

BEMIDJI HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

City Hall Conference Room
317 4th Street NW



4:30 PM

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Welcome Guests**
- 3. Approve Agenda**
 - a. April 14, 2026 Meeting
- 4. Approve Minutes**
- 5. Old Business**
 - a. SHPO Follow Up
 - b. 100 Year Old Buildings
 - i. McKeig House Information
 - c. New Bemidji Hotel Mural
 - d. Pumping Station 1909
- 6. New Business**
- 7. Next Meeting**
- 8. Adjourn**

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes for Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Meeting was held in City Hall Conference Room, 317 4th Street NW.

1. Meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM by Linda Lemmer, Chair.
2. No guests present. Members present in: Linda Lemmer, Chris Belle, Andy Mack, Joan Dreyer, Jay Tody, and Lois J. Jenkins. Ashton Loeb, excused. City reps: Josh Peterson and Michelle Miller.
3. Agenda was approved as presented. (a-Andy, s-Chris, c)

Minutes of the March 17, 2026, meeting were approved as presented. (a-Andy, s-Chris, c)

5. Business

DISCUSSION AND CHANGES TO ORDINANCE OF THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION OF CITY OF BEMIDJI

Sect 2-247. Organization; composition

Part a) add line "At least one member shall be a member of the Beltrami County Historical Society."

Section 2-254 Powers and duties

Delete paragraphs 2 and 3 in their entirety

Paragraph 4 that reads "Including interiors where appropriate"

Reference the City of Bemidji ordinance with changes as provided to Michelle Miller.

Motion was made by Chris Bell to approve the above changes to the document. Seconded by Jay Tody. Motion passed.

6. Next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 19, 2026 at 4:30 PM

7. Motion to adjourn (Andy, Lois J) Passed

Recorded by

Joan Dreyer, Secretary protem

422 Irvine Avenue

Block F, Lots 23 & 24, Original Townsite

Bemidji, Minnesota

A Century Home History

The yellow house at 422 Irvine Avenue, on the corner of Irvine and Fifth Street in Bemidji's Original Townsite, has stood for well over a century. It has been home to teachers and tradesmen, immigrants and nurses, photographers and ordinary families navigating the full arc of American life. It weathered two chimney fires in a single January week, outlasted the flu epidemic of 1918, and endured the Depression years. Today it still stands — and the story of who lived within its walls is, in many respects, a story of Bemidji itself.

The MacGregor Years: 1906–1913

The house on Irvine Avenue enters the historical record in the spring of 1906, when the *Bemidji Pioneer* noted that J. P. Lahr was moving his household goods to “a cottage on Irvine Avenue, between Fourth and Fifth Streets.” Whether the MacGregor family arrived with Lahr or shortly after, they would become the house's first well-documented occupants, and they would leave their mark on it for nearly a decade.

Mary MacGregor and her daughters — Lillian, Beth (Elizabeth), Mae (Mary O.), Laura, Cathern— were a remarkable household. Mary appears to have been widowed or living independently, and she ran a home that was by all accounts busy, warm, and deeply woven into the social fabric of Bemidji. Her daughters were educators. In an era when teaching was one of the few professional paths open to women, the MacGregor girls pursued it with evident energy and commitment, fanning out across the townships and villages of Beltrami and surrounding counties: Nebish, Tenstrike, Hines, Hornet, Turtle River, Blackduck. The *Bemidji Pioneer* tracked their comings and goings with the easy familiarity reserved for families everyone knew.

"Miss Beth MacGregor, who teaches near Blackduck, spent Saturday in the city with home folks. Miss MacGregor returned yesterday morning to complete her term of school, which closes June 1. — Bemidji Pioneer, May 16, 1910"

The MacGregor daughters were also active in civic and religious life. Several participated in state teachers' examinations in February 1909. Lillian and Cathern appear in accounts of the Christian Endeavor Society, a nationwide youth ministry movement that was a significant social institution for young Protestants in the early twentieth century. Mae performed solos at society gatherings. These were young women who took their faith, their work, and their community seriously.

The house also witnessed grief. On May 25, 1911, the *Pioneer* reported the death of Laura MacGregor at age 27, after seven years of illness from pulmonary tuberculosis. The paper noted she died 'at the MacGregor. She was buried at Greenwood Cemetery. The loss of a young woman to tuberculosis was not uncommon in this era, but it casts a quiet shadow over what otherwise reads as a lively household.

By the summer of 1912 the house had been listed for sale — “six room cottage, 5th and Irvine Ave., easy terms, inquire at 422 Irvine” — but Mary MacGregor was still listed at the address through 1913. In August of that year, friends gathered at the house to give her a farewell party, presenting her with a handsome linen tablecloth. She and her remaining daughters were moving to Baudette. The *Pioneer's* brief notice carries the unmistakable warmth of a community saying goodbye to one of its own. Mae MacGregor became known for her service to the country as a Red Cross nurse during World War I.

The Russell Years: 1909–1928

Even as Mary MacGregor's daughters came and went from the family home, another branch of the family had already put down roots there. On February 6, 1909, the *Pioneer* reported the quiet wedding of R. J. Russell — “one of the expert plumbers in the employ of Doran Brothers” — to Miss Cecilia MacGregor of Bemidji. The ceremony took place at the home of the bride's cousin in Roseau, performed by a Presbyterian minister. The newlyweds returned to Bemidji and settled, the paper noted, “at their new home, on the corner of Fifth Street and Irvine

Avenue.” The 1910 census confirms Robert J. Russell, age 31, born in Scotland, and his wife Cecelia (née McGregor), age 30, born in North Dakota, at 422 Irvine Avenue, with their infant daughter Lora (Laura).

The house probably experienced its first addition at that time. It went from a square house with four rooms to the addition of a kitchen, bathroom on the east end of the house and a porch and new entry facing north toward 5th Street.

Robert Russell was a man in motion. He had emigrated from Scotland, learned his trade, and was building a life in a booming northern Minnesota city. He worked for the Doran Brothers plumbing firm, whose contracts included heating installations as far away as Kelliher's new city hall. By the early 1920s he had established his own business — Russell Plumbing and Heating, 315 Minnesota Avenue — and in September 1922 he formally applied for United States citizenship. Two daughters were born: Marion in December 1911 and Laura in November 1909. City directories place the Russell family at 422 Irvine through 1928, suggesting they remained in the house for nearly two decades.

Interlude: Lenahan, Rolette, and Two Fires

The 1930s brought new occupants and new troubles. William Lenahan is listed at the address in the 1931–32 directory. By 1934, William E. Rolette and his wife Marie had moved in, and they would remain through 1938.

The Rolette years produced the most dramatic episode in the house's recorded history. On January 30, 1937, at approximately 8 o'clock in the morning, fire crews responded to a chimney fire at 422 Irvine. The house — frame construction, as the fire report noted — survived. The following evening, January 31st at 7 PM, they were called back again: another chimney fire at the same address. Two fires in two consecutive days speak to the relentless demands of keeping a drafty frame house warm and the hazards of aging flues pushed past their limits. Interestingly enough, the coal stove was placed in the dining room near the entry to a bedroom, and the stove pipe extended above the dining room and then upward through the ceiling of the kitchen. Considering the placement of the wood stove in the kitchen in the 1940s, they may have shared the same chimney. I remember the capped-off chimney hole in the wall in the kitchen and the brick chimney itself which is now hidden behind up-to-date paneling in a bedroom!

In 1937–38, William Rolette was working as a waiter at the Markham Hotel. It is a small detail, but it places the household squarely within the economic realities of Depression-era Bemidji — steady if modest employment, a rented frame house and wood or coal fires burning against the cold.

The Bentley and Moeskau Years: 1939–1944

By 1939–40, Earl L. Bentley, owner of Bentley Saw Service at 315 Fourth Street, was living at 422 Irvine. The house witnessed another death within its walls during this period: Mrs. Jeanette Clark, age 61, who had been living with her daughter Mrs. Earl Bentley. Born in England on December 14, 1877, Mrs. Clark had come to America, married, and settled with her husband at Turtle River, where he died thirty-eight years before her own passing. She had lived with her daughter at 422 Irvine for some time before her death on June 29, 1939.

World War II brought the Moeskau family to the address. Elwood John Moeskau and his wife Elsie are listed as residents of 422 Irvine in his 1941 draft registration — he was unemployed at the time. Andrew Moeskau, likely a relation, is listed at the address in 1942. Andrew had been born February 23, 1893, in Sarpsborg, Norway, emigrated to America at age 16, and settled in Bemidji. He served in World War I and worked for many years for the Ray Kaliher Oil Company. He married Cora Reinke in Minneapolis on September 5, 1919. The Norwegian immigrant who had come to northern Minnesota as a teenager, fought in one world war, and watched his adopted country enter another: 422 Irvine sheltered lives like his.

