

PLANNING COMMISSION

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – July 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: Heinonen, Lemmer, McCoy, Peterson, Meehlhause.

Members absent: Faver.

Staff Present: Planning Director Jamin Carlson, Compliance Inspector & Site Analyst Dave Wielenberg, Planning Administrative Assistant Ainslee Krause.

Others Present: Troy Gilchrist (via WebEx), Dave Hengel (via WebEx), John Hamrin (via WebEx), Nancy (via WebEx), Michael Johnston, Les Sanders, Gary Smith, Ryan Haasch, Jeff Cwikla, Tim Marco, Mark McLane, Carl Johnson.

AGENDA

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

MINUTES

The minutes for the **June 26, 2025**, Planning Commission meeting were presented for approval. Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, approving minutes as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

VISITORS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA: No appearance.

NEW BUSINESS

PUBLIC HEARING: VARIANCE & INTERIM USE PERMIT REQUEST – VOYAGEURS EXPEDITIONARY SCHOOL

Carlson presented the planning case request: Voyageurs Expeditionary School is requesting a variance from impervious surface requirements under the shoreland overlay and an amendment to the approved interim use permit amendment Resolution 2014-02 on leased property (JC Properties of Bemidji, LLC) to operate a private school. The variance is to increase the impervious surface coverage by 8% over existing to allow for a building addition. The amendment request is to increase total occupancy for the building from 125 persons to 205 persons (grades 9-12 = 125; grades 6-8 = 50; staff = 30) with a building addition. The subject property is located at 3724 Bemidji Ave N (PINS 800628000) 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:

- No comments.

Public Hearing for Variance and Interim Use Permit Requests

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **5:38 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Michael Johnston, ICON architects representing the applicant, addressed the Commission.

- Les Sanders, neighbor of the subject property, expressed concern for noise level, the fire pit, individuals entering his yard, and the effect on his property value. Sanders inquired about a process to appeal the request.
- Gary Smith, 3703 Birchmont Dr NE, expressed concern that the present yard for the school is not adequate for the school's current needs. Smith expressed concern that the yard size does not seem big enough and his fence has sustained damage, expressed concern for students entering his property either around or over his fence and noted concern for liability. Smith expressed concern that the school is still on private septic for the number of people onsite and expressed concern that the approval will affect the use of his property. Smith suggested that the school secure their area and improve their septic system.
- Ryan Haasch, executive director of Voyageurs Expeditionary School, addressed the commission and noted that he is unaware of any issues with the neighboring properties. Haasch identified their plan is to add 50 students over time. Haasch addressed that they have added cameras to increase surveillance in the back and expressed a willingness to secure the property with a fence if needed. Haasch addressed plans to increase their work-based learning program and career college pathways.
- Peterson inquired if Voyageurs is looking at other locations to expand. Haasch addressed that they are part of the Safe Routes School Grant along with the neighboring school Aurora Waasakone Community of Learners.
- Lemmer inquired as to how the backyard is being used. Haasch addressed that time outside is supervised, and classes are sometimes held outside.
- Jeff Cwikla, owner of the building, addressed a willingness to work something out with the neighbor if the fence or barrier needs to be updated. Cwikla addressed that city sewer is not available at the site and noted a letter from Jay Seitz expressing that the septic can handle additional people.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **5:56 PM**.

Further comments:

- Peterson inquired when city services will be available. Carlson addressed in conjunction with the county road project potentially in 2029 or 2030.
- Members and staff discussed setbacks and stormwater.

Variance:

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the variance request for parcel 800628000, 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**. Nays: **None**.

Further comments:

- Members discussed the yard and a fence.
- Peterson suggested adding a condition to require a fence.
- Meehlhause inquired of the proposed timeframe for adding additional students.

Chair Heinonen reopened the Public Hearing at **6:06 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Haasch addressed that the number of students would be increased incrementally over the next 2 to 3 years.
- Peterson inquired if applicant would be willing to install 8-foot fence. Haasch addressed that they are willing.

Hearing no further comments, Chair Heinonen closed the public hearing at **6:07 PM**.

Interim Use Permit:

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Peterson**, to recommend approval of the interim use permit request for parcel 800628000, with the conditions and findings of fact as presented in the packet and an additional condition #12 to require an 8-foot fence along the east side of the property. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that these requests would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **August 11, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PUBLIC HEARING: PRELIMINARY 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 Preliminary Planned Unit Development (PUD)/PLAT to develop a multi-phase project which would include a YMCA Community Wellness Center and other future developments. The subject property is located at 101 Minnesota Ave NW (PIN #80.00344.99) 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:

- Heinonen expressed concern for the trail plan and making sure the parkland is sufficient if high density housing is part of the project.
- Lemmer addressed support from Veteran's Memorial and Historical Society for park and expressed concern for the density of the development and concern for construction limiting traffic to those two locations.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **6:16 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Tim Marco, Marco McLane Development, addressed that the trail will still have a 90 degree turn. Marco noted their request that the private utility coordination would not be tied to the final PUD approval. Marco addressed that the building pad may change if utilities are unable to be moved, however the current proposal shows the maximum building size. Marco addressed that the greenspace or parkland is going to be privately programmed and privately owned and noted their request that this not be a part of the final PUD approval. Marco addressed that there is no timeline yet for when the final PUD will come before the commission and board.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **6:25 PM**.

Additional comments:

- Carlson addressed that the ordinance allows for privately owned parks. Carlson addressed remediation could potentially start next month.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the preliminary planned unit development request for parcel 800034499, 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**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **August 11, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

Chair Heinonen turned the gavel over to Vice Chair Meehlhause due to a conflict of interest with the next planning case.

PUBLIC HEARING: VARIANCE REQUEST – CARL JOHNSON REPRESENTING 4TH STREET LODGE

Wielenberg presented the planning case request: Carl Johnson representing 4th Street Lodge, LLC is requesting three variances from the sign standards to increase the signage allowed on the property. These variances will allow for the following:

1. Increase the maximum wall sign square footage allowed for the parcel from 200 square feet to 535 square feet.
2. Increase the number of projecting or under canopy signs per parcel per street frontage from one (1) to three (3) for the 4th St NW frontage.
3. Increase the number of projecting or under canopy signs per building facade from one (1) to three (3) for the 4th St NW façade.

The subject property is located at 116 4th St NW (PIN #800103600) 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:

- 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 **6:33 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Carl Johnson, representing 4th St Lodge LLC, addressed the commission.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **6:34 PM**.

Additional comments:

- Carlson addressed the uniquely large size of the building in comparison to other building sizes in the downtown area.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the variance request for parcel 800103600, 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**. Nays: **None**. Abstentions: **Heinonen**

Vice Chair Meehlhause addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **August 11, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

Vice Chair Meehlhause passed the gavel back to Chair Heinonen.

PUBLIC HEARING: VARIANCE REQUEST – JOHN HAMRIN

Carlson presented the planning case request: John Hamrin is requesting a Variance from the OHWL requirements to build an attached lakeside deck on an existing lot of record. The subject property is located at 1725 S Lake Irving Dr SW (PIN #80.01671.00) in the City of Bemidji. The requested variance is as follows:

1. A reduction of 9 feet from the OHWL setback per Section 28-352 requirement of 50 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 the following comments:

- 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 **6:39 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- John Hamrin, applicant, addressed the commission.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **6:40 PM**.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Meehlhause**, to recommend approval of the variance request for parcel 800167100, 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**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **August 11, 2025**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

UPCOMING COMMISSION MEETINGS

- Thursday, August 28, 2025 5:30 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at **6:43 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



Ainslee Krause
Planning & Building Administrative Assistant

PC Minutes approved and attested by:



Planning Commission Representative