2024, we presented our initial proposal to the Council and received approval to begin lease negotiations for the facility.

Since then, we are pleased to share that the George W. Neilson Foundation has generously awarded us a \$250,000 grant to help initiate the remodel. Our three organizations have since formed the **Bemidji Indoor Sports Commission, Inc (BISC)**, which will be set up as a 501c3 and are actively moving forward with the next steps of the project. We are sincerely grateful for the support of the City Manager and Council thus far and are ready to begin formal lease agreement discussions.

Renovation Plans

After several site walkthroughs and research into comparable facilities within our region, we intend to renovate the space to include:

- Artificial turf
- Two retractable batting cages (with a long-term goal of four)
- A walking track
- Handicap-accessible lift
- Fire alarm system
- Keyless entry system
- Protective film on spectator windows
- Updated locker room and workout spaces
- Fresh paint and general cleaning

At the request of the George W. Neilson Foundation, the renovated space will be named the **Neilson Fieldhouse**. Please see the attached AI-generated rendering of the renovation concept.

Operational and Usage Structure

The BISC Board of Directors is currently developing a usage agreement for the space. While some details are still being finalized, priority use will be granted to:

- BGFS, BYBA, and BYS (approximately 1,000 members)
- Youth sports organizations
- Community groups and adult leagues

Operating costs will be primarily supported through modest membership fees from the three founding organizations. Additional revenue will be generated through hourly rentals to other organizations and groups.

BISC is actively pursuing further donations and sponsorship opportunities. A website with online scheduling will soon be available for both members and the public. We are also engaged in discussions with other community organizations and look forward to solidifying these partnerships.

Timeline

Our goal is to open the renovated Neilson Fieldhouse by **October 1, 2025**. We are prepared to begin coordination efforts with our partners and volunteers immediately. We are incredibly grateful for the growing community support and are confident this facility will positively impact our youth and community for generations to come.

Sincerely,



BISC Board of Directors

Caralee Nowak, President – Bemidji Girls Fastpitch Softball Association

Robert Elliott, Vice President – Bemidji Youth Soccer

Will Tysver, Treasurer - Bemidji Girls Fastpitch Softball Association

Kelly Martinka, Secretary – Bemidji Youth Soccer

Shannon Miller, At Large – Bemidji Youth Baseball

Heather Zimmerl, At Large – Bemidji Youth Baseball

Before:



After (AI Rendering):





June 20, 2025

City of Bemidji
Attn: Bemidji City Council
317 4th Street NW
Bemidji, Minnesota 56601

Dear Council Members:

As President of First National Bank Bemidji, I'm writing to express my strongest support for the Bemidji Indoor Sports Commission and the proposed Neilson Fieldhouse project. In my opinion, this is not only the best current project in Bemidji—it's one of the most meaningful long-term investments our community can make in our youth, families, and quality of life.

Currently, nearly 1,000 youth in Bemidji participate in organized soccer, baseball, and softball programs. These numbers continue to grow, yet our available indoor practice space has not kept pace. Long winters and unpredictable shoulder seasons limit safe and effective training opportunities. Simply put, we're out of room. The Neilson Fieldhouse will be a game-changer—not just for the athletes who use it, but for the entire community that rallies around them.

At First National Bank Bemidji, we've always believed in the power of youth sports to build character, leadership, and community. Over the years, we've consistently supported youth sports programs—financially and otherwise—because we know how foundational they are to the fabric of Bemidji. That support will continue with this project. We fully intend to contribute financially to help make the Neilson Fieldhouse a reality.

This is more than a building; it's a statement about who we are and what we value as a community. The Bemidji Indoor Sports Commission has put forth a thoughtful and timely solution to a well-documented need. We urge others to join us in backing this vision with the enthusiasm, investment, and leadership it deserves.

Sincerely,

Ryan Welle
President
First National Bank Bemidji

MAIN BANK
1600 Paul Bunyan Drive NW
218-751-2430

SOUTH BANK
607 Washington Avenue South
218-333-4396

MAILING ADDRESS
PO Box 670
Bemidji, MN 56619-0670

www.fnbbemidji.com

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM



Meeting Date: June 23, 2025
Action Requested: City Operations Direction
Prepared By: Rich Spiczka, City Manager

Background:

As your City Manager, I have spent the last 18 months evaluating our City operations in order to affect change to create a better service to our community. The supplemental documents are a mission in which as a City staff we will begin working under and some of the initial changes I am proposing to our City operations. The goal of all of these changes are to Build a Better Bemidji internally so we can serve better externally.

Recommendation:

Staff recommendation is for council to provide feedback to City staff so items can be ready for council action on July 7th, 2025.

City Operations Discussion

As employees and elect of the City of Bemidji, we have signed up for “public service.” The definition of public service is the services provided by a government or regulated by a government in the interests of public good. The goal is to SERVE the needs of the public. As employees and elect we are PUBLIC SERVANTS. In order to live that we are moving forward focusing on a three word mission in which we as a City of Bemidji staff will operate:

SERVICE. EFFICIENCY. CONNECTIVITY.

SERVICE

We need to strive to SERVE above all else and at all times. Our goal should be how to best serve our public and base our decisions on that goal first and foremost. We need to focus on the action of service, because as public servants our job is to SERVE.

EFFICIENCY

We need to find efficiencies in any and all areas. Our focus should be to SERVE the best we can while being as efficient as possible. These efficiencies can be budget related, structure related and processes related. We need to do all we can to find efficiencies even if it means our day to day changes.

CONNECTIVITY

We need to become a more connected organization. We need to be more connected staff to council. We need to be more connected staff to public. We need to be more connected staff to staff/department to department. Most importantly, we need to be more connected to the mission of SERVICE.

City Operations Adjustment Recommendations and Notifications

Contract out Civil Legal Services

The City of Bemidji has historically used Flaherty and Hood for legal matters that needed more nuance or a secondary opinion for how to proceed. Since October of 2024, we have used Flaherty and Hood to handle our civil matters in totality after we were forced to reassign our City Attorney to do strictly prosecution due to our staffing shortages which are continuing and indefinite. This temporary all inclusive shift allowed us to evaluate what it would look like if we changed our model to using a firm.

The concept of shifting to this model permanently creates some positives that are keys to us successfully moving forward as a City.

- Using a firm for our civil work gets us direct access to multiple professionals with expertise and experience in all civil matters on a recurring basis. They almost always

have seen what we are bringing them. There is rarely a first time for them on issues we have experienced.

- This “deep bench” of experts is very helpful in navigating civil issues. It also allows us to permanently create processes, like contract templates, that are tried and true- vetted by large numbers of municipalities and organizations.
- In the current model, staff departure at any level of the legal department creates quite the negative ripple on completing legal work effectively and efficiently. If we contracted with a firm, this would allow us to have reliability and dependability as the firm would have that “deep bench” to assign us another attorney to keep moving without any hiccup in civil operations.
- Lastly, once we have gone through a cycle of creating agreement templates, contracts and established communications norms, there is definitely a possibility to find a cost savings going this way, which may, however, happen imminently. One other note would be to point out that well over 90% of the cities in MN handle their civil this way.

As City Manager, I am moving forward with a plan to assure we are abiding by state law in providing Prosecution in house by assigning “City Attorney (Legal Department)” under City Code to perform prosecution only as City Attorney and civil only City Attorney designees and services being handled by an outside firm, including those specified in Charter, Code, or other official documents. The in house City Attorney would still be the Department Head for Legal Department as specified under Code. As currently stated in City Code, the City Manager is responsible for the appointment of all City Department Heads and the organizational chart. Katie Nolting will continue to be the prosecution only City Attorney and Legal Department Head. There will be some other administrative and operational adjustments that may need to be made concerning organizational charts, job descriptions, policies, and reporting structures. We would address those in totality and make the necessary administrative and operational adjustments.

In order to put this plan into action, the council will need to approve a contract with an outside firm. The plan would be to utilize Flaherty and Hood in the interim until an RFP process can be completed. Staff would be bringing an action item to the July 7th council meeting to begin that process.

Separations of Parks and Recreation

In order to best serve our City, we need to be strategic about it’s structure and realize when changes need to be made. I think it is imperative to separate Parks and Recreation in order to pivot to our current needs, set us up to handle future growth and most importantly to promote efficiency in both departments. The cost to operate parks and recreation has grown exponentially over the recent past in comparison to other departments. We have absolutely increased services, but I believe we need to separate Parks and Recreation to establish how efficient we are and what impact those dollars/resources are making. The projected plan is to separate into two departments:

Parks and Trails

Recreation

The separation will allow us to better manage both by providing focused attention and assuring we understand what it takes in resources for each to stand on their own. I believe the focus and lack of layers, will allow us to identify inefficiencies, evaluate staffing levels and create a budgetary savings.

The intent is to make this change immediately to allow them to function independently the last 6 months of 2024. It will allow us to properly evaluate operations and make informed budget decisions for 2026, as these departments will stand on their own. There will be no staff increase required to achieve this plan.

A structure change like mentioned above is not regulated by charter or ordinance so can be made administratively through the office of the City Manager.

Hiring Communications and Engagement Director

We have talked numerous times in the recent past about the City hiring a communications professional. The almost complete 2024 audit does show a preliminary final result regarding the City coming in under budget in 2024 to afford the move to adding a Communications professional. The goal of this position:

- *Allow the City to tell our story
- *Be responsive to requests for comment, information, etc
- *Be expedient in notifying the public urgently, professionally and thoroughly in sensitive times
- *Creating a “go to” for information and response
- *Creating conduit to engage citizens, groups, businesses and the like to get feedback and feel from our community
- *A sample potential job description is attached.

The goal would be to post for the position in early July in hopes of having someone on board by mid-September.

Would be seeking consent agenda approval at the July 7th meeting to begin process for hiring.

Hiring Community Development Director

In order to facilitate growth and keep up with the needs of our community, we need to be open for growth. We need a professional to engage those requesting feedback on potential projects. We need a professional to seek out potential opportunities and help potential partners navigate. This position has been in place in the City of Bemidji before, but has been cut for budgetary reasons. I am proposing that this position be reinstated and funded 100% through Building Department fees.

Would be seeking consent agenda approval at the July 7th meeting to begin process for hiring.

Other Items City will be pursuing moving forward

*Addition of an Asset Management Program- This allows us to efficiently monitor and manage all of our equipment and other assets throughout the city to evaluate best timelines for replacement, monitor usage/cost, etc.

*Initiative to inventory all City owned assets and equipment to seek efficiencies, discover unneeded redundancies, explore alternative methods, etc.

*Sale of City owned real estate that is no longer needed

*Implementation of City best practices to assure departments are working together and using resources as efficiently as possible.

*Explore the use of technology/software to increase productivity in as many areas of the city as possible.



ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Department	Communications	Grade	?
Division	Communications	Union	Non-Union
Location	City Hall	FLSA	Exempt
Type	FT		

GENERAL PURPOSE

The Engagement and Communications Director is a leadership position responsible for managing and executing high-profile, time-bound projects focused on public communication, media relations, community engagement, and strategic messaging. This role blends project management responsibilities with the core functions of public information and engagement, serving as the organization's central resource for both internal and external communications strategies. This position typically oversees initiatives that have defined start and end dates, operating within City and departmental guidelines, and may lead interdepartmental teams, manage project-specific budgets, and coordinate with multiple stakeholders across public and private sectors.

OR

The Engagement and Communications Director is distinguished by its dual role: leading communication initiatives and managing defined projects. The Engagement and Communications Director operates with a high degree of autonomy, critical thinking, and strategic oversight. Projects managed are moderate to complex in scope and may represent standalone efforts or parts of broader multi-faceted initiatives. The position requires substantial engagement with community partners, state agencies, and media outlets, while balancing internal coordination and process development.

Supervision Received

- Works under the general direction of the City Manager.

Supervision Exercised

- (Subordinate structure dependent)

ESSENTIAL DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Project Management

- Lead the planning, execution, and completion of communications-focused projects that have defined scopes, timelines, and outcomes, ensuring alignment with City priorities and departmental objectives.
- Establish and oversee operational procedures and workflow processes specific to each project, ensuring efficiency, compliance with City policies, and alignment with strategic goals.
- Develop and manage project budgets, monitor expenditures, and ensure resources are allocated efficiently and within financial constraints.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

- Coordinate and manage cross-functional project teams, including internal staff, contractors, and external partners, providing guidance, accountability, and performance tracking.
- Identify and manage risks associated with project delivery, making adjustments as needed to timelines, resources, or deliverables.
- Report regularly on project progress to department leadership and stakeholders, providing data-driven updates, performance metrics, and final project evaluations.

Strategic Communications

- Design and implement comprehensive communications strategies to inform, educate, and engage diverse audiences, including residents, community groups, elected officials, and City staff.
- Develop key messages, campaigns, and content to promote City initiatives, services, and events across multiple platforms, including print, digital, and social media.
- Provide strategic counsel to senior leadership and departmental staff on communication matters, ensuring consistency, transparency, and accessibility in messaging.
- Ensure compliance with legal, ethical, and organizational standards for all public information dissemination and media interactions.

Public and Media Relations

- Serve as the primary point of contact for media inquiries, developing and maintaining strong relationships with journalists and media outlets.
- Write and distribute press releases, talking points, and official statements, tailoring messages to target audiences and maintaining consistency in tone and voice.
- Prepare spokespeople and elected officials for public speaking engagements, interviews, and media appearances with key briefing materials and strategic guidance.
- Monitor media coverage and public sentiment, using analytics tools to assess reach and impact; develop proactive and reactive strategies as needed.

Community Engagement

- Lead public outreach efforts to build trust, encourage participation, and gather community input on City initiatives.
- Plan and facilitate public meetings, town halls, and community forums, ensuring inclusive participation and meaningful engagement.
- Develop culturally appropriate materials and outreach strategies to ensure accessibility across diverse populations and communities.
- Build and sustain relationships with community organizations, advocacy groups, and neighborhood associations, serving as a liaison between the public and the City.

Digital and Internal Communications

- Manage and optimize the City's digital presence, including the website, email newsletters, and social media platforms, ensuring accuracy, accessibility, and

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

alignment with public engagement goals.

- Create and curate content for internal and external audiences, including infographics, reports, multimedia assets, FAQs, and outreach materials.
- Coordinate internal communication efforts across departments to ensure staff are informed about key initiatives, policy updates, and engagement opportunities.
- Leverage communication technologies and platforms to improve reach, measure impact, and adapt strategies based on performance data.

Evaluation and Reporting

- Develop and implement tools to measure the effectiveness of communications strategies, including surveys, website analytics, social media metrics, and engagement feedback.
- Analyze communication and engagement data to identify trends, inform decision-making, and support continuous improvement.
- Prepare comprehensive reports and presentations for City leadership, summarizing findings, lessons learned, and recommendations for future initiatives

Peripheral Duties

- (list any)

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Education and Experience

- Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in communications, public relations, journalism, public administration, marketing, or a closely related field.
- At least five (5) years of progressively responsible experience in communications, public relations, public information, community engagement, or a related field.
- At least two (2) years of experience managing projects, including planning, budgeting, team coordination, and stakeholder engagement.

Preferred Qualifications

- Master's degree from an accredited college or university in communications, public relations, journalism, public administration, marketing, or a closely related field.
- Experience working in or with government, nonprofit, or public sector organizations is highly desirable.
- Certification in project management: Project Management Professional (PMP), Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) or public information (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Information Officer (PIO) training/certification is a plus.

Necessary Knowledge Skills and Abilities

- Strong knowledge of principles and practices of public information, strategic communications, media relations, and community engagement.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

- Proven project management skills, including the ability to manage timelines, budgets, and cross-functional teams.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills, including writing for public consumption (e.g., press releases, speeches, social media, reports).
- Proficiency with communication tools and platforms, including content management systems (e.g., WordPress), social media platforms, email marketing tools, and graphic design software (e.g., Canva, Adobe Creative Suite).
- Ability to analyze data and evaluate communications effectiveness using metrics and feedback mechanisms.
- Strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to engage diverse communities and work collaboratively across departments.
- Ability to work independently, exercise sound judgment, and respond effectively in high-pressure or emergency communication situations.

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT USED

- Personal computer, including word processing and spreadsheet software, central financial computer, 10-key calculator, telephone, fax and copy machine.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

- The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.
- Work is performed in both office and site-related settings. Some outdoor work is required in engagement with the community, visits to locations and projects, as well as events. Hand-eye coordination is necessary to operate computers and various pieces of office equipment.
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee is occasionally required to stand; walk; use hands to finger, handle, feel or operate objects, tools, or controls; and reach with hands and arms. The employee is occasionally required to sit; climb or balance; stoop, kneel, crouch, or crawl; talk or hear.
- The employee must occasionally lift and/or move up to 25 pounds. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, peripheral vision, depth perception, and the ability to adjust focus.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

- The work environment characteristics described here are representative of those an employee encounters while performing the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee often works in outside weather conditions. The employee occasionally works near moving mechanical parts and in high, precarious places and is occasionally exposed to wet and/or humid conditions, or risk of electrical shock.
- The noise level in the work environment is usually quiet in the office, and moderate to loud in the field.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

SELECTION GUIDELINES

- Formal application, rating of education and experience, oral interviews and references check. Job related tests may be required.
- The job description does not constitute an employment agreement between the employer and employee and is subject to change by the employer as the needs of the employer and requirements of the job change.

INTERNAL APPROVAL

Department Head/Director

Name	Signature	Date

City Manager

Name	Signature	Date