The Wattles Years: 1944–2017

In 1944, Waldo and Ann Wattles came to 422 Irvine Avenue from their former home west on 5th Street, which they laughingly called “the Shack.” That one was a small house furnished for the night-watchman at the Grinols lumberyard. Mom had always admired the house at 422 Irvine when she walked to the St. John grocery store on Minnesota Avenue. She must have been elated when it was for sale just as they were looking for a place closer to St. Philip’s School so that daughter Cecelia and son Phil would be able to walk to and from school.

In 1951, they borrowed the money to build an addition on the east side of the house which necessitated the removal of a lovely old lilac tree between the house and garage. The addition served as the home of Wattles Studio, a photography business, in which Waldo was the photographer and did all the retouching and finishing of the photos. Ann hand-tinted many of the photos and was the welcoming lady behind the counter in the two-room addition.

In the years when Waldo flew small private planes, a Cub, a Tailorcraft, and numerous others, he would fly low over the house on his way back to the airport and wiggle his wings to let us know he'd soon be home. Waldo and Ann added another child to the family in 1965 when Valerie was born. A few years later, Waldo was killed in a tragic airplane accident. Ann Wattles was a constant at the address through 2017, a span of seventy-three years. Her sister Geney moved into the studio portion of the house, and they shared many good years of trips, slots at the casinos, and raising young Valerie through her school-age years.

Anne lived there until February 2017 when she moved to Birch Haven, but the house was still home to the Wattles family, and after her death in April of 2017, ownership passed to Cecelia, Phillip, and Valerie, and eventually to Cecelia who is making this petition to the committee.

Summary of Known Occupants

The following occupants are documented at 422 Irvine Avenue through city directories, census records, and newspaper accounts:

c. 1906–1913 Mary MacGregor and family (including daughters Lillian, Beth, Mae, Laura, Cathern)

1909–c. 1928 Robert J. and Cecelia (MacGregor) Russell, with daughters Marion and Laura

1931–1932 William Lenahan

1934–1938 William E. and Marie Rolette

1939–1940 Earl L. Bentley and wife (daughter of Jeanette Clark, d. 1939)

1941–1942 Elwood John and Elsie Moeskau; Andrew Moeskau

1944–2017 Ann Wattles (Wattles Studio, photographer, 1951–1961)

2017–present Cecelia Wattles McKeig

Sources

Bemidji Pioneer, various dates 1906–1919 (newspaper archives). United States Census, 1910. Bemidji City Directories, 1920–1944. Beltrami County fire records, January 1937, Abstract of Title. Beltrami County History Center research files.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM



Meeting Date: May 19, 2026
Action Requested:
Prepared By: Ashton Loebis

Background:

Sam conveyed the information about the property in an email, which is attached. At this point, I believe the best course of action regarding the pumping station building is to move forward with salvaging the blocks and signage. Until the future of the property is determined (whether or not it is sold to someone else), we will not be in a position to make any final decisions regarding the location of the proposed monument.

Because the City would already be responsible for the demolition of the building, I believe the City should also cover the cost of salvaging the blocks and signage as part of that demolition process. As a commission, it would then be our responsibility to identify funding sources for the eventual construction and installation of the monument, wherever that may ultimately be located.

I also believe it is very important that the monument ultimately be placed on City owned property rather than under private ownership. At this stage, there are still too many unknown factors to make a permanent decision on its location, so preserving the materials now would allow us to move forward when things are more certain.

That said, I still believe the monument's layout and overall design should remain consistent with the version previously approved by the commission below:

- 26' wide
- 11' 4" tall with a 3" concrete cap on top
- 2' thick wall
- Each brick block is 24"x8"x12"

Recommendation:

I can reach out to Sam Anderson to better understand the current demolition plans for the building. I can also reach out to Rich to coordinate the project with him as well. We would also need to identify a suitable location to safely store the salvaged materials until the appropriate time comes to move forward with construction of the monument.

I would also be willing to spearhead the project moving forward and serve as the primary point of contact between the commission and any potential contractor (Con's or whoever ends up being selected). I think that would help ensure the intent of the monument is accurately communicated, that the drawings and layout I previously prepared are followed closely, and that a sufficient number of bricks are properly salvaged for the future construction of the monument.



Ashton Loebbs <aloebbs512@gmail.com>

1909 Pumping Station

4 messages

Ashton Loebbs <aloebbs512@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 5, 2026 at 10:07 AM

To: Sam Anderson <sam.anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>

Hey Sam,

I recently joined the Heritage Preservation Commission, and we've been working on a project to salvage all or a part of the old pumping station building on Park Avenue.

When I joined the commission back in September, we decided to not move forward with saving the building due to extensive damage sustained during the June storm. We decided that a more meaningful way to preserve this piece of history would be salvaging the signage and blocks as necessary to erect a monument centered between the four water tower footings.

The monument would have interpretive display panels (like the ones at Diamond Point) that would cover the history of Bemidji's water system. This would likely be cheaper than restoring the building as is.

I've attached two exhibit drawings for your reference so you can understand our intentions.

If possible, I'd love to meet with you to discuss the project further in detail and how to facilitate the successful progression of this project.

Thanks!

Ashton Loebbs

2 attachments

 **1909 Pumping Station Monument - Elevations & Section.pdf**
565K **1909 Pumping Station Monument - Site Plan.pdf**
1416K

Sam Anderson <Sam.Anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>

Mon, Jan 5, 2026 at 2:47 PM

To: Ashton Loebbs <aloebbs512@gmail.com>

Good afternoon Ashton,

I've emailed our city manager to request an update on this parcel. I'll reach out when I've heard something more definitive.

Thank you,

Sam Anderson, P.E. | City Engineer/Director of Public Works | City of Bemidji
218-333-1851 | sam.anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us

From: Ashton Loeb <aloeb512@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 5, 2026 10:08 AM
To: Sam Anderson <Sam.Anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>
Subject: 1909 Pumping Station

[EXTERNAL]

[Quoted text hidden]

Ashton Loeb <aloeb512@gmail.com>
To: Sam Anderson <Sam.Anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>

Mon, Feb 16, 2026 at 12:19 PM

Good afternoon Sam,

Just following up, have you heard anything from Rich regarding the old water tower parcel? I also had a few additional questions:

1. Would we need plans that are signed off by an engineer or architect?
2. Does the city need to issue a Request for Quotes for this type of work?
3. Will a building permit be required?

Thank you,

Ashton

[Quoted text hidden]

Sam Anderson <Sam.Anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>
To: Ashton Loeb <aloeb512@gmail.com>

Tue, Feb 17, 2026 at 1:38 PM

Hey Ashton,

I'm being told there's some interest in a private party purchasing the 1909 Pumping Station property as it currently sits today.

I would get in touch with our city manager for more information, as he's more involved with this topic.

Richard Spiczka Richard.Spiczka@ci.bemidji.mn.us

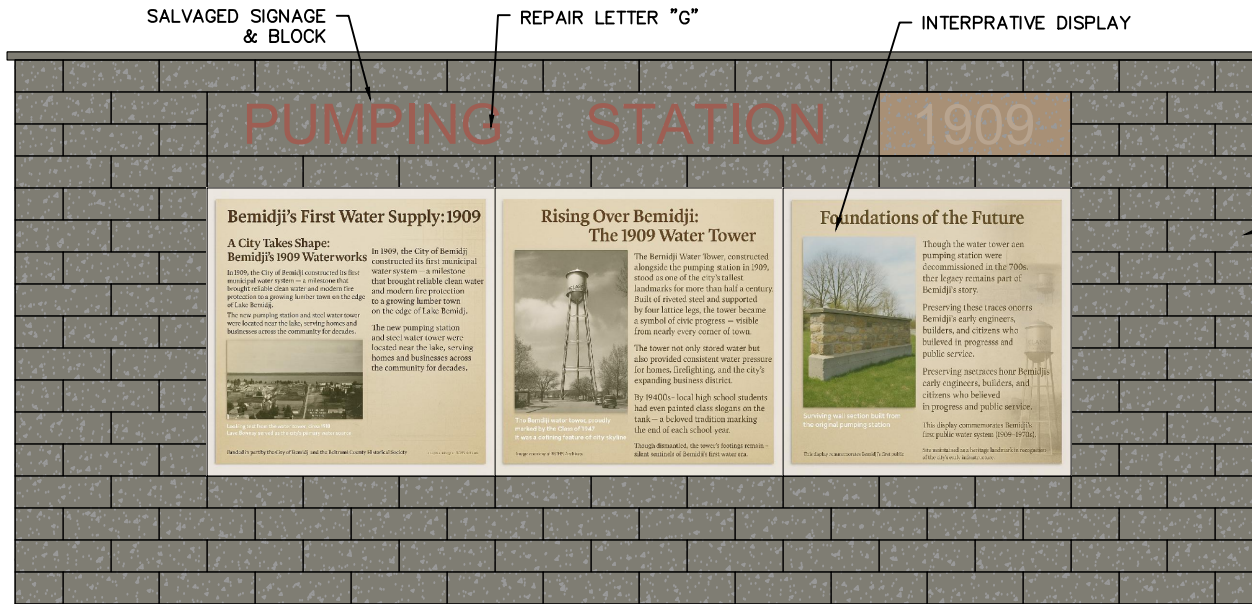
Thank you,

Sam Anderson, P.E. | *City Engineer/Director of Public Works* | *City of Bemidji*
218-333-1851 | sam.anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us

From: Ashton Loebis <aloebis512@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 16, 2026 12:20 PM
To: Sam Anderson <Sam.Anderson@ci.bemidji.mn.us>
Subject: Re: 1909 Pumping Station

[EXTERNAL]

[Quoted text hidden]



SALVAGED SIGNAGE & BLOCK

REPAIR LETTER "G"

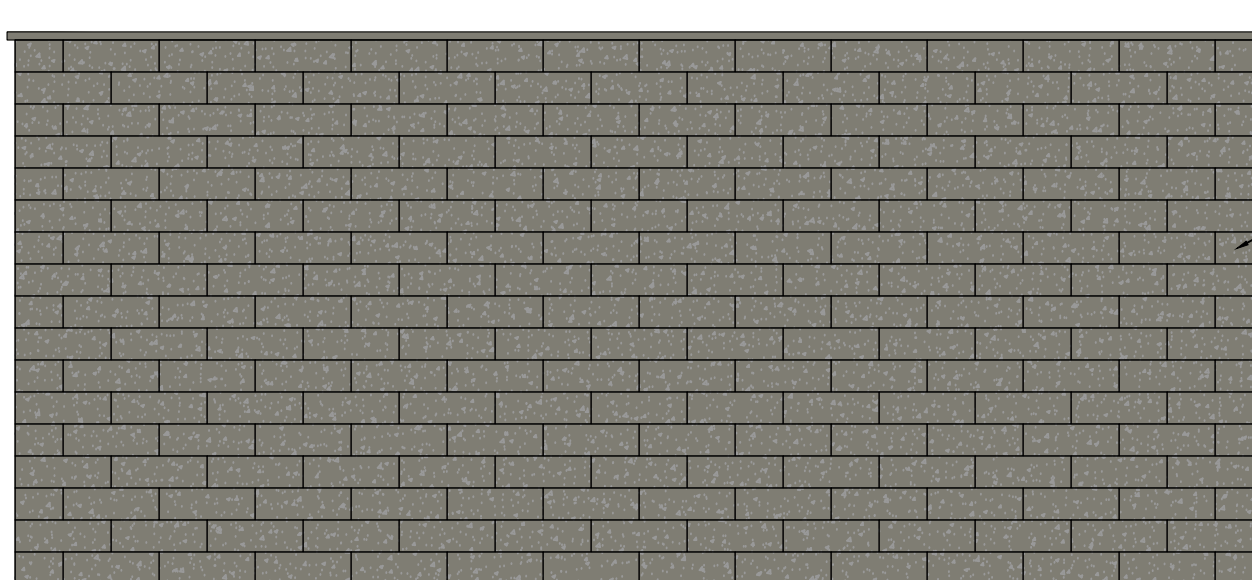
INTERPRATIVE DISPLAY

2" CONCRETE CAP TO MATCH EXISTING BLOCK

SALVAGED 24x12 CONCRETE BLOCK (APPROX. 325)

NOTE: DISPLAY BOARD DESIGNS ARE A.I. GENERATED MOCK-UPS AND ARE NOT FINAL

FRONT ELEVATION



2" CONCRETE CAP TO MATCH EXISTING BLOCK

SALVAGED 24x12 CONCRETE BLOCK (APPROX. 325)

EXISTING CONCRETE LETTERS

INTEPRATIVE DISPLAY

6" CMU

SALVAGED 24x12 CONCRETE BLOCK (APPROX. 325)

SECTION