

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – September 15, 2025

Pursuant to due call and notice, a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, September 15, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Pro Tem Rivera presiding.

Upon roll call, the following Councilmembers were declared present: Prince (WebEx-Out of Town), Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer.

Staff Present: City Manager Rich Spiczka, City Engineer Sam Anderson, Finance Director Donna Coe, Fire Chief Justin Sherwood, Assistant Planner Melissa Fahrenbruch, City Clerk Michelle Miller

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Rivera called for any amendments to the agenda. Prince requested that the Appointment of Ashton Loebs to the Heritage Preservation Commission be added as to a Consent Agenda #2. **Motion by Thayer, seconded by Eaton, approving the agenda as amended. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Peterson, Thayer, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Rivera, Eaton, Dickinson.**

MINUTES

The following minutes were presented for approval:

- August 18, 2025 BEDA Meeting
- August 18, 2025 Council Meeting

Motion by Eaton, seconded by Thayer to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Prince, Rivera, Thayer, Dickinson, Eaton, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson.

CONSENT AGENDA #1

Mayor Pro Tem Rivera called for any amendments to be made to Consent Agenda. Staff requested that the approval of commercial refrigerators be added to the existing suite Sanford Center CIP request (renamed to approve suite upgrades) and change order no. 1 for Herzog Roofing for Sanford Center be added. The following Consent Agenda items were presented for approval.

Motion by Eaton, seconded by Thayer, to approve Consent Agenda #1 as follows:

1. Claims Submitted by Finance Officer in the Amount Of \$2,352,759.07
2. Claims Submitted by ASM Global for the Sanford Center in the Amount of \$45,483.91
3. 2025 Business License Approvals
4. Approve Special Event Permit for Bemidji Fall Classic (September 28)
5. Approve Special Event Permit for BSU Homecoming Street Dance (October 4)
6. Approve Special Event Permit for Fire Department Open House (October 11)
7. **RESOLUTION NO. 6643:** Approving Temporary Off Premises Liquor Permits for the 2025 BSU Homecoming Street Dance
8. **RESOLUTION NO. 6644:** Authorizing Grant Agreement with MN Dept of Public Safety for Traffic Safety Enforcement Projects
9. **RESOLUTION NO. 6645:** Declaring Costs to be Assessed, Ordering Preparation of Proposed Assessment Rolls, and Establishing a Date for Public Hearing for City Project 25-01
10. **RESOLUTION NO. 6646:** Declaring Costs to be Assessed, Ordering Preparation of Proposed Assessment Rolls, and Establishing a Date for Public Hearing for City Project 25-02
11. **RESOLUTION NO. 6647:** Establishing Charge(s) for Connection to Sanitary Sewer and Water Utility Facilities for Proposed North Lake Bemidji Utility Extension Project
12. Approve Submission to MN DNR ReLeaf Community Forestry Grants
13. Approve Quote for Tree Trimming/Pruning to Wood Chucks Tree Service (\$56,000)
14. Approve Quote for Tree Trimming/Pruning to Jake's Stump Grinding (\$50,000)
15. Approve Suite Upgrades from Sanford Center CIP
16. Approve Change Order No. 1 for Herzog Roofing for Sanford Center (\$62,500)
17. Approve MOU with Beltrami County for Tactical Medical Support
18. Approve Professional Services Amendment for Loucks Engineering - Bemidji Rail Corridor Project - City Project 25-05
19. Approve Lease Agreement with Bemidji Indoor Sports Commission
20. Approve Council Travel Authorization-2025 CGMC Fall Conference (Grand Rapids), November 12-14-Prince, Thayer, Eaton

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

CONSENT AGENDA #2

Mayor Pro Tem Rivera called for any items to be pulled from consent agenda #2. The following Consent Agenda item was presented for approval. **Motion by Prince, seconded by Dickinson, approving Consent Agenda #2 as follows:**

1. Approve Appointment of Ashton Loeb to the Heritage Preservation Commission

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Dickinson, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Eaton, Thayer, Rivera. Abstain: Peterson due to him being related to the applicant.

CITIZENS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA

- Linda Lemmer, 155 Gemmel Ave, addressed the city council about ongoing graffiti on the historic Nymore Bridge. She emphasized that graffiti is not harmless, as it damages the historic structure and poses environmental risks during removal, such as solvents potentially entering the Mississippi River. Linda requested the council consider installing a trail camera to identify those responsible and require them to pay for graffiti removal.

REPORT – HOUSING STUDY

Sandy Hennum and Rhonda Walters from HRDC presented the results of a comprehensive housing study for Bemidji. The study aimed to analyze the community's housing situation, including demographics, income trends, housing conditions, and market demands. The process involved community engagement through surveys and 13 stakeholder meetings, resulting in 408 coded pieces of feedback to identify trends and priorities.

Key findings included:

- Strong median income growth in Bemidji, but housing costs (rents and home prices) have also risen, often outpacing income gains.
- Over 50% of residents are renters, and there is a need to better understand the breakdown between those who wish to rent versus buy.
- Housing affordability remains a challenge, with many residents paying a high percentage of their income for housing.
- Construction costs are a significant barrier to new housing development, and solutions may require state-level support or creative local strategies.

Recommendations and next steps:

- Continue collaboration between the city, county, and other stakeholders.
- Participate in an upcoming housing summit in December.
- Use the study as a foundation for ongoing evaluation, policy development, and targeted action to address housing needs.
- Consider innovative solutions such as increasing housing density, reducing parking requirements, and exploring alternative construction methods.

The presenters emphasized that the study is a starting point for ongoing community conversation and action to improve housing affordability and availability in Bemidji.

Council discussion and feedback:

- Noted the significant increase in median income within city limits but questioned how this reconciles with ongoing housing affordability challenges. They sought clarification on whether rising incomes were keeping pace with rent and mortgage costs and requested more detailed data on housing costs and income ratios.
- Highlighted increasing construction costs as a major barrier to new housing development. They discussed the need for creative solutions, possibly at the state level, to reduce these costs and make new housing more feasible.
- Inquired about the survey methodology, response rates, and whether the study captured the perspectives of key groups, such as renters, the unhoused, veterans, and students. They expressed interest in more granular data, such as how many renters aspire to homeownership.
- Inquired about the reported rental vacancy rate (5.5%), with questions about how vacancies are defined and whether the rate includes uninhabitable or owner-held vacant properties. Councilmembers suggested refining this data for future planning and funding applications.
- Councilmembers supported exploring diverse housing options, such as accessory dwelling units and increased density, and discussed the importance of code reform and infrastructure readiness to support new development.
- Councilmembers emphasized the importance of ongoing collaboration with county and regional partners, continued data collection, and community engagement. They expressed interest in participating in the upcoming housing summit and using the study as a foundation for future policy and action.

NEW BUSINESS**Consider Resolution Approving Agreement Between the City and UFCW 1189, Liquor Store for 2025-2027**

Contracts have been negotiated and approved by the unions for the Liquor Store and Fire. The goal of changes for these contracts included:

- *Work towards creating a consistent contribution to the Cafeteria plan for all City employees.
- *Create an environment that provides competitive packages to recruit and retain staff.
- *To assure we are in the same marketplace as other public employers to maintain staffing.
- *To be responsive to market conditions and provide terms that assure quality public services.

RESOLUTION NO. 6648: Approving Agreement Between the City and UFCW 1189, Liquor Store for 2025-2027 was offered by Councilmember Fiskevold Gould, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Eaton passed by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Rivera, Peterson, Dickinson, Fiskevold Gould, Thayer, Prince, Eaton.

Consider Resolution Approving Agreement Between the City and Uniformed Firefighters, Local 2302 for 2025-2027

Contracts have been negotiated and approved by the unions for the Liquor Store and Fire. The goal of changes for these contracts included:

- *Work towards creating a consistent contribution to the Cafeteria plan for all City employees.
- *Create an environment that provides competitive packages to recruit and retain staff.
- *To assure we are in the same marketplace as other public employers to maintain staffing.
- *To be responsive to market conditions and provide terms that assure quality public services.

RESOLUTION NO. 6649: Approving Agreement Between the City and Uniformed Firefighters, Local 2302 for 2022-2027 was offered by Councilmember Peterson, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Fiskevold Gould passed by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Thayer, Dickinson, Eaton, Rivera, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Prince.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE UPDATES

- Councilmember Dickinson had no report.
- Councilmember Eaton reported on several upcoming and recent meetings, including the Airport Authority, KRSL Board (with a focus on the 2024 audit), and the City Library Board, which will not meet due to members attending a county board meeting.
- Councilmember Thayer attended the Downtown Business Alliance meeting (discussed financials, upcoming events, parking issues, and restaurant week), the Sustainability Committee (bylaws, tree inventory, planning engagement, and upcoming EV car show), and the Headwaters Regional Development Commission.
- Councilmember Peterson attended the Fire Relief Association meeting (discussed upcoming open house and dinner, annual audit, retirement requests, and bylaw amendments).
- Councilmember Fiskevold Gould attended the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, where restructuring and committee roles were discussed.
- Mayor Prince attended a League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust board meeting (noted expanded coverages), a Sanford Center press conference, and provided radio updates.
- Councilmember Rivera reported on the Public Arts Commission (reviewed mural restoration, kiosk projects, a collaboration with the Downtown Business Alliance), and mentioned upcoming HRA Board activities, including screening applicants for a new director.

Mayor Pro Tem Rivera called for a brief recess at 7:20 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 7:26 p.m. with all members present.

CLOSED MEETING

Mayor Pro Tem Rivera stated that council will need to discuss in closed session for pending litigation, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.05, Subd. 3(b) concerning the consolidated boundary adjustment proceedings involving Northern Township and the City of Bemidji, Minnesota Office of Administration File Numbers OAH 71-0330-40846 and OAH 71-0330-40869. Prince read into the record that the need for confidentiality outweighs the purposes served by the open-meeting law in this case based on the following:

- The City Council and legal counsel need to have a candid and open discussion of strategic considerations regarding the pending litigation.
- The only business to be discussed in the closed session is the pending litigation.
- An open session would be detrimental because it may take place in the presence of individuals or parties involved in the litigation and thereby divulge legal strategy that may be detrimental to the interests of the City and taxpayers.
- A closed session would benefit the public because the ultimate outcome of the threatened litigation may impact the finances, operations, future growth, services, economic development, and rights of the City.

Motion by Eaton, seconded by Dickinson to close the meeting pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.05, Subd. 3(b) regarding pending litigation concerning the consolidated boundary adjustment proceedings involving Northern Township and the City of Bemidji, Minnesota Office of Administration File Numbers OAH 71-0330-40846 and OAH 71-0330-40869. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Fiskevold Gould, Eaton, Rivera, Peterson, Prince, Dickinson, Thayer. Meeting closed at 7:29 p.m.

Those in attendance: Rich Spiczka, Sam Anderson, Robert Kringler, Chad Arnesen, and Michelle Miller. Councilmember Thayer left the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

REOPEN MEETING

Having completed their business in closed meeting, Mayor Pro Tem Rivera reopened the City Council meeting at 8:24 p.m.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- September 22 (5:30 pm) – Work Session
- September 29 (5:30 pm) – Work Session (if necessary)
- October 6 (6:00 pm) – Council Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Dickinson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Peterson, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Rivera, Eaton, Dickinson. Absent: Thayer. Meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk