

BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL COUNCIL WORK SESSION AGENDA

Monday, March 23, 2026

City Hall
317 4th Street NW
5:30 PM



CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

BUSINESS

- a) Comprehensive Plan Update

ADJOURN

MEMBER ATTENDING REMOTELY

COUNCILMEMBER FISKEVOLD GOULD WILL BE ATTENDING VIA WEBEX UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF MINNESOTA STATUTES SECTION 13D.02. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC MAY MONITOR THE MEETING BY ACCESSING THE REMOTE MEETING LINK ON THE CITY WEBSITE <https://bemidjimn.portal.civicclerk.com/>

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM



Meeting Date: March 23, 2026
Action Requested: Comprehensive Plan Update
Prepared By: Rich Spiczka, City Manager

Background:

In general, the goal of a municipal comprehensive plan is:

The goal of a municipal comprehensive plan is to provide a unified vision for the future development and improvement of the municipality. It aims to guide public decisions related to land use, mobility, amenities and economic development. The plan sets forth policies for the community's future development and serves as a blueprint for that development and the preservation of the locality. It is a dynamic public process that helps communities identify issues, stay ahead of trends in land use development, redevelopment and anticipate in order to navigate change in the community's population and land use patterns.

At the work session HRDC will be presenting an update on information collected, conversations had, partners who they have worked with and some findings/recommendations. Throughout the process thus far, council has been able to identify focus areas for the plan, in order to address the most pertinent and urgent needs as they see it in our community. These priorities were used as guiding principles in the newest outreach and collection of data. Their presentation will include a summation of some key themes identified. They have also provided supplemental information for your review so you know where the themes were derived from.

They have also taken the time to review the goals of the previous comprehensive plan to identify its success and evaluate how effect those items were. In the future they will be providing information regarding some of the challenge being items were identified and put into the plan that were no necessarily items the City itself could address or remedy. As they have moved through the collection of data and engagement in this process they have identified issues like it, which they will use in the near future to encourage/identify partnerships to address these issues.

Recommendation:

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION

Monday, March 23rd

Shaping the Future of Our City Bemidji



THIS IS OUR CITY

Bemidji

Cal Larson, Naomi Carlson



Anna Carlson



Dave Hengel

Scott Turn



BEMIDJI AREA

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

COMPLETED SURVEYS

Each Survey was Developed and Distributed in Partnership with Community Leaders



Community-wide

462 responses

July 2025 - February 2026

Purpose: To understand residents' priorities, perceptions, and vision for Bemidji's future to guide long-term planning decisions.



Business

145 responses

December 19 - January 7

Purpose: To gather input from the business community on economic conditions, barriers to growth, and opportunities to strengthen Bemidji's competitiveness.



Housing

103 responses

February 24 - March 9

Purpose: To assess development challenges, market conditions, and opportunities to expand and diversify housing options in Bemidji.



Three Surveys - Same Messages

(Community Survey • Business Survey • Housing Development Survey)

Housing Supply & Affordability

Residents, businesses, and housing professionals all identified housing availability as a challenge.

Increasing housing supply will be critical for Bemidji's long-term economic growth.



Economic Development & Business Climate

Businesses and residents want stronger local economic growth.

The city may need to evaluate policies, regulations, and incentives that influence development.

Regulatory Predictability & Development Process

Developers and businesses both emphasized the importance of clear and predictable rules.

Improving clarity and predictability in development processes may support investment.



Quality of Place

Residents and businesses both emphasized maintaining a high quality of life.

Continued investment in public and green spaces, infrastructure, and neighborhood quality supports both residents and economic activity.



COMMERCIAL AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Encouraging commercial/business development
in the City of Bemidji, within the comprehensive plan

Dave Hengel



Scott Turn



WHY IT MATTERS

RESIDENTIAL

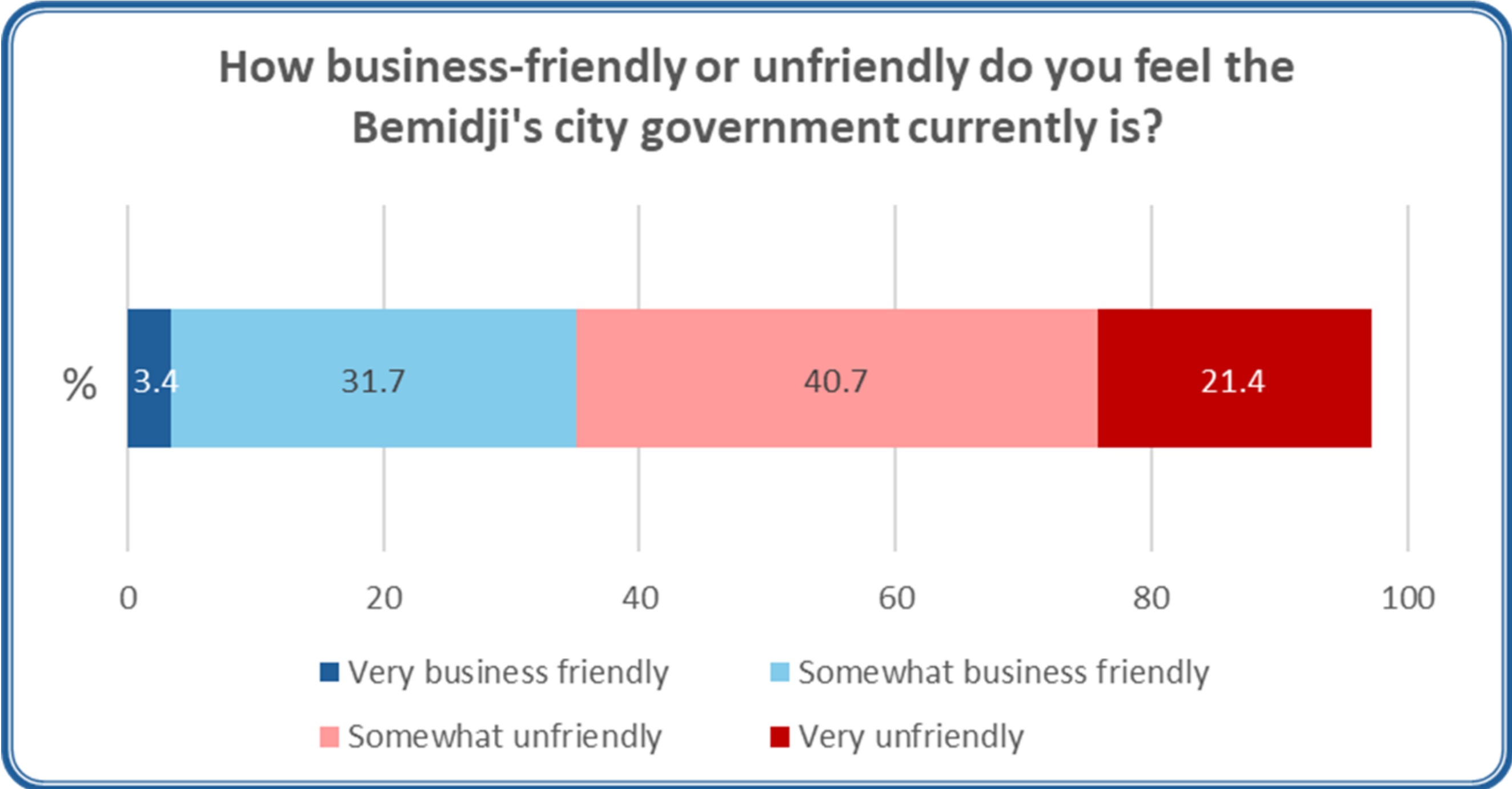
For every \$1 in property tax paid by a residential taxpayer, that residence uses on average between **\$1.08 and \$1.18** in city services.

COMMERCIAL/BUSINESS

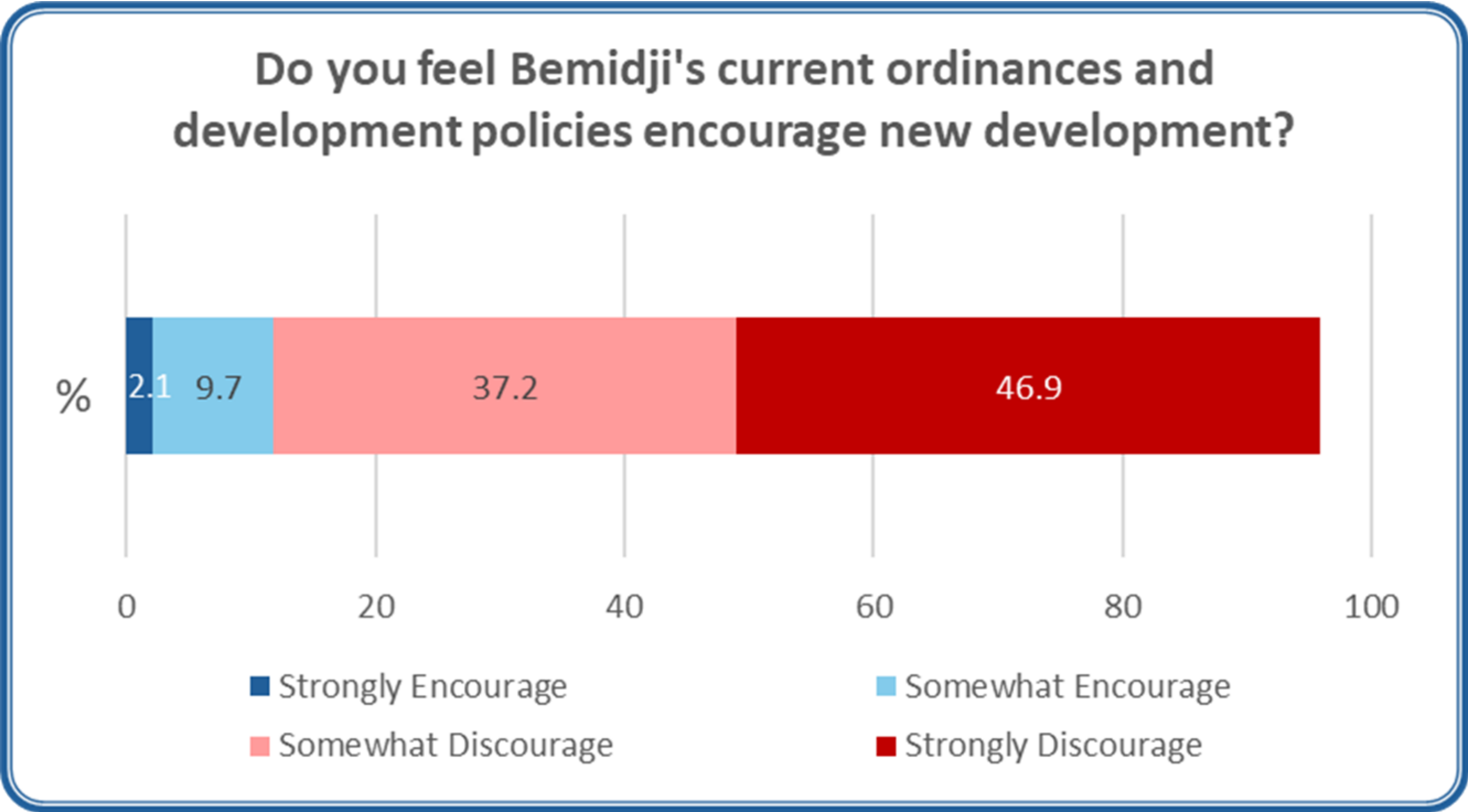
For every \$1 in property taxes paid by a commercial/business taxpayer, that business uses on average between **60 cents and 70 cents** in city services.

In Bemidji's case, this does not take into account the local sales tax impact

HOW IS BEMIDJI DOING?



HOW IS BEMIDJI DOING?



ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

(We heard versions of these repeatedly in the responses)

“Have the City’s attitude be: ‘What can we do to HELP you build/expand your business?’ rather than ‘Here are the requirements you have to follow.’”

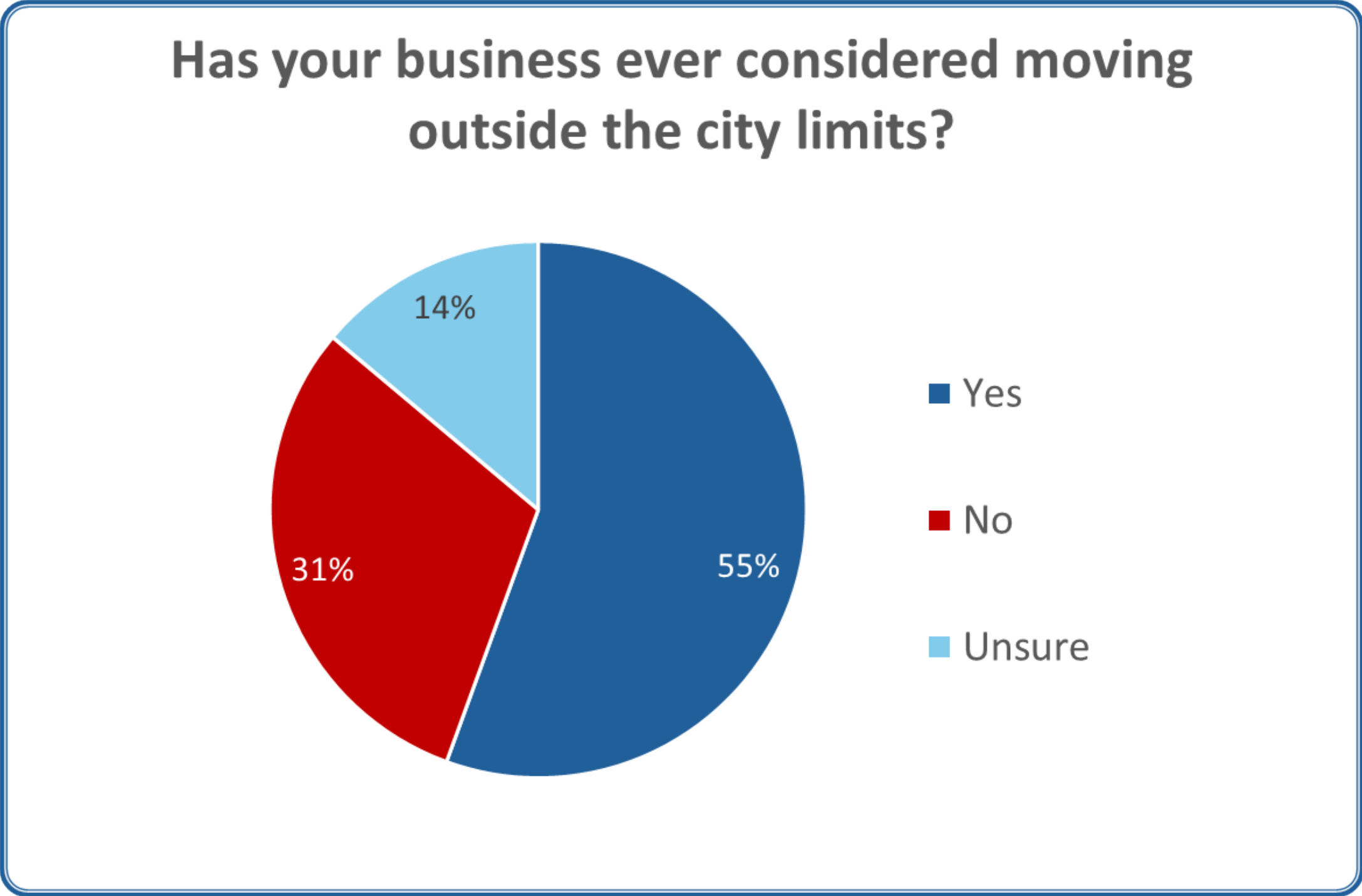
“We need to think more like a business... be proactive, nimble and quick to respond. What can we do to be the #1 relocating city in Minnesota?”

“We desperately need affordable housing for working and middle-class people in Bemidji.”

“There are just so many trivial hoops to jump through to get approval where outside the city it is much easier and cheaper. Can we make it easier for businesses to say yes within Bemidji city limits?”

“The cost of meeting building code requirements significantly limits business expansion.”

HOW IS BEMIDJI DOING?



WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

BUSINESSES:

Stittsworth Meats
Bemidji Steel
Roth RV
Grizzley Truss
Rays Marine
Shulke Properties
Bemidji Aviation
LePier
Up North Sports
King of the Road
Bessler Electric

ANNUAL PROPERTY TAX

\$312,114

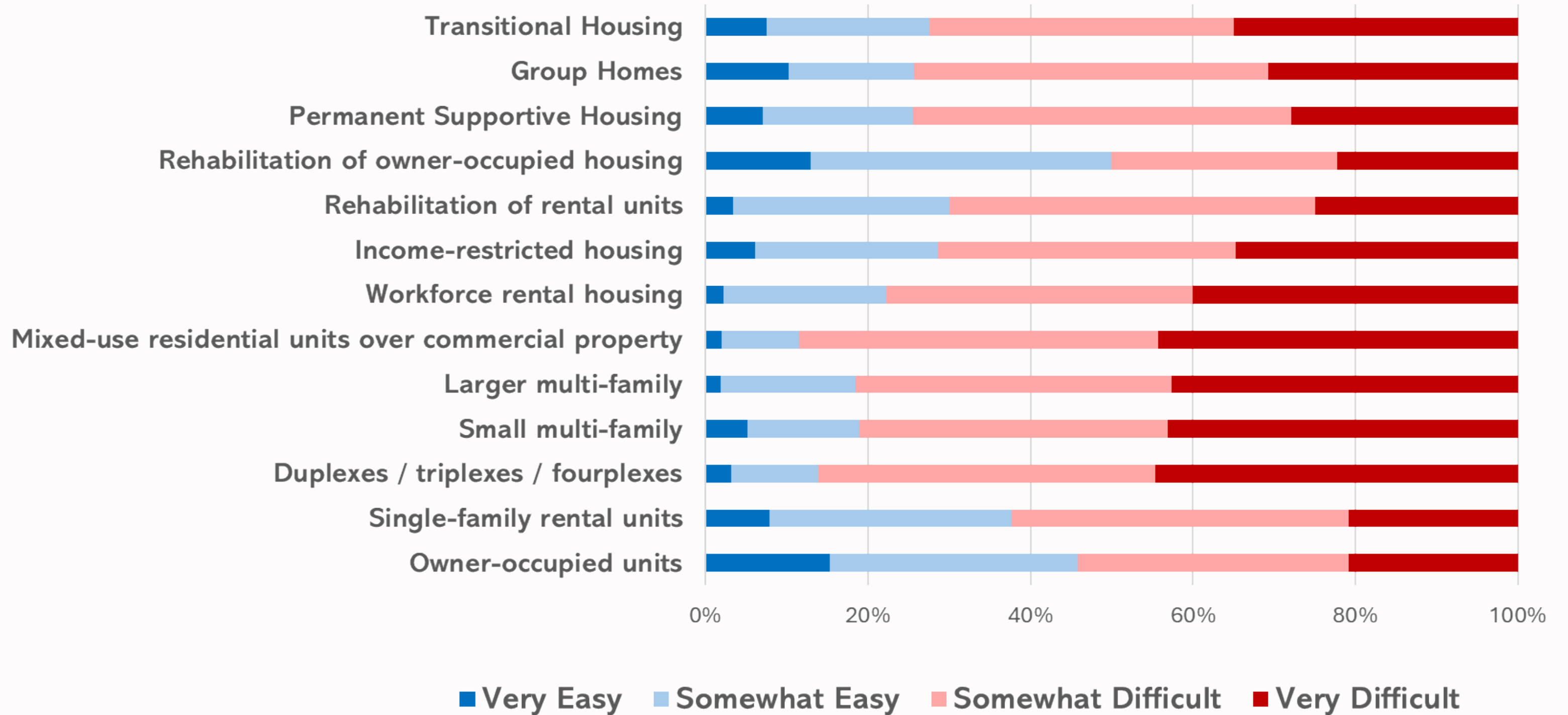
ESTIMATED POTENTIAL CITY PORTION

\$99,877

ESTIMATED SALES TAX IMPACT

>\$100,000

How easy or difficult is it to build the following housing types in Bemidji?



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

1

ORDINANCE CHANGES

(starting with industrial park)

- Fencing/shielding
- Green space
- Trees
- Outdoor lighting
- Signage
- Prohibition on gravel/crushed concrete
- Interior parking lot green space
- Job/storage trailer restrictions
- Dumpster enclosures
- Parkland dedication
- Stormwater detention ponds

2

START WITH "YES"

Focus on internal culture and external perception

Staff and council begin from "how can we make this work?"

Reduce unnecessary friction in early conversations

3

ESTABLISH BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

to provide advice and counsel to City staff and Council.

Allow that Committee the opportunity to comment on all planning cases in front of the city

4

TASK THE COMMITTEE

with generating a comparison of ordinances and fees with similar sized communities and neighboring townships

identifying appropriate actions the City can consider to improve business development conditions



Next Steps

Over the next 3-4 months our team will be distributing at least one additional survey (transportation) and engaging in a variety of more in depth - focused conversations to generate the final content for the Comprehensive Plan Update



Transportation Survey



Business & Housing Development Advisory Committee(s)



Quality of Life Discussion



Draft and Finalize Update for Approval



HEADWATERS
Regional Development Commission
Leading the Way

THANK YOU

Cal Larson



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