

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – November 17, 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, November 17, 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, Planning Director Jamin Carlson, Finance Director Donna Coe, City Clerk Michelle Miller

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

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

MINUTES

The following minutes were presented for approval:
October 6, Council Meeting

Motion by Eaton, seconded by Dickinson, approving minutes as presented. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Prince called for any amendments to be made to Consent Agenda. The following Consent Agenda items were presented for approval. **Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Thayer, to approve Consent Agenda as follows:**

1. Claims Submitted by Finance Officer in the Amount Of \$1,629,009.42
2. Claims Submitted by ASM Global for the Sanford Center in the Amount of \$67,598.07
3. 2026 Business License Approvals
4. 2026 Liquor, Sunday Liquor and Wine License Renewals
5. Approve Special Event Permit for Kids Dash (November 28)
6. Approve Special Event Permit for Reindeer Run (November 29)
7. Approve Hardship Assessment Deferral for Property at 1414 Norton Ave NW - City Project 25-01
8. Approve Hardship Assessment Deferral for Property at 819 14th Street NW - City Project 25-01
9. Approve Hardship Assessment Deferral for Property at 1611 Park Ave NW - City Project 25-02
10. Approve CIP Requests for the Sanford Center
11. Approve Purchase of 2026 Police Patrol Vehicles
12. Approve MOU Between MN DOT and the City of Bemidji
13. Authorize Grant Funding Application to MN DNR for Personal Protective Gear
14. Approve Memorandum of Understanding with McKinstry Essention LLC for a No Cost Preliminary Energy Evaluation
15. Approve Policy Regarding Minnesota Paid Family Leave

Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

CITIZENS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA

- Charles Biberg, 1109 Beltrami Ave NW, addressed council on the unfair enforcement of parking tickets.

ORDINANCES

Ordinance Amending 2026 Fee Schedule

Staff stated that fire inspection fees needed to be reduced for childcare/foster care, commercial property, and pyrotechnics from \$55 to \$50 to comply with statutory limits. Staff also stated that the 95-gallon residential refuse rate needed to be changed to \$18.50/week to match the 65-gallon rate.

Public Hearing of an Ordinance Amending Fee Schedule for 2026

Pursuant to published notice a public hearing was held regarding input on an Ordinance Amending Fee Schedule for 2026. Mayor Prince opened the Public Hearing at 6:14 p.m.

Councilmember Rivera proposed an increase to the annual renewal fees for long-term rental property business licenses by 10%, noting rental renewal fees haven't been meaningfully adjusted in several years. This increase would be for the 1 unit residential, duplex residential and multi-unit residential annual fees. Thayer noted concern that landlords might pass this increase onto tenants.

Spiczka provided clarification on the changes to the park fees.

Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded Rivera accepting the changes to the Ordinance Amending 2026 Fee Schedule. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Motion by Rivera, seconded by Eaton, to increase the long-term rental property, business license, annual renewal for all single unit to multi-unit residential buildings by 10%. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Peterson, Thayer, Fiskevold Gould, Prince, Rivera, Eaton, Dickinson.

Hearing no public comments Prince closed the Public Hearing at 6:30 p.m.

AN ORDINANCE Amending Fee Schedule for 2026 was given a first reading.

REPORT

Emily Thabes, Executive Director for Beltrami County History Center provided a report highlighting the following:

- Their 2025 theme was “Empowering Women,” with year-long programs highlighting women’s history, health, and leadership in the county. Major initiatives included monthly women’s panels, community workshops, health equity programming, and art collaborations.
- The society completed a grant-funded shelving upgrade to preserve over a million county archives.
- A major ongoing project is the digitization of approximately 50,000 negatives from the Bemidji Sherling Studio (1937–1975), with support from the Minnesota Digital Library. Once digitized, these historical photos will be accessible online, and workshops will help families search for portraits.
- In 2026, they will launch the “Voices of the Mississippi” oral history project, aiming to record at least 100 residents’ stories of community, migration, and identity.
- The History Center is undergoing a major exhibit redesign with an advisory committee for community inclusiveness, targeted to open in late 2026.
- Facility upgrades (notably to HVAC) are nearly complete, improving preservation conditions.

BUSINESS

Consider Solar Developer Contract for Water Treatment Plant Rooftop Solar Array

Anderson reported that the Water Treatment Plant – Phase 2 project design included future accommodations for adding a solar array on the Phase 2 rooftop when the main facility construction was completed. Now that the contract 1-year warranty periods are close to expiring, staff have completed a Request for Proposal (RFP) process with the assistance of the Minnesota Department of Administration State Procurement office to select the most qualified pre-approved solar developer to install the solar array on the City’s behalf.

