

# CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

## BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

### Work Session – September 22, 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, September 22, 2025 at 5:43 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: Rich Spiczka, Sam Anderson, Michelle Miller, Matthew Upgren, Darren Laesch

#### MnDOT TH 197 Update

MnDOT provided an update on the Trunk Highway 197 project, addressing both the current status and future schedule. Due to funding delays and adjustments, project staging had to be modified. The city's roundabout construction is underway, with MnDOT's main highway work now spread over the next two years (2026-2027). MnDOT explained that their portion will start on the west side of town in summer 2026, coordinated with city construction to avoid overlap. During construction, live traffic will remain on Highway 197, though there will be two short-term closures (approximately 2-3 weeks each) for Highway 71 at the intersection. Temporary signals and signage will help manage access to local businesses. MnDOT's right-of-way staff are working with corridor landowners for easements and property issues, and ongoing meetings with business owners address construction impacts. A public open house is scheduled for October 23rd to keep residents informed.

Communication plans include pre-construction open houses, weekly construction meetings (in person and virtual), an email distribution list, a phone hotline, and a dedicated business liaison to support local businesses. MnDOT highlighted strategies for supporting businesses during construction, such as working with the local Small Business Development Center, Chamber of Commerce, and using community-driven promotional initiatives.

Council and MnDOT discussed options for new light poles as part of the Trunk Highway 197 project. MnDOT proposed using standard light poles (without banner brackets or GFCI outlets) and offered to cover the cost of "knockdowns" (major repairs due to accidents or damage) if the standard option was chosen. These standards align with statewide policy and simplify maintenance responsibilities.

If decorative features such as banner brackets or outlets were added (as are seen elsewhere in the city), the city would be responsible for the cost of knockdowns and ongoing major maintenance, as these features make the poles "non-standard" in MnDOT's view. Several councilmembers expressed a preference for the simpler, standard option to minimize costs and streamline maintenance. They also appreciated MnDOT's offer to assume responsibility for major repairs. Some councilmembers noted aesthetic or community benefits associated with decorative lighting, but agreed practicality and cost were more important for this project area. The discussion clarified that installing decorative poles would not affect installation costs (covered by grant funding) but would affect long-term maintenance obligations for the city. Councilmembers asked about precedents and maintenance agreements for other parts of the city, and MnDOT clarified the statewide policy that guides such decisions. Most councilmembers ultimately supported the simpler, standard lighting solution without banner brackets or outlets.

The MnDOT team addressed council questions, particularly around signage for business access, detour routes, timing during local events (like the county fair), and funding contingencies. The team committed to adapting plans as needed to minimize disruptions.

#### ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Dickinson, seconded by Eaton, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller  
City Clerk