

**Meeting Notes**  
**GREATER BEMIDJI AREA JOINT PLANNING BOARD**  
**Joint Work Session with the Northern and Bemidji Town Boards and the**  
**Bemidji City Council**

September 23, 2009  
6:30 p.m.

Northern Town Hall  
Meeting Room

**BEMIDJI TOWN SUPERVISORS PRESENT:**

**Becky Livermore, Joan McKinnon, Jan Heuer, John Rowles, and Lowell Vagle.**

**BEMIDJI TOWN SUPERVISORS ABSENT:**

None.

**BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

**Richard Lehmann, Roger Hellquist, Ron Johnson, Greg Negard, Kevin Waldhausen, Jerry Downs, and Barb Meuers.**

**BEMIDJI CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:**

None.

**NORTHERN TOWN SUPERVISORS PRESENT:**

**Tim Mountain, Jim Thompson, Ron Gangeness, and Michael Kelly.**

**NORTHERN TOWN SUPERVISORS ABSENT:**

Dan Bahr.

**STAFF PRESENT:**

**Mel Milender, Andrew Mack, Jinger Pulkrabek, Lanee Paulson (B), Mary Israelson (N), John Chattin (C), Al Felix (C), and Craig Gray (C).**

\* (B) indicates Bemidji Twp, (N) Indicates Northern Twp, and (C) indicates City.

**\* Members indicated in Bold are also Joint Planning Board Officials or staff.**

**OTHERS:**

Cliff Tweedale (Facilitator), Bethany Wesley, Brian Eggersdorf, Clark Chambers, and Jim Wang

## **CALL TO ORDER:**

Mel Milender convened the session at 6:30 p.m.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Milender gave a brief synopsis of the purpose and intent of this session. He described the hand-outs (the Joint Powers Agreement, the Orderly Annexation Agreement, and the 2009 permit lists) then introduced Cliff Tweedale, the facilitator from HRDC.

Cliff Tweedale assumed facilitation of the meeting. Each member then took turns giving a brief introduction of themselves prior to Tweedale reviewing the agenda. It was decided to follow the originally distributed agenda rather than the revised agenda. Cliff noted that approximately 60% of the currently seated members were elected officials when the agreements forming the JPB were crafted.

## **VISION**

Tweedale then handed out a mock 2020 newspaper article (see attached) which was designed to induce thought about where the members would like to see the community in 2020. It was unanimously affirmed via general consensus that this is a worthwhile cause that should be continued for the foreseeable future.

The original goals of the annexation and joint planning efforts were then discussed. These include a unified voice and rules throughout the AOR (Area of Responsibility), one vision for the community, shared costs, responsibilities, etc... Agreement was reached that the goals are still valid.

Tweedale reiterated that the organization is in its adolescence and is still very immature, but the vision is strong, and as long as the vision is strong, the rest is in the details. This process has not been pain free by any measure, and it will not be pain free going forward, but the cause is worthwhile and the commitment and vision are strong, which puts the collective goals well within reach. There were no disagreements.

## **ANNEXATION ISSUES – CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS**

It was indicated that expectations often lead to challenges. Those who are being annexed may have expectations that the City will not be able to meet. Everyone annexed will not immediately receive sewer, water, curb and gutter. This is not financially feasible and assessing 100% of the cost does not work, as evidenced by the Birchmont Project.

One expectation that will be met is that everyone within the annexation areas will be annexed. Another is that everyone annexed will be treated the same as current city residents. Not all current city residents have municipal water and sewer, or even paved streets, for that matter. Two other expectations which will be met are that revenue sharing will occur and the agreements will be followed.

It was indicated that nearly all of the first phase of the annexation area within Northern Township already has most of the benefits that people are expecting from annexation. It

was argued that for those residents, higher property taxes are all that they have to look forward to. It was then indicated by City officials that there is no real way to tell in advance what will happen with the property taxes of those annexed.

The various benefits of annexation were discussed, including that municipal sewer frees up yard space and eliminates the potential for septic freeze up. Additional law enforcement and improved security were also mentioned. It was then indicated that intangible long term benefits of annexation far outweigh the short term benefits. Annexation contributes to a stronger City, increased revenue not available to townships and additional political clout which benefits the entire community.

### **Algoma Park**

This park consists of approximately 7 acres in Northern Twp. and lies within the first phase of annexation. The Orderly Annexation Agreement indicates that the maintenance of and responsibility for all parks goes to the City Parks Department immediately upon annexation. It was indicated that there has been no dialogue between Northern Twp and the City to facilitate the transfer of this park.

Discussion ensued regarding what will happen with the ownership of this park. The question was raised as to why the ownership of this park has to change. Northern Twp responded that they have no desire to own property within City limits. The City indicated that the City Parks Commission desires to maintain green space and has committed to no net loss of parks. In a recent work session, the City Parks department submitted projected costs of upgrade and maintenance to the City. City officials cited the fact that there is no money to purchase parks.

### **Challenges to Annexation**

The challenges were then clearly stated and include the following:

1. Residents have different expectations.
2. There are perceived winners and losers.
3. There is ambiguity among residents.
4. There may be some push back.
5. Algoma Park must be figured out.
6. Timing – the upcoming census further complicates the timing issue and the City is trying to ensure that the best interests of all parties are met.

At this point, Brian Eggersdorf, resident of Northern Township, spoke up and indicated that no one should be annexed without having requested annexation. He then cited some legal reason for this, and Tweedale indicated that legal questions should be left to legal counsel. It was indicated that Orderly Annexation, which is the model in play here, is completely different than what Mr. Eggersdorf was speaking about.

### **SOLVING CHALLENGES**

Communication is the key to solving most of the challenges voiced at this meeting. The Algoma Park issue and the timing issue are both a bit more complicated. It is important to

act as one community, maintaining transparency and a high level of communication, in order to address these challenges. The relationships are the key. It is imperative to build strong open relationships rather than tearing them down.

A big part of the challenge is how to pay to extend services to the annexed areas. This is truly a long term issue because along with annexation comes an increased expectation for roads and other services. Long term planning with increased dialogue is key to the process.

### **Process for Solving Challenges**

It was indicated that the timing issue is truly up to the City, but that the Townships hope to have input and also desire to be kept well informed of the City's position on the matter. The question was then raised as to the appropriateness of continuing with annexation. It was indicated by Bemidji Township Officials that it appears that the City cannot afford to go forward with annexation at this time and the question was raised if maybe the City should wait until it is in a better financial situation to proceed. The Townships then asked to be kept in the loop on the City's thought process on this.

City Officials responded that there is absolutely no intent on their part to delay annexation. The financial aspect of the situation was discussed at some length. Many residents of both the City and the annexation areas have voiced concerns over the situation. The residents within the annexation areas, according to Township Officials, are concerned that they will see a big increase in their taxes while seeing no improvement in services. City residents and staff are concerned about what annexation will do to the already tight City budget.

City Officials indicated that the city never expected to get rich from the annexation. It was indicated that the long term interests of the entire community dictate that this should be done. It will not be a pain free process, but building the economic base of the City is in everyone's best interests.

### **Communications Strategy**

Consensus was reached that communication definitely needs to improve. The Orderly Annexation Agreement provides for meetings whenever necessary and at least annually. The suggestion was made to hold more meetings to work on resolving these issues.

There are benefits that the City can provide that the Townships cannot which need to be clearly voiced to the constituency. It is also important to get information out to the constituency to clear up misconceptions and help better align expectations with what is actually going to happen.

It was decided that a cohesive communications strategy must be developed. The JPB will be the starting point for facilitating the development of the communications strategy. The JPB and its staff will work in concert with City and Township staff to implement the plan.

## **Rentals**

Another issue wrapped up in the annexation issue is the rental housing situation. Milender indicated that approximately 20% of the calls to the JPB in the past year have been directly related to the rental housing issue, which appears to be a jurisdictional wide problem in relation to quality and regulation. Many of the rentals in the townships will be annexed into the city. Northern Township indicated that they are not interested in pursuing a rental ordinance of their own, but they would be willing to at least consider some sort of JPB ordinance and enforcement. Milender indicated that approximately 60% of the rentals in Northern Township are within the annexation areas. Northern Twp has no Rental Ordinance, while Bemidji Twp and the City each have a Rental Ordinance. They differ considerably. People who have rentals and people who rent need to know how annexation will affect them. This is another of the communication issues, and a large scale media effort like the one undertaken for the Bemidji Regional Events Center (BREC) was suggested as a solution to address the entire annexation issue.

## **Algoma Park**

It was indicated that it is up to Northern Township to decide how to proceed regarding transfer of the park. It was also noted that there are more parks within the annexation areas, but they are in later phases. What happens with this park will set the precedence for what happens with the other parks. The possibility of a Joint Parks Agreement