

# **BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL COUNCIL WORK SESSION AGENDA**

Monday, November 24, 2025

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



**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

**BUSINESS**

a) Comp Plan Update from HRDC

**ADJOURN**

# CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM



**Meeting Date:** November 24, 2025  
**Action Requested:** Provide Feedback to Comprehensive Plan Team  
**Prepared By:** Rich Spiczka, City Manager

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**Background:**

The team from HRDC and BSU will be in chambers to present a status update and illicit feedback on the City of Bemidji Comprehensive Plan update. The goal of the work session is for council to get up to speed with what has been done, be looped in to the workings of the group and to provide feedback and direction on how the plan will move forward.

**Recommendation:**

Provide feedback to Comprehensive Plan Team.



# Comprehensive Plan Update Work Session

11/24/25

Since January 2025, you have entrusted us with Bemidji's Comprehensive Plan Update. We started by listening — to individuals, groups, and organizations — laying the groundwork for a new kind of planning process, rooted in community voices that drive collaborative partnerships to positively shift the culture in Bemidji. Over the past ten months, we've worked to gather voices from across Bemidji, strengthening the connections that make this city resilient. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in this work session time to collaboratively design the next phase of this process, which we see as being all about **clarity, alignment, and leadership**. We want to share some observations of current pain points in Bemidji and work with you to set priorities over the next 6-8 months as well as clarify roles and responsibilities moving forward. We want our work to weave each of our individual strengths as leaders in this community into the long-term success of this plan. This work session is not just about a plan or a document — it's about how we, together, build a lasting structure for collaboration and trust in Bemidji.

## Where We Started (Establishing a Foundation)

*January 2025*

In January, we began with a shared vision: to approach Comprehensive Planning not just as a technical exercise, but as a community-driven journey. The Headwaters Regional Development Commission, BSU's Center for Empowered Communities, and the City of Bemidji came together to rethink how planning is done — prioritizing authentic relationships and iterative processes to produce the most relevant and useful outcomes.

Our commitment was clear: build a foundation that lasts beyond this plan, creating a **social and technical infrastructure** that **strengthens trust and collaboration** for years to come.

## Where We Are Now (Building Relationships & Gathering Stories)

*10 months in*

Over the past ten months, we've engaged through:

- **Community-wide events** that brought diverse voices together.
- **One-on-one interviews** to capture personal perspectives.
- **Surveys and meetings** that gathered critical input.

These efforts have not only **produced valuable data** but also **strengthened essential relationships** across the city. We are currently building out a technical database and story map for #ThisIsOurCityBemidji to be a hub site to highlight our story and provide useful information, engagement, and collaboration.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES SO FAR

## COMMUNITY-WIDE SURVEY

On-line & In Person

201 Surveys taken so far  
**57% taken at our Picnics**



**In order to have the survey be statistically representative of our City we need a total of approx. 375 responses  
Our goal is at least 450**

### Next Steps for Survey

- Partner with Pioneer
- Create Social Media Video
- Award one of the raffles with a press release
- Ask for greater City outreach

## COMMUNITY PICNICS

July 29 & September 17

Nymore Nights Picnic  
**~750 people, 14 Vendors,**  
Free Meal featuring Local Food & Farmers

### Engaged Participants Around:

- **Health, Wellness & Sustainability**
- **Community Resources & Connection**
- **Gratitude**
- **Public Safety**
- **Science and Nature**
- **Active Living & Play**

Latin Block Party  
**~600 people, 13 Vendors,**  
Free Meal featuring Local Food

### Engaged Participants Around:

- **Culture & Diversity**
- **Education & Lifelong Learning**
- **Jobs, Innovation & Opportunity**
- **Housing & Community Living**
- **Arts, Sports, & Community Spirit**
- **Town & Gown Connections**

## LOCAL MEETINGS & EVENTS

Face to Face

### 42 engaged community Partner meetings

1. National Night Out
2. Face It Together gatherings
3. Presentations
  - a. Bemidji Rotary
  - b. HRDC Commission
  - c. City Council
  - d. Bemidji Department team meeting
  - e. Regional Energy Stakeholder meeting
4. Tabling
  - a. Bemidji All Class Reunion
  - b. Evergreen Conference
  - c. BHS Job Fair
5. Young Professional Network
6. Door Knocking in Community
7. International Red Lake Teachers Gathering
8. 3 Chatabouts with Kev Jackson
9. One-on-one's with City Staff and City Council

### Upcoming Opportunities:

1. County Board presentation
2. Greater Bemidji meeting
3. NMF Housing Discussion
4. Chamber & Downtown Business Alliance
5. Listening Session/Community Discussions

## RECOMMENDED NEXT PHASE WITH COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

### 4 Impact Areas

1. Housing
2. Transportation & Mobility
3. Business & Economic Development
4. Quality of Life (Arts, Education & Health)

### 4 Cross-Cutting Themes

- Zoning & Land Use
- Safety, Security & Emergency Response
- Sustainability (Land, Water, Air, Energy & Waste)

# Welcome to the 1st “This is Our City Bemidji” Community Picnic [\(VIDEO\)](#) Nymore Nights edition!

As you explore the park, stop by each of our 6 themed stations. Each one highlights a unique part of what makes Bemidji a strong, connected, and thriving community. Answer the question at each station for a chance to win raffle prizes! Come and share your input with us – we want to hear from you! Each station you visit will allow you an entry into the raffles for some local prizes!

## **Station 1: Health and Wellness**

Grab a bite to eat and celebrate local foods, community gardens, and healthy and resilient living. Our health is rooted in the land and the people who nourish it. From local farmers to community gardens, Bemidji is growing wellness together!

**Question: What’s one of your favorite foods or meals and are there any ingredients you can/ could source locally?**

## **Station 2: Community Resources & Connection**

Find ways to collaborate, support, and gain access to services. Our city is stronger when we lift each other up. Local organizations and services help connect people to what they need to thrive.

**Question: What is one community resource that has helped you in your life that you think more people should know about?**

## **Station 3: Gratitude**

Share your gratitude and neighborhood character. Every neighborhood has its own heartbeat – shaped by the people, places, and stories that make it special. Whether it’s a neighbor who always lends a hand, a favorite gathering spot, or a moment that made you proud to live where you do, these stories reflect the spirit of Bemidji.

**Question: Who or what in your neighborhood are you most thankful for, and how does it represent the character of your community?**

## **Station 4: Public Safety**

Learn about community safety and emergency response. Safety is a shared responsibility. Our first responders, like the Bemidji Fire Department, help keep our neighborhoods safe and prepared.

**Question: What makes you feel safe in your neighborhood, and how can we build on that together?**

## **Station 5: Science and Nature**

Learn to understand our world and care for our natural spaces. Bemidji is surrounded by beauty – from our lakes, our woods, and our parks. The more we understand our environment, the better we can protect them for future generations.

**Question: What is one of your favorite natural spaces in Bemidji? What is one small action you take, or could take in your daily life to care for our shared environment?**

## **Station 6: Active Living & Play**

Practice movement, fun, and community togetherness. Play isn’t just for kids – it’s how we build joy, health, and connection. Whether biking, walking, or playing in the park, movement brings us together.

**Question: What’s your favorite way to stay active or play in Bemidji?**

## Welcome to the 2nd “This is Our City Bemidji” Community Picnic [\(VIDEO\)](#) Latin Block Party edition!

As you explore the event, stop by each of our 6 themed stations. Explore how Bemidji’s identity as a college town shapes life today — and how it can guide our future. Stop by each station, share your thoughts, and enter to win local prizes!

### **Station 1: Culture & Diversity**

College students bring new perspectives, events, and traditions that add to Bemidji’s cultural fabric.

**Question: What is a cultural event or tradition that is important to you and your family? How can Bemidji continue to celebrate its cultural diversity, and what new events or traditions would you like to see us share as a community?**

### **Station 2: Education & Lifelong Learning**

Colleges bring new ideas, research, and cultural exchange. Local schools and libraries help learning last a lifetime.

**Question: Who was your most influential teacher you’ve ever had, and how did they impact your education? How can the educators at BSU/NTC best support lifelong learning in Bemidji and beyond?**

### **Station 3: Jobs, Innovation & Opportunity**

Colleges help create a skilled workforce and bring new industries to town.

**Question: What was your first or most memorable job, and how did it shape your future opportunities? What kinds of jobs or industries should Bemidji grow to support its people?**

### **Station 4: Housing & Community Living**

College towns need to balance affordability, availability, and neighborhood character.

**Question: Where was the first place you ever lived on your own, and what did that experience teach you about community? What’s one thing you’d like to see improved about housing in Bemidji for students, families, and long-term residents alike?**

### **Station 5: Arts, Sports & Community Spirit**

From Beaver hockey to campus concerts, college life brings energy and pride to the whole community.

**Question: What arts, sports, or entertainment activities make you feel most connected to Bemidji?**

### **Station 6: Town & Gown Connections**

When students, faculty, and residents work together, we all thrive.

**Question: What is one way BSU or NTC could better connect with the broader community?**

## Where We're Going (Finding Alignment & Claiming Our Leadership)

6-8 months

The next phase is about **alignment and clarity**:

- Creating a **shared vision** for and **commitment** to this work
- **Setting priorities** to align our resources, time, and effort
- **Claiming each of our unique leadership** and **clarifying roles of council and staff** in shaping and guiding the work.

Together, we will move from listening and relationship-building into **structured action** and **decision-making**, ensuring the plan reflects both **community aspirations** and **practical governance**.

### Next Steps

#### Creating a Shared Vision & Commitment – Kick-off Luncheon with Council and Staff

We want to help set the stage for alignment within the City – between Council and Staff, and set a tone of **gratitude, partnership, and shared stewardship** for our City. We are planning on hosting a luncheon featuring local foods and farmers in the coming weeks to honor the work you all do to make Bemidji work, celebrate the momentum you're building as a team, and foster the collaborative spirit needed to move our community forward in this process. We are asking you all to set aside 60-75 minutes of your time to gather, listen, and share – and build a **shared vision** for and **commitment** to this work.

#### Setting Priorities –Themed Community Conversations around Priority Areas

We want to ensure that the next phase of our community engagement strategy reflects the Council's **priorities, values, and expectations**. We received valuable feedback from our original proposal of 8 Action Areas and 3 cross-cutting themes and have modified our approach to better align with the City's current capacity and needs. Our refined 4 Action Areas and 4 cross cutting themes engagement proposal reflects an approach that **balances breadth and depth and practical feasibility**. By having fewer sessions, we can encourage greater participation and more representative conversations. And by integrating the 4 refined cross-cutting themes of public safety & emergency response, zoning & land use, sustainability, and community partnerships, we can ensure an interconnected approach that focuses both on the 'how' and 'why' of this work.

Each Action Area will include a **short survey** distributed to and completed by key stakeholders ahead of dedicated **90-minute in-person Community Conversations** that draw on examples and stories from our community to highlight the **levers the city can pull to advance its strategic priorities**. These 90-minute sessions will serve two purposes: 1) to **show gratitude** to all of the community members actively engaged in these spaces and conversations by offering a shared meal, and 2) to **gather input** on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and collaboratively design positive pathways forward in each Action Area

#### Claiming Our Individual Leadership & Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

The community needs **clarity, trust, and a unified vision**. This Comprehensive Plan Update is our chance to move from **reactive governance** to **forward-thinking leadership**. Together, we can preserve what we have, embrace change, and build partnerships that make Bemidji stronger. The culture we create here will ripple far beyond this plan.

City Council isn't just a decision-making body — it's a **culture-setting force**. You all have the opportunity to:

- **Model values** like humility, accountability, empathy, collaboration, and transparency
- **Uplift stories (individual and organizational)** that reflect Bemidji's heart and resilience
- **Support systems and processes** that connect departments, residents, and community partners
- **Shape the tone** of civic life — one of possibility and shared purpose

# NEXT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

## OPTION 1

(Originally Proposed)

### 8 Focus Groups

1. Housing
2. Transportation
3. Health, Wellness, and Food Security
4. Education & Economic Opportunity
5. Business Development
6. Waste, Materials, and Resource Efficiency
7. Natural Resources & Land Use
8. Energy

### 3 Cross-Cutting Themes

- *Climate Resilience & Sustainability*
- *Equity & Inclusion*
- *Community Partnerships*



## OPTION 2

(Refined Version of Option 1 based on Direct Feedback)

### 3 Priority Areas

1. Housing
2. Transportation & Parking
3. Land Use/Tax Base

### 1 Cross-Cutting Theme

- *Sustainability*
  - *Energy*
  - *Recycling*
  - *Environmental Protection*

**Each option would include the distribution of short theme related surveys to be completed ahead of 90 min facilitated in person themed discussions**

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Which direction would you like us to further develop and execute in this next phase of our community engagement process?
2. To what extent, and in what ways would you like city staff and/or council to be involved in these conversations?

## OPTION 3

(Recommended Proposal)

### 4 Action Areas

1. Housing
2. Transportation & Mobility
3. Business Development
4. Quality of Life
  - Arts
  - Education
  - Health

### 4 Cross-Cutting Themes

- *Safety, Security & Emergency Response*
- *Zoning & Land Use*
- *Sustainability*
  - *Land, Water, Air, Energy & Waste*
- *Community Partnerships & Ongoing Engagement*