

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Work Session – November 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, November 24, 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 (5:33), Peterson, Dickinson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer.

Present: Rich Spiczka, Michelle Miller, Anna Carlson, Naomi Carlson

Comprehensive Plan Update from HRDC

The process began with HRDC outlining their engagement-focused approach, guided by the principle "if you want to go far, go together." Over the preceding 10 months, HRDC conducted community outreach through events like picnics, surveys, and one-on-one meetings to build relationships and gather initial feedback. The goal of the current phase is to work with the City Council to establish alignment, clarity, and shared leadership for the plan's future direction. HRDC explained their methodology was designed to build a unified vision and momentum that would outlast the planning document itself.

Proposed Structure for the Comprehensive Plan

After initial feedback, HRDC presented a revised proposal to streamline the plan's focus. This new structure consists of four main priority areas and four cross-cutting themes:

- **Priority Areas:**
 1. Housing
 2. Transportation, mobility, and parking
 3. Business development
 4. Quality of life (including arts, education, and health)
- **Cross-Cutting Themes:**
 1. Land use and zoning
 2. Safety, security, and emergency response
 3. Sustainability (air, water, land, waste, energy)
 4. Community partnerships and ongoing engagement

Council Feedback and Key Priorities

Councilmembers provided extensive feedback on the proposed structure and the overall process, highlighting several key priorities:

- **Housing and Business Development:** There was a strong consensus that housing is the number one priority, followed closely by business development and job creation. Councilmembers emphasized that growing the tax base through development is essential to fund all other city initiatives.
- **Removing Barriers:** A recurring theme was the need for the city to "get out of the way" by identifying and removing restrictive ordinances and other barriers that hinder housing and business development. A key question raised was what changes would encourage developers to build within the city limits rather than in surrounding townships.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The council stressed the critical importance of deeply engaging the business community, developers, and major employers. It was noted that the stakeholder list for engagement sessions needed to be expanded to include more local business leaders. Councilmembers should submit suggestions for the stakeholder list to the City Manager.
- **Scope of the Update:** HRDC clarified the process as an update to the existing 2016 plan, not a complete rewrite. However, some councilmembers stated that foundational elements like the city's mission, vision, and values needed to be revisited, as there might not be a current consensus on them.
- **Data and Accessibility:** The council requested a breakdown of community survey responses by ward for better analysis and asked that all future presentations be digitally accessible for screen readers and individuals with colorblindness.

Next Steps and Unresolved Issues

- **Refining Focus Areas:** The council did not formally adopt the proposed priority areas. HRDC will incorporate the council's feedback to refine the framework.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The consultants will update the stakeholder list with council suggestions and plan a series of 90-minute facilitated sessions focused on each priority area, with a specific focus on inviting business and development leaders.
- **Business Survey:** The distribution of a previously developed business survey with the Chamber of Commerce, which had been paused, was identified as a priority to gather crucial input.

- **Council/Staff Meeting:** The proposed luncheon for council and staff received mixed reactions. The idea was floated to potentially hold it as a "wrap-up" event after community feedback is gathered, but no decision was made.
- **Path Forward:** Councilmembers will send feedback on the proposed plan structure and stakeholder names to the City Manager. The consultants will then provide an updated model timeline and refined language for the council to review and act upon.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Thayer, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk