

PLANNING COMMISSION

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – February 26, 2026

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Michael Meehlhause called the regular meeting of the City of Bemidji Planning Commission to order at **5:30 p.m.** Roll call was taken, and the pledge of allegiance was recited.

Members present: Meehlhause, Lemmer, McCoy, Olderman, Peterson (via WebEx).

Members excused: Faver, Heinonen

Staff Present: Planning Director Jamin Carlson, Assistant Planning Director Melissa Fahrenbruch, Planning Administrative Assistant Ainslee Krause.

Others Present: Troy Gilchrist (via WebEx), Robert Iverson, John Johannson, and Dean Williamson.

AGENDA

Chair Meehlhause called for any amendments to the agenda. Motion by **Lemmer**, seconded by **Peterson**, to approve the agenda. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Olderman, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer**. Nays: **None**.

MINUTES

The minutes for the **January 22, 2026**, Planning Commission meeting were presented for approval. Motion by **Lemmer**, seconded by **McCoy**, approving minutes as presented. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Lemmer, McCoy, Meehlhause, Olderman, Peterson**. Nays: None.

VISITORS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA: No appearance.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Hearings:

PLANNING CASE: VARIANCE REQUEST – John Johannson representing Division 25, LLC & Willow Creek Center:

Fahrenbruch presented the planning case request: John Johannson, representing Division 25, LLC and Willow Creek Center, is requesting a variance for section 28-409 off-street parking, loading and surfacing standards of a redevelopment of a parking area setback to the side property lines. The subject properties are abutting parcels (parking area for a new Chipotle [former Rod's Meats] and the Willow Creek Center) at 1718 & 1710 Paul Bunyan Dr NW (PIN:800301700, & 800301600) in the City of Bemidji.

Conclusions based on the Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan were presented in the packet including conditions and findings of fact.

Commission members made the following comments:

- No comments.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Meehlhause opened the Public Hearing at **5:36 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Robert Iverson addressed the Commission regarding the variance request.

- John Johansson addressed the Commission regarding the project, the reasons for the variance request, proposed construction timelines, and asked for the City to work with MnDOT regarding business signage and detour routes during the roundabout construction in 2026-2027.
- Peterson and Meehlhause welcomed the project to Bemidji.

Hearing no further comments Chair Meehlhause closed the Public Hearing at **5:44 PM**.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the variance request for parcels 800301700 and 800301600, with the conditions and findings of fact as presented in the packet. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer**. Abstention: **Olderman**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Meehlhause addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **March 9, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

Planning Commission Discussion: Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Ordinance Language:

Fahrenbruch presented the discussion request: The City of Bemidji applied for the Local Climate Action Planning Grant and was awarded the grant in 2025. The City of Bemidji has worked closely with the Great Plains Institute (GPI), a clean energy non-profit based in Minnesota, to meaningfully advance work to further transportation electrification through creation of a custom roadmap that would include a fleet analysis, a comprehensive review of the community's zoning code and creation of a community-wide electric vehicle (EV) vision statement. Staff is bringing to the Planning Commission the draft recommendations for the EV Charging language to be added to the city code. This is a discussion of example language that the city could adopt in the future or at the time of a full ordinance update.

Commission members made the following comments:

- Olderman questioned the extent of Recommendation 5 relating to new parking areas being built as EV ready.
- Fahrenbruch answered that "EV ready" means conduit and wire are in the ground for future use for Level 1 & 2 chargers only and that the cost is lower for those chargers.
- Fahrenbruch discussed the size of new development or redevelopment projects that would require EV ready spots, and which would require Planning Board or Administrative approval.
- Peterson addressed maintenance and snow removal issues related to charging stations. Fahrenbruch responded.
- Lemmer addressed signage and chargers placed in hotel parking lots.
- Carlson addressed signage and location issues, ordinance trade-offs, and that that being proactive can lower the installation costs for developers.
- Meehlhause questioned if the state had data relating to the number of EVs registered in the state or other geographical areas. Fahrenbruch, Carlson, Meehlhause and McCoy discussed.
- McCoy addressed MnDOT's EV corridors and if the City's ordinance could assist in that.
- Peterson addressed locations such as downtown and at hotels rather than forcing small business to install them.
- Fahrenbruch addressed that other cities focused on larger parking areas such as hotels, grocery and department stores, and that local ordinance can be customized to meet local needs and should be looked at as a way to help Bemidji grow.
- Fahrenbruch addressed that ordinance requirements to provide EV charging can trigger reductions in overall parking spaces, and that some EV spaces must be handicapped accessible.

- Olderman addressed the number of EV vehicles registered in Beltrami County per the MPCA, the number of charging stations currently available, and the need to focus on larger developments and hotels rather than small business.
- Meehlhause addressed that new hotel development is already including this, that larger existing parking areas should be addressed, and that this would include City owned parking lots.
- Lemmer inquired if the YMCA project had EV charging included. Carlson responded.
- Carlson addressed that a 5% reduction in parking spaces granted by requiring EV charging would offset the cost of EV charging installation and that electric utilities offer rebates for installing chargers.
- Lemmer questioned if the EV ready requirement carried a timeline for completion. Carlson responded that such an end date could be added to the ordinance, or they can be conditioned into them.
- Meehlhause and Carlson discussed offsets that could be granted by ordinance.
- Peterson reiterated concerns regarding the financial impacts of maintenance on small businesses.
- Meehlhause and Carlson discussed outcomes from the discussion.
- Fahrenbruch addressed additional grant opportunities that had arisen from having done this one and that City Council approval will be requested.


UPCOMING COMMISSION MEETINGS

- Thursday, March 26, 2026 5:30 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by **Lemmer**, seconded by **McCoy**, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Lemmer, McCoy, Meehlhause, Olderman, Peterson**. Nays: **None**. Meeting adjourned at **6:20 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



David Wielenberg
Compliance Inspector & Site Analyst

PC Minutes approved and attested by: Michael Meehlhause
Planning Commission Representative