Two solar developers submitted proposals that were scored by city staff, and Wolf Track Energy was the highest scoring proposal. Below are the two developers and submitted pricing:

Wolf Track Energy - \$155,124.00 or \$2.78 (\$/watt DC)
Cedar Creek Energy - \$122,774.40 or \$3.024 (\$/watt DC)

The solar array should be eligible for the currently available 30% federal tax credits and Ottertail Power has tax rebates up to \$1500/KW (or up to \$60,000 maximum) available to assist with project costs. The RFP also included language that has the selected solar developer submitting for the currently available “Solar on Public Buildings Program” grant, which provides up to 70% project funding not to exceed \$112,000, if selected. Any gap in funding not covered by a combination of these funding sources would then come from our City’s Water Utility Fund. The solar array would be scheduled to be installed and online by Summer 2026.

Questions and concerns were raised regarding the award of the grants, the impact to the utility fund if grants are not awarded the long-term maintenance and return on investment of the solar array.

Motion by Rivera, seconded by Thayer authorizing the Mayor and City Manager to finalize and execute a contract with Wolf Track Energy to install a solar array on the Water Treatment Plant – Phase 2 facility in an amount not to exceed \$160,000. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Prince, Rivera, Thayer, Dickinson, Eaton, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson.

Consider Solar Developer Contract for City Facilities

At the October 20 council meeting, council approved submission of RFPs regarding solar installations for city facilities through the MN Commerce Department Solar on Public Buildings Grant. Only one solar developer, Wolf Track Energy, submitted proposals that were submitted to city staff for those locations. Their proposals are attached to this memo. Below is the submitted pricing:

Wolf Track Energy
- Fire Station 2: \$104,129.72 or \$3.94 (\$/watt DC)
- Sanford Center: \$159,864.62 or \$2.90 (\$/watt DC)
- Curling Club: \$127,481.38 or \$3.54 (\$/watt DC)

- City Park Warming House: \$159,995.37 or \$2.90 (\$/watt DC)

The solar arrays should be eligible for the currently available 30% federal tax credits and Ottetail Power has tax rebates up to \$1500/KW (or up to \$60,000 maximum) available to assist with project costs. The RFP also included language that has the selected solar developer submitting for the currently available “Solar on Public Buildings Program” grant, which provides up to 70% project funding not to exceed \$112,000 per project, if selected. Any gap in funding not covered by a combination of these funding sources would then come from other funding sources. The solar arrays would be scheduled to be installed and online by Summer 2026.

During consideration of solar installations for additional city facilities, the council discussed several key points and concerns:

- Councilors asked how and why certain city facilities were chosen for solar installations. Staff explained that selections were based on feasibility (roof orientation, age, existing utility connections, available open space) and quick turnaround to meet grant deadlines.
- Specific discussion focused on whether some sites (like city park) were appropriate for ground-mounted arrays, with councilmembers concerned about preserving usable public space and visual impact.
- There was repeated concern about financial risk if only the 70% state grant was secured, leaving the city potentially responsible for covering up to 30% of project costs (about \$150,000). Staff could not specify exact funding sources for this contingency, raising concerns about budget impact, especially given recent storm recovery expenses.
- Council and staff reviewed the process whereby the contractor requires an authorization to apply for grants but clarified that the project would not proceed if grant funding wasn't secured.
- Questions were raised about whether some of the projects (such as at the curling club) would generate savings for the city if utilities were paid by tenants or clubs, rather than by the city itself.
- The council discussed possibly scaling back or removing projects/sites from the plan if costs exceeded grant funding or if logistical problems arose at sites.
- Staff noted that the timeline was accelerated due to imminent grant deadlines and that detailed contract language (including deposit/refund clauses) would be developed, with projects brought back to council should circumstances change.
- There was some uncertainty and discomfort with the rushed process, unknowns regarding project scale or precise city cost share, and a desire to confirm legal review of contracts before any money was expended.

Motion by Rivera, seconded by Thayer, authorizing the Mayor and City Manager to finalize and execute a contract with Wolf Track Energy to install a solar array on the four City locations not to exceed \$552,000. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Yeas: Eaton, Prince, Thayer, Dickinson, Rivera, Fiskevold Gould. Nays: Peterson.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE UPDATES

- Councilmember Eaton reported on upcoming meetings with animal ordinance review, library board and airport.
- Councilmember Rivera had no report.
- Councilmember Eaton Thayer attended CGMC board meeting and conference.
- Councilmember Peterson reported on fire department relief association and upcoming Heritage Preservation Commission.
- Councilmember Fiskevold Gould had no report.
- Councilmember Dickinson had no report.
- Mayor Prince attended LMC meeting, Greater MN Housing meeting and CGMC conference.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- November 24, 2025 (5:30 pm) - Work Session (2026 Budget/Levy Discussion and Comp Plan Report by HRDC)
- December 1, 2025 (6:00 pm) - Council Meeting
- December 8, 2025 (5:30 pm) - Work Session
- December 15, 2025 (6:00 pm) - Council Meeting
- December 22, 2025 (5:30 pm) - Work Session

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 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk