

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Work Session – March 24, 2025

Pursuant to due call and notice, a work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, March 10, 2025 at 5:30 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.

Present: City Manager Rich Spiczka, Finance Director Donna Coe, Fire Chief Justin Sherwood, City Clerk Michelle Miller

Code of Conduct

The Council reviewed the code of conduct, with members expressing varying opinions on its necessity and enforcement. Key points include:

- The code of conduct was intended to help facilitate meetings and improve council interactions.
- Some councilmembers were indifferent but supportive of the document.
- Non-verbal communication was the most discussed aspect, with members acknowledging it can be challenging to control facial expressions.
- Mayor Prince suggested a potential third-party audit of meetings to provide neutral feedback on non-verbal interactions.
- Councilmember Rivera proposed having mediated conversations between councilmembers if communication issues arise.
- The council agreed the document serves as a guide for respectful interaction and working together, especially when disagreements arise.
- No major changes were recommended, but there was consensus on potentially refining the section about non-verbal communication.
- The council also discussed the importance of revisiting the city's mission, vision, and values in the future.

SAFER Grant Application Submission (Fire)

Council discussed the SAFER grant application for the fire department, which seeks \$1.5 million over three years to hire four new full-time firefighters. Council's discussion on the SAFER grant application centered on several key points:

- Councilmembers' perspectives:
 - Could be an estimated 6% potential levy increase (could be lower due to growth); however, Rural Fire Association would cover approximately 44-46% of costs
 - Potential long-term commitment after grant funding ends
 - Supportive of improving firefighter safety
 - Concerned about long-term financial sustainability
 - Interested in proactive staffing solutions
 - Desire to support firefighters and community safety
- Chief Sherwood highlighted the following:
 - Need for adequate staffing (only one full-time firefighter can be guaranteed on the primary engine during a call)
 - Difficulty ensuring consistent coverage due to paid time off
 - While paid-on-call firefighters play an essential role, 97% of emergency Responses are handled by career staff, placing a significant load on full-time firefighters
 - Importance of proactive services like fire inspections
 - Current grant application is on hold due to federal funding freeze

The council generally supported pursuing the SAFER grant with the discussion focused on balancing financial constraints with the critical need to ensure firefighter and community safety.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Peterson, seconded by Thayer, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk