

# CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

## BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

### Work Session – August 25, 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, August 25, 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, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer. Absent: Peterson

Present: Rich Spiczka, Sam Anderson, Justin Sherwood, Michelle Miller

#### Storm Recovery Update

##### Debris Cleanup:

- The city conducted three rounds of debris pickup following the storm. The first round was extensive and time-consuming, while the second and third rounds proceeded more quickly due to reduced volume.
- The final round of debris pickup was scheduled to begin August 25 following the same route as previous rounds. The city aimed to complete this round by the end of the week.
- Residents were given advance notice to place natural storm debris at the curb. The city emphasized that only natural debris would be collected—piles containing non-natural materials (e.g., fence panels, metal, birdhouses) would not be picked up to avoid equipment damage.
- Fewer contractors were needed for the final round due to decreased demand.
- The city communicated the pickup schedule and rules through social media, the city website, and a dedicated Public Works phone line for questions or special issues.
- Issues with debris pickup on private streets were resolved, and residents with special needs (e.g., new hazardous trees) could call to be added to the pickup list.

##### Sanford Center:

- The Sanford Center sustained significant damage, with the high roof over the arena being the largest issue. As of the meeting, roof repairs were essentially complete, allowing the ice plant to be restarted and ice to be installed for events.
- Many repairs and decisions are ongoing, with numerous bids coming in for additional work. Some items, like flooring and terrazzo repairs, are still being evaluated for scope and timing.
- Insurance coverage for the Sanford Center is in place through the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust. There is a single deductible for all city properties, and most repairs, including the flooring, are covered. The contractor who installed the flooring has been on site to assess the damage.
- The Sanford Center is expected to meet all its obligations for upcoming hockey and other scheduled events, though some areas may not look exactly as they did before the storm. Minor repairs and cosmetic work will continue throughout the winter.
- Councilmembers asked about the impact on event scheduling, insurance details, and the process for making decisions about repairs and replacements.

##### City Buildings Damage:

- Multiple city buildings sustained damage from the storm, including City Hall (minor rooftop AC unit issues), the Depot, Lake View Liquor, and the Carnegie (all needing roof replacements, with work underway or scheduled).
- The public works salt shed was completely destroyed and will require a custom replacement due to its unique size and foundation. This has been a challenging process due to limited manufacturers.
- The public works cold storage building suffered roof and garage door damage, with structural issues being evaluated by engineers. There is uncertainty about whether it can be repaired before winter or if alternate storage will be needed.
- The airport and HRA building also sustained damage; the HRA building's roof has already been repaired.
- Some smaller or less-used park buildings and shelters have not yet been fully evaluated.
- There are also issues with "loose property" and items not specifically listed on insurance policies, but most of these have been addressed.
- Insurance for all city buildings (including the HRA and airport) is under a single policy with the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, with one deductible for all claims. Some costs, such as tree or debris removal near insured buildings, may be partially recoverable.
- The city is working with contractors, engineers, and insurance adjusters to assess and repair damage. The process is ongoing, with some repairs completed and others still being planned or evaluated.

- Councilmembers asked about insurance deductibles, coverage for specific repairs (like flooring), and the process for handling claims and repairs across multiple buildings and entities.

Financial Summary:

- The city has incurred or expects to incur about \$4.4 million in costs related to storm recovery, including debris cleanup, repairs, and emergency response across various departments (streets, parks, fire, water/sewer).
- The city anticipates receiving 75% reimbursement from the state for eligible costs, which would amount to about \$3.3 million. This would leave the city responsible for approximately \$1.1 million, though the final amount could be higher (up to \$1.5–2 million) depending on what is deemed eligible for reimbursement (e.g., light poles).
- The largest expenses are in the streets department, primarily for debris cleanup and related work. Parks, fire, and water/sewer also have significant costs.
- Staff wages, overtime, and related expenses are included in these totals.
- There is uncertainty about some costs, such as whether certain light pole replacements will be reimbursed.
- Councilmembers discussed the impact of these costs on the city's budget, including concerns about how to pay for the city's share, the effect on property values, and the challenge of maintaining required reserve funds.
- The city will need to develop a plan to replenish its 50% undesignated fund balance reserve over the next two to three years, as required by city policy.
- There was discussion about the city's policy to maintain a 50% reserve, and whether that policy could be adjusted if needed.
- The financial impact will be a key consideration in the 2026 budget, and staff are exploring all options, including grants, to help offset costs.

Moving Forward:

- Staff and Council discussed the need to clear mulch and firewood from city sites before winter. Staff are discussing whether to open up access to the public for a limited time, allowing residents to take mulch (and some firewood) for personal use. Liability concerns were raised about allowing the public to use equipment or chainsaws on city property, so the approach will be to keep the process simple and safe.
- Some Councilmembers expressed concerns about the potential spread of tree diseases through mulch, but staff indicated that experts do not see this as a major risk. Most of the remaining material is mulch, and the city is already paying to have excess hauled away for use in other locations (e.g., farms, reclamation sites).
- The city is actively seeking grants to help with recovery costs, including tree replanting and maintenance. Staff are processing all available grant opportunities to offset both immediate and long-term recovery expenses.
- Moving forward, the city will need to address properties with unaddressed storm debris or hazards. Staff plan to develop a process for identifying and addressing these properties, balancing enforcement with humanitarian considerations. There will be outreach to connect residents with community resources, and compliance notices will include information on how to seek help.
- The city will also need to communicate clearly with the public about timelines for debris removal and the transition back to normal code enforcement.
- Councilmembers discussed the importance of messaging around sidewalk and boulevard maintenance, and the potential for community initiatives (like "adopt a sidewalk") to help keep public spaces accessible.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, motion by Dickinson, seconded by Fiskevold Gould, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller  
City Clerk