

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – October 6, 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, October 6, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Prince presiding.

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

Staff Present: City Manager Rich Spiczka, City Engineer Sam Anderson, Finance Director Donna Coe, City Clerk Michelle Miller

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

Mayor Prince called for any amendments to the agenda. **Motion by Eaton, seconded by Dickinson, approving the agenda as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.**

MINUTES

The following minutes were presented for approval:

- August 25, 2025 Work Session
- August 25, 2025 Special Council Meeting
- September 2, 2025 Council Meeting

Motion by Eaton, seconded by Thayer, approving the August 25, 2025 minutes as presented. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Thayer, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Rivera, Eaton, Dickinson. Peterson abstained due to absence from the August 25 meetings.

Motion by Peterson, seconded by Rivera, approving the September 2, 2025 minutes as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

CONSENT AGENDA #1

Mayor Prince called for any amendments to be made to Consent Agenda. Rivera requested that the Resolution Adopting Assessment Roll for Delinquent Utility Bills be removed for discussion. Thayer requested that the Quote to 106 Group for Archaeological Services be removed for discussion. Fiskevold Gould requested that the Amended Bylaws for the Sanford Center Advisory Board be removed for discussion. The following Consent Agenda items were presented for approval. **Motion by Peterson, seconded by Thayer, to approve Consent Agenda #1 as follows:**

1. Claims Submitted by Finance Officer in the Amount Of \$3,383785.02
2. Claims Submitted by ASM Global for the Sanford Center in the Amount of \$119,188.29
3. Approve August Financials from ASM Global for the Sanford Center
4. 2025 Business License Approvals
5. Approve Quote to Blue Ox Outdoors, LLC for Tree Clearing at City Park (\$9,750)
6. Approve Purchase of GPS Rover & Tablet from Frontier Precision (\$41,780.50)
7. Approve Purchase of Portable Generator - Sewer Department (\$68,461.41)
8. Approve Change Order #1 for Middle School Drive NW & Hannah Avenue NW Reconstruction - City Project 23-05
9. Approve Change Order #6 - WWTP Final Clarifier Project - City Project 23-03
10. Approve Access Agreement with MPCA
11. **RESOLUTION NO. 6653:** Establishing Deferred Connection Charges for Sanitary Sewer and Water Service on 34th Street NW - City Project 24-04
12. **RESOLUTION NO. 6654:** In Support of a Job Creation, Fund Application in Connection with Aircorps Aviation Expansion at the Airport
13. **RESOLUTION NO. 6655:** In Support of a Job Creation, Fund Application in Connection with Aircorps Aviation Expansion in the Industrial Park
14. **RESOLUTION NO. 6656:** Approving Donation from Bemidji Jaycees (\$500.00)
15. **RESOLUTION NO. 6657:** Approving Donation from Knights of Columbus (\$400)
16. **RESOLUTION NO. 6658:** Adopting Assessment Roll for the Cost of Abatement of Diseased Tree
17. **RESOLUTION NO. 6659:** Approving Minnesota Off Premises Gambling Permit Applications for Lawful Gambling to Bemidji Youth Hockey Association Located at the Sanford Center Bemidji
18. **RESOLUTION NO. 6660:** Approving Gambling Premises Permit for Lawful Gambling to the Confidence Learning Center at the Blue Oyster

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

CONSENT AGENDA #2

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

1. Claims Submitted by Finance Officer to VisitBemidji in the Amount of \$81,604.12
2. Approve Special Event Permit for Night We Light and Lighting Display
3. 2025 Business License Approvals

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Eaton, Prince, Thayer, Dickinson, Rivera, Fiskevold Gould. Abstain: Peterson due to his role as the Executive Director of Visit Bemidji.

CITIZENS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA

- No Appearance

PUBLIC HEARINGConduct Public Hearing on Proposed Assessments for Costs Associated with Unpaid Special Charges

Pursuant to published notice a public hearing was held regarding input on Costs Associated with Unpaid Special Charges. Mayor Prince opened the Public Hearing at 6:09 p.m.; hearing no comments closed the Public Hearing at 6:10 p.m.

Resolution Adopting Assessment Roll for Costs Associated with Unpaid Special Charges

RESOLUTION NO. 6661: Adopting Assessment Roll for Costs Associated with Unpaid Special Charges was offered by Councilmember Eaton, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Thayer was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Conduct Public Hearing on Proposed Assessments for Costs Associated with Civil Fines for Property-Related Violations

Pursuant to published notice a public hearing was held regarding input on Costs Associated with Civil Fines for Property-Related Violations. Mayor Prince opened the Public Hearing at 6:11 p.m.; hearing no comments closed the Public Hearing at 6:14 p.m.

Resolution Adopting Assessment Roll for Costs Associated with Civil Fines for Property-Related Violations

RESOLUTION NO. 6662: Adopting Assessment Roll for Costs Associated with Civil Fines for Property-Related Violations was offered by Councilmember Eaton, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Dickinson was passed by unanimous voice vote.

Report on the Formation of the Bemidji Police Department Drone Program

In a memo provided by Chief Mastin, he stated that law enforcement agencies across the country use drone programs to improve officer safety, enhance situational awareness and increase operational efficiency. Drones serve as a cost-effective alternative to traditional air support, helping departments manage high-risk situations, respond to emergencies and save lives. The Bemidji Police Department has utilized drug forfeiture funds to purchase the required equipment and seeks to implement this advanced equipment in order to better serve our community.

The presentation by Detective Schermerhorn and Officer Mestemacher introduced the Bemidji Police Department's new drone program, highlighting the following:

- The drone program is designed to enhance public safety, improve operational efficiency, and increase officer safety.
- The drone features thermal imaging for night search and rescue and a range finder to assist officers. It can operate for about 30–40 minutes per flight and has a loudspeaker for communication.
- The department currently has five certified drone operators—all licensed under FAA Part 107 rules, with ongoing training required every two years (though they plan to train and fly more frequently).
- Primary uses of the drone include search & rescue, crime scene documentation, high-risk incident response, hazmat situations, and supporting community events, as well as assisting other agencies.
- The program is strictly compliant with FAA regulations and state laws: no audio recording, strict video data retention rules (non-investigative footage deleted within seven days), and privacy laws matching those for body-worn cameras.
- The department will not use drones for facial recognition (unless court-ordered), will never arm drones, and will not conduct surveillance of public protests or demonstrations except under specific conditions involving safety threats.

Councilmembers expressed overall support for the drone program, praising its capabilities and the department's professionalism and thoroughness in the presentation. Questions highlighted a strong focus on airspace regulations (especially near airports), city ordinances, the assessment of "high-risk" situations, and operational protocols for privacy and protest events. Several members stressed

the importance of transparent communication, especially when drones are deployed near public gatherings or demonstrations. They wanted event organizers informed about any such use and the underlying reasons. Concerns were also raised about equipment readiness (backup drones, batteries), privacy protections, and appropriate data handling procedures.

Councilmembers affirmed the value of using drones for officer and public safety, and for community outreach, and appreciated the department's efforts to comply with legal and ethical standards.

Conduct Public Hearing on Proposed Bemidji Police Department Drone Program

Pursuant to published notice a public hearing was held regarding input on Proposed Bemidji Police Department Drone Program. Mayor Prince opened the Public Hearing at 6:26 p.m.; hearing no comments closed the Public Hearing at 6:35 p.m.

ORDINANCES

Public Hearing of an Ordinance Authorizing the Transfer of Real Property for the Purposes of Lot Realignment to Remedy Surveying/Platting Error

Pursuant to published notice a public hearing was held regarding input on an Ordinance Authorizing the Transfer of Real Property for the Purposes of Lot Realignment to Remedy Surveying/Platting Error. Mayor Prince opened the Public Hearing at 6:37 p.m.; hearing no comments closed the Public Hearing at 6:37 p.m.

First Reading of Said Ordinance

AN ORDINANCE Authorizing the Transfer of Real Property for the Purposes of Lot Realignment to Remedy Surveying/Platting Error was given a first reading.

NEW BUSINESS

Consider Resolution Ordering Feasibility Report - 2026 Street Renewal Project - City Project 26-01

Anderson reported that the City has nearly completed the 17th year of the annual street reconstruction program and must now consider the proposed program for 2026. The goal each year is to select the upcoming street segments in the fall so that the preliminary survey information can be acquired prior to snowfall. This will allow the winter months for engineering design, neighborhood information meetings and public hearings.

Below is a synopsis of what has been completed in the first 17 years of the annual program:

- 1,071 homes with new roadway improvements.
- 26,403 linear feet of new storm sewer has been installed or replaced.
- 630 homes have had new water and/or sanitary sewer services installed to them.
- 56,166 linear feet of 60-90 year old water main and sanitary sewer has been replaced.
- 21.32 miles of city streets reconstructed.
- 12.93 miles of sidewalks and trails replaced or added.
- Total investment in our infrastructure and neighborhoods of \$34,305,000.
- Utilization of \$13,400,000 in federal and state funds.

The street segments that are proposed to be included for study within the 2026 feasibility report are as follows:

19th Street NW	-	Park Avenue NW – Irvine Avenue NW
20th Street NW	-	Norton Avenue NW – Park Avenue NW
21st Street NW	-	Norton Avenue NW – Irvine Avenue NW

19th Street NW and 20th Street NW are both non curb and gutter streets that have old cast-iron watermain that is in need of replacement. The road surface is also deteriorating and in need of repair. Staff are proposing to replace the existing cast-iron water main with new ductile-iron water main and add curb and gutter to the street segments, as well as new asphalt pavement.

21st Street NW is a curb and gutter street that has old cast-iron watermain that needs replacement. The road surface is also deteriorating and in need of repair. Staff are proposing to replace the existing cast-iron water main with new ductile-iron water main, as well as new curb and gutter and asphalt pavement. The feasibility report is the first step in the Chapter 429 assessment process and it will outline the proposed improvements, project costs, preliminary assessments and the feasibility of the proposed project. The report should be complete and ready for city council review in December. After completion of the feasibility report staff will hold a neighborhood meeting to outline the proposed project to the affected property owners.

The feasibility report will be completed by city staff in the engineering department. There will be no outside cost for the report. The report will detail all of the proposed project costs and funding sources.

Multiple councilmembers voiced concerns about the concentration of street renewal projects and repeated construction impacting the same neighborhood (Park Avenue area, including 19th, 20th,

and 21st Streets), citing the financial burden of multiple assessments on residents—especially those on corner lots.

Council provided the following comments and questions:

- Councilmembers underscored that they had directly heard complaints and disappointment from affected residents, who were frustrated by back-to-back construction and costs.
- Some councilmembers questioned whether the targeted streets truly needed renewal at this time, noting that other city streets were in worse condition.
- Suggestions were made to consider alternative areas for the project or to explore spacing projects further apart to avoid "piling on" costs to the same residents.
- There was discussion about the city's policy to offer reduced assessments for corner lot properties, but members felt this mitigation was insufficient to address resident concerns.
- The council expressed interest in a possible one-year "pause" or break in the street renewal program, both to reduce resident financial strain and to free up staff bandwidth for other critical projects and maintenance.
- Councilmembers requested staff return with detailed assessment data (including a high-level draft showing impacts for corner lots) and report on possible alternatives or new street segments for consideration at a future meeting before making a final decision.

Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Eaton to table the Resolution Ordering Feasibility Report – 2026 Street Renewal Project – City Project 26-01 to the October 20, 2025 council meeting. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Dickinson, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Eaton, Peterson, Thayer, Rivera.

