

PLANNING BOARD PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – August 11, 2025

Pursuant to due call and notice, a regular meeting of the Planning Board of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Upon roll call, the following board members were declared present: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer.**

Staff Present: **Assistant Planner Melissa Fahrenbruch, Compliance Inspector & Site Analyst David Wielenberg, Administrative Assistant Ainslee Krause, City Manager Rich Spiczka.**

Others Present: **Troy Gilchrist, Town Law Center PLLP (via WebEx), John Hamrin, Mike Johnston, Ryan Haasch, Jeff Cwikla, Dave Hengel, Tim Marco, Mark McLane, Carl Johnson.**

AGENDA

Chair Thayer called for any amendments to the agenda. Motion by **Prince**, second by **Peterson**, to approve the agenda. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

MINUTES

The following minutes were presented for approval:

Planning Board Meeting: **July 14, 2025**

Motion by **Fiskevold Gould**, second by **Prince**, approving minutes as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

CITIZENS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA: No appearance.

NEW BUSINESS

PLANNING CASE WITHDRAWN: VARIANCE AND CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT REQUESTS - 80.02677.00 – MICHAEL ETTESVOLD

CONSIDER RESOLUTIONS FOR VARIANCE AND INTERIM USE PERMIT REQUESTS – 80.06280.00 – VOYAGEURS EXPEDITIONARY SCHOOL

Fahrenbruch presented the first planning case request: Voyageurs Expeditionary School (Represented by Michael Johnston) 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.

The Planning Commission recommended approval of a Variance and Interim Use Permit amendment for parcel #800628000, with the conditions and findings of fact presented in the packet.

Board members made the following comments regarding the variance request:

- Peterson addressed support for the project.
- Members discussed the septic system, parking, and fence height.

- Prince inquired if the board could amend the condition #9 to specify water usage is required to be monitored” as opposed to “recommended to be monitored”.
- Rivera recommended amending the proposed condition to require a 6 ½ foot fence so as not to place undue burden on the applicant to have an engineered 8-foot fence.
- Thayer expressed support for a 6 ½ foot fence.
- Prince expressed support for the 8-foot fence recommended by the commission.
- Eaton expressed support for an 8-foot fence.
- Dickinson expressed support for an 8-foot fence.
- Chair Thayer opened the floor to the applicant.
- Prince inquired if the applicant has an issue with an 8-foot fence.
- Jeff Cwikla, owner of the building, addressed that they are willing to work with the neighboring property owners. Cwikla noted that the current fence is owned by the neighbor so the [owner/school] would be footing the bill for a new fence.

Motion by **Prince**, second by **Eaton**, to approve a Variance and Interim Use Permit for parcel # 800628000 for Voyageurs Expeditionary School with the findings of fact and conditions amended to include that the applicant is required to regularly monitor and report water usage and to include the requirement for the 8-foot fence.

Additional comments were made:

- Gilchrist recommended that the board vote on the variance request first and then the interim use permit request.

Motion amended by **Prince**, second by **Eaton**, to apply to the Variance request for parcel # 800628000 with the amendment that the applicant is required to regularly monitor and report water usage.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Eaton, Thayer.** Nays: **Rivera.**

Rivera addressed no vote was due to the requirement of the height of the fence.

Motion by **Prince**, second by **Eaton**, to approve the Interim Use Permit amendment request for parcel # 800628000, for Voyageurs Expeditionary School with the findings of fact and conditions amended to include that the applicant is required to regularly monitor and report water usage.

Board members made the following comments regarding the interim use permit request:

- Rivera requested that regular monitoring be defined.
- Fahrenbruch addressed that the original IUP monitoring was monthly for the first year and annually after that.
- Board members concurred that the same monitoring schedule would be appropriate.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Eaton, Thayer.** Nays: **Rivera.**

Rivera addressed no vote was due to the same reason as stated previously.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF A PRELIMINARY PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT REQUEST – 80.00344.99 – MARCO MCLANE DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTING GREATER BEMIDJI

Fahrenbruch presented the second 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 within the Urban Renaissance (UR) zoning district and the Shoreland Overlay. 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).

The Planning Commission recommended approval of a Preliminary Planned Unit Development for parcel # 800034499, with the conditions and findings of fact presented in the packet.

Board members made the following comments regarding the request:

- Members discussed the trail, with member Eaton expressing support for a 90-degree turn to slow individuals down and staff noting that the snowmobile club expressed concern for 90-degree turns making it difficult for the groomers to turn.
- Rivera inquired about the requests for conditions to be removed. Fahrenbruch addressed that an email was received from the applicant requesting that conditions #7 and #10 be removed. Fahrenbruch addressed that the applicant has stated that the park will be a private park with possible public access. Fahrenbruch advised that the high-powered utility lines will not be moved according to Otter Tail.
- Rivera and staff discussed the traffic study and changes made since the concept phase.
- Rivera requested to ask the representative about the traffic study.
- Chair Thayer opened the floor to the applicant.
- Tim Marco, Marco McLane Development, 17158 Stonebriar Cir, Prior Lake, addressed the board and noted that the YMCA is in the detailed design phase and addressed that the change in the building location to be outside of the utility easement was not completed in time to include in the presentation. Marco addressed that the traffic study would be commissioned before the final PUD but would be completed after the final design phase of the YMCA. Marco discussed the snowmobile trail.
- Marco reiterated their request to remove condition #7 to give the applicant and future developers flexibility. Marco addressed condition #10 and identified that they are not pursuing a relocation of the power lines as it is not feasible in phase 1.
- Rivera expressed support for keeping condition #10.
- Rivera noted concern about the study not being completed during tourist times.
- Prince inquired of legal counsel to clarify condition #7. Gilchrist addressed that it is a requirement within the ordinance and recommended including it as a condition but noted it could be included later or in the development agreement.
- Prince addressed support for striking condition #7 and keeping condition #10 as that condition seemed to be resolved.
- Prince addressed support for a turn that could potentially slow snowmobiles down.
- Peterson expressed support for removing condition #7.
- Fiskevold Gould expressed a hesitancy for removing conditions however was in support for either including or striking #7 after clarification from the applicant.
- Thayer expressed support for removing condition #7 and discussed trail orientation.
- Rivera inquired as to why the commission chose not to remove any conditions.
- Gilchrist addressed that the commission moved it forward leaving it up to the board to approve the conditions.
- Peterson requested clarification on action needed from the board.
- Gilchrist recommended that a motion be made.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Prince**, to approve the Preliminary Planned Unit Development for parcel # 800034499, with the findings of fact and conditions as presented with condition #7 removed. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Eaton, Thayer**. Nays: **Rivera**.

Rivera addressed no vote was due to not agreeing with the removal of condition #7.

CONSIDER RESOLUTION FOR VARIANCE REQUEST – 80.01036.00 – CARL JOHNSON REPRESENTING 4TH STREET LODGE

Wielenberg presented the second 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. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the three variances for parcel #800103600, with the conditions and findings of fact presented in the packet.

Board members made the following comments regarding the request:

- Peterson expressed support for the variance.
- Prince expressed support for the variance.
- Members and staff discussed the sign ordinance and future changes to the signs at the subject property.
- Eaton expressed support.
- Dickinson expressed support.
- Fiskevold Gould expressed support and addressed concern for setting precedent in approving sign variances before the ordinance is reviewed.
- Thayer expressed support.
- Members discussed updating the sign ordinance and sign permit process.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Rivera**, to approve **Resolution 2025-22** for three variances from the sign standards for parcel #800103600, with the findings of fact and conditions as presented. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer**. Nays: **None**.

CONSIDER RESOLUTION FOR VARIANCE REQUEST – 80.01671.00 – JOHN HAMRIN

Wielenberg presented the second 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 in the R-4 Moderate Density Residential zoning district and the Shoreland Overlay (General Development Lake). 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.

The Planning Commission recommended approval of a Variance from the OHWL for parcel #800167100, with the conditions and findings of fact presented in the packet.

Board members made the following comments regarding the request:

- Eaton expressed support.
- Rivera expressed support.
- Prince expressed support.
- Peterson expressed support.
- Dickinson expressed support.

Motion by **Eaton**, seconded by **Fiskevold Gould**, to approve **Resolution 2025-23** for a Variance from the OHWL for parcel #800167100, with the findings of fact and conditions as presented. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer**. Nays: **None**.

STAFF REPORTS

Director's Report

Fahrenbruch presented the Director's Report. Board members had the following comments:

- Members discussed.

Site Analyst & Enforcement Report

Wielenberg presented the Site Analyst & Enforcement Report.

Board members had the following comments:

- Members discussed.

UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

- **CANCELLED:** Monday, September 8, 2025 5:30 p.m. Planning Board Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by **Peterson**, second by **Dickinson**, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at **7:11 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



Ainslee Krause
Planning & Building Administrative Assistant

PB Minutes approved and attested by:



Planning Board Representative