

PLANNING COMMISSION

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Regular Meeting – December 18, 2025

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Don Heinonen 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: Faver, Heinonen, Lemmer, McCoy, Peterson (WebEx), Meehlhause.
Members excused: None.

Staff Present: Planning Director Jamin Carlson, Assistant Planner Melissa Fahrenbruch, Compliance Inspector & Site Analyst David Wielenberg, Receptionist Heidi Hein, Lead Accounting Clerk Rachelle Barckholtz.

Others Present: Troy Gilchrist planning attorney(via WebEx), Ben Kerr, Thom Schuett (WebEx), David Haaland (WebEx), Reed Olson, Julie Canty, Cassandra Hietala, Nancy Schram, Jennifer Thomas, Jeremy Olson, Sandy Henum, Mariano Arguedas, Bidal Duran, Tom Rev, Brian Christiansen, Liz Smyithe, Andrew Erholtz, Leroy Stenstrom, Lisa Knights, and other members of the public.

AGENDA

Chair Heinonen called for any amendments to the agenda. Motion by **Lemmer**, seconded by **Meehlhause**, to approve the agenda. Motion carried by unanimous roll call vote.

MINUTES

The minutes for the **October 23, 2025**, Planning Commission meeting were presented for approval. Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, approving minutes as presented. McCoy abstained due to previous absence. Motion carried by unanimous roll call vote.

VISITORS WITH BUSINESS NOT ON AGENDA: No appearance.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Hearings:

PLANNING CASE: CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT REQUEST – BEN KERR REPRESENTING KODIAK BUILDERS, LLC:

Fahrenbruch presented the planning case request: Ben Kerr representing Kodiak Builders, LLC is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to operate a contractor's shop and storage facility for their construction business and Mixed Use (commercial & residential) for a rental house on the property. The subject property is located at 628 Paul Bunyan Dr SE (PIN 800376100) in the City of Bemidji and is in the B-2 General Commercial Zoning District.

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

Commission members made no comments.

Public Hearing

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

- Ben Kerr, the applicant, addressed the commission.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **5:37 PM**.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Peterson**, to recommend approval of the conditional use permit request for parcel 800376100, 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, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **January 12, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PLANNING CASE: CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT REQUEST – GREG JOHNSON REPRESENTING TAMARACK WOODS APARTMENTS:

Carlson presented the planning case request: Greg Johnson (Applicant) representing Tamarack Woods Apartments is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for greater than 30 units of high density residential along with removing high quality significant trees beyond the base minimum landscape standard. The subject property is located at 2590 Ridgeway Ave NW (PIN 800008300) 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 no comments.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **5:41 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Tom Schuett, project developer, addressed the breakdown of senior and family units in the new complex.
- Faver inquired what the applicant thought about the Bemidji Sustainability Commission's recommendation for EV charging and rooftop solar. Schuett deferred to David Haaland of UrbanWorks Architecture, LLC.
- Haaland stated that the project would be constructed for future rooftop PV solar as that is a requirement of Minnesota Rental Housing Guidelines and that EV charging would be pre-wired for future addition depending upon demand.
- Faver inquired if the applicant would be opposed to having solar and EV charging added as conditions.
- Schuett stated that they would not, but that doing so would be a challenge due to an already tight construction budget, and that if funds became available to do so, they would add them.
- Peterson addressed the Applicant.
- Schuett addressed the commission regarding possible future phases of the project.
- Reed Olson, 711 14th ST NW, addressed the commission regarding a perceived negative reputation of the housing developer.
- Schuett responded to Olson's comments.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **5:51 PM**.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **McCoy**, to recommend approval of the Conditional Use Permit request for parcel 800008300, with the conditions and findings of fact as presented in the packet. Meehlhause requested, seconded by Faver, an amendment to include the Sustainability Commission's solar and EV recommendations as a condition.

Commission members made the following comments:

- Peterson addressed the clarity of the amendment.
- Troy Gilchrist addressed the commission regarding clarifying the amendment.
- Meehlhause clarified the amendment to be that the Applicant would include a sustainability plan for future solar and EV charging.
- Commission discussed the amendment and possible costs of adding it.
- Lemmer addressed additional needs such as garages or vehicle plug-ins.
- Peterson addressed the City's housing shortage.

Chair Heinonen called for a roll call vote to approve the amendment to the Conditional Use Permit for the addition of a solar panel and EV charging plan with the recommendation of the City Engineer. Motion failed on the following roll call vote due to no majority: Ayes: **Faver, Lemmer, Meehlhause**. Nays: **Heinonen, McCoy, Peterson**.

Motion to approve Conditional Use Permit as presented carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**. Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **January 12, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PLANNING CASE: INTERIM USE PERMIT REQUEST – JULIE CANTY REPRESENTING FIRST CITY CANNABIS:

Carlson presented the planning case request: Julie Canty representing First City Cannabis is requesting an Interim Use Permit (IUP) for operating a Cannabis Retail Business in a leased building. The subject property is located at 920 Washington Ave S (PIN 80.04204.00) in the City of Bemidji and is in the B-2 General Commercial Zoning District within the Highway 197 Overlay. 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 Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **6:14 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Julie Canty, Applicant, addressed the commission regarding the project on her business plan, security, site improvements, age verification, lighting, parking, tax advantages for the City, rules for the property, amount of employees, hours of operations, and how to contact owner.
- Sandra Hietala, 4207 Woodbury Dr NE, owner of the Gym Bin addressed the commission requesting denial of the IUP based on the definition of use of the Gym Bin.
- Nancy Schram, 50160 219th Ave, addressed the commission in in opposition to the IUP, discussing buffer zone measurement requirements.
- Jennifer Thomas, 2715 Beltrami Ave NW, addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP, discussing buffer zone measurement requirements and the definition of use of the Gym Bin.
- Jeremy Olson superintendent of Bemidji Schools, 502 Minnesota Ave NW, addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP based on the school district's lease of the Gym Bin.
- Sandy Henum, 3601 Waville Rd NE, addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP based on the school district's lease with the Gym Bin.
- Mariano Arguedas, 2325 16th St SW, addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP based on proximity to Kandiland Daycare and Gym Bin.
- State Representative Bidal Duran addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP based on issues with state law.
- Tom Rev, Bemidji, addressed the commission in favor of the IUP based on age restriction requirements.
- Reed Olson, 711 14th St NW, spoke in favor of the IUP.
- Brian Christianson, 902 Washington Ave S, addressed the commission in opposition to the IUP based on possible security issues raised by the business.
- Liz Smyithe, 2512 Beltrami Ave N, stated that applicant is a great person & neighbor and was in favor of the IUP.

- Canty addressed the commission in response to some of the issues raised. Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **6:43 PM**.

Commission members made the following additional comments:

- Faver and Peterson addressed staff regarding the buffer zone measurement requirements. Carlson asked Gilchrist to respond.
- Gilchrist addressed the commission discussing what state law allows and what the City adopted as ordinance.
- Peterson inquired about the school district's use of leased space in relation to cannabis buffers. Commission discussed.
- Gilchrist addressed state statute and City ordinance definitions of what defines a school. Commission discussed.
- Lemmer questioned if parking at the proposed site would be sufficient. Carlson replied it met City ordinance requirements.

Motion by **Peterson**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend denial of the permit until further findings and research is done. Chair Heinonen requested clarification from staff if the motion was adequate. Commission, staff, and Gilchrist discussed.

- Faver inquired about tabling the measure until the next meeting to allow staff and Gilchrist the opportunity to establish findings of fact for denial. Chair Heinonen expressed a preference to table rather than deny.
- Commission, staff, and Gilchrist discussed the requirements for tabling and the 60/120-day rule.
- Commission discussed tabling versus the motion on the floor.
- Lemmer inquired about withdrawing the second for the motion to deny. Chair Heinonen and Gilchrist discussed.

Motion by **Faver**, seconded by **McCoy**, to table the motion until the January commission meeting for clarification on how the buffer zones are measured.

- Faver clarified that the motion to table was to allow staff and Gilchrist time to draft findings of fact toward denial.
- Commission discussed.

Motion by **Faver**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to table the motion until the January commission meeting for staff and Gilchrist to determine findings of fact toward denial.

- Chair Heinonen and Lemmer discussed procedure.
- Meehlhause discussed that by definition the Gym Bin is a private business and does not meet the requirements for protected status.
- Peterson discussed the need to be clear in how buffer zones are measured.
- Lemmer addressed staff regarding the number of accesses to the Gym Bin and the proposed cannabis site.
- Carlson addressed the commission regarding buffer zone measurements per City ordinance.

A roll call vote was taken to table the request for parcel 800420200, until the January commission meeting to allow for the establishment of findings of fact toward denial. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, McCoy, Lemmer, Faver**. Nays: **Heinonen, Meehlhause**. Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would return to the Planning Commission at their next meeting on **January 22, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final recommendation.

PLANNING CASE: LAND USE MAP AMMENDMENT & CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT REQUEST – ANDREW ERHOLTZ REPRESENTING VISION PROPERTIES LLC:

Fahrenbruch presented the planning case request: Andrew Erholtz representing Vision Properties of Bemidji is requesting a Land Use Map Amendment (Rezone) from R-4 Moderate Density Residential to B-2 General Commercial for the parcel and a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for Mixed Use (Commercial & Residential) to rent the house on the property. The subject property is located at 506 and 616 6th St SE (PIN 80.03760.00) 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 Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **7:11 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- Andrew Erholtz, Applicant, addressed the commission regarding the overall plans for the project.
- McCoy inquired about the rental status of the house. Erholtz replied long-term.
- Leroy Stenstrom, 516 Wood Ave SE, addressed the commission in favor of the project.
- Lisa Knights, 416 Wood Ave SE, addressed the commission in favor the project.
- Ben Kerr, 628 Paul Bunyan Dr S, addressed the commission in favor of the project.

Hearing no further comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **7:18 PM**.

Commission members made the following comments:

- McCoy inquired about current tax status of property, Erholtz replied no taxes.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Peterson**, to recommend approval of the rezone request for parcel 800376000, 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, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **January 12, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Peterson**, to recommend approval of the Conditional Use Permit request for parcel 800376000, 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, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **January 12, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

PLANNING CASE: ORDINANCE TEXT AMMENDMENT REQUEST – Article X, Section 28-429 Cannabis Zoning and Land Use:

Fahrenbruch presented the ordinance text amendment request: The City of Bemidji approved a new ordinance to Chapter 28, Article X, Section 28-429 for Cannabis Business Zoning and Land Use at the end of 2024. Since then, the State Legislature has updated the state statute, and the Office of Cannabis has updated their guidance, prompting the city of Bemidji to update our ordinance to clarify language on Lower-Potency Hemp Edibles.

Commission asked to discuss and hold a public hearing on the updates and provide a recommendation to the Planning Board.

Commission members made the following comments:

- Peterson addressed staff regarding interim use permits not being required. Fahrenbruch replied.
- Carlson addressed commission to clarify reasoning and timeframe.
- Peterson questioned staff regarding benefit to City liquor stores.
- Carlson clarified that reasoning was to avoid undue review & permitting of all businesses that have currently been operational for multiple years with no issues.
- McCoy inquired on how many businesses sell low potency hemp within the city. Carlson responded around 30.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to published notice, a public hearing was held regarding input on the request. Chair Heinonen opened the Public Hearing at **7:31 PM**, hearing the following comments:

- No comments received.

Hearing no comments Chair Heinonen closed the Public Hearing at **7:31 PM**.

Motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to recommend approval of the ordinance text amendment to Article X, Section 28-429 Cannabis Zoning and Land Use, specifically for low potency hemp drinks, low potency hemp, and CBD.

Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**.

Chair Heinonen addressed that the request would go before the Planning Board at their next meeting on **January 12, 2026**, at 5:30 PM for the final decision.

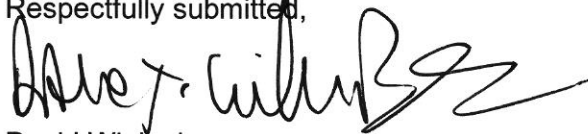
UPCOMING COMMISSION MEETINGS

- Thursday, January 22, 2026 5:30 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by **Meehlhause**, seconded by **Lemmer**, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried by the following roll call vote: Ayes: **Peterson, Meehlhause, McCoy, Lemmer, Heinonen, Faver**. Nays: **None**. Meeting adjourned at **7:33 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



David Wielenberg
Compliance Inspector & Site Analyst

PC Minutes approved and attested by: _____



Planning Commission Representative