Consider Resolution Adopting Assessment Roll for Delinquent Utility Bills for 2025

Councilmember Rivera raised questions about the total outstanding bills (approximately \$133,000), how these funds are recovered, and which city funds are affected. Staff explained that delinquent amounts are assessed on property taxes—with portions allocated back to water/sewer, storm water, and refuse funds as collected, and a 10% monthly penalty applied until payment. In cases where property taxes remain unpaid, the city generally must wait until tax forfeiture and sale to recover funds. Councilors expressed concern about the city's limited options for recouping especially large delinquencies.

RESOLUTION NO. 6663: Adopting Assessment roll for Delinquent Utility Bills for 2025 was offered by Councilmember Eaton, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Dickinson, passed by unanimous voice vote.

Consider Quote to 106 Group for Archaeological Services (\$15,759)

Councilmember Thayer suggested the park superintendent coordinate with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, which may have existing cultural resource information to help reduce costs. Thayer emphasized the importance of covering all legal and grant requirements but hoped to save money through existing data. Staff affirmed that the archeological review is a grant requirement, the 106 Group is a reputable, recommended vendor, and that they would seek collaboration with Indian Affairs as appropriate.

Motion by Rivera, seconded by Eaton, authorizing archaeological services through 106 Group for \$15,759.00 to be funded from the Parks Department budget. Motion carried by the following voice vote: Yeas: Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton. Nays: Thayer.

Consider Amended By-Laws for the Sanford Center Advisory Board

Councilmember Fiskevold Gould asked for clarification on what had changed, with staff explaining that the new content was marked with underlining, specifically in the section on ad hoc subcommittees, and the remaining bold text was from the original adoption.

Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Peterson approving the Amended By-Laws for the Sanford Center Advisory Board. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE UPDATES

- Councilmember Thayer provided updates from the Downtown Business Association (DBA), highlighting upcoming "Shop & Stroll" holiday events and ongoing efforts to address downtown parking permits and challenges relating to the unhoused community. Suggested inviting the city manager or mayor to engage with the DBA regarding downtown issues. Noted growing business participation in downtown activities.
- Councilmember Rivera shared visual materials showing deterioration of the mural at the wastewater treatment plant and suggested seeking funding to update it. Reported on the HRA's progress in hiring an executive director, mentioning upcoming interviews and involvement by city staff. Expressed appreciation for staff assistance.
- Councilmember Eaton announced the cancellation of the animal control committee meeting. Shared news from the airport authority, highlighting resolutions with First National Bank to bridge construction payments until grant reimbursements arrive. Mentioned a library board

controversy over the levy not being honored by some counties and the city's position on the issue.

- Councilmember Dickinson reported on attending Visit Bemidji meeting and receiving an update about participation in the State Fair and other activities.
- Councilmember Fiskevold Gould attended a BSU Student Senate meeting to reintroduce herself, no major updates from the meeting.
- Councilmember Peterson provided updates from the Heritage Preservation Commission, including approval of a 100-year-old home, pending approvals for other historic properties, and the impact of storm damage on historic sites (specifically, Pumping Station 1909). Described plans to preserve historical elements if the pumping station is demolished. Discussed ongoing applications and preservation goals, including work with the State Historic Preservation Office.
- Mayor Prince noted recent absences from some meetings due to travel. Provided an update from the Sanford Center Advisory Board (bylaw changes and marketing initiatives). Reported on public speaking engagements (e.g., Lions Club, Monarch Festival). Highlighted upcoming council meetings, planning board sessions, Fire Station 1 open house, and an important public hearing at the Sanford Center regarding the contestation between Northern Township and Bemidji.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- October 6 (6:00 pm) - Council Meeting
- October 14 (5:30 pm) - Planning Board **Tuesday**
- October 20 (6:00 pm) - Council Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Peterson, seconded by Eaton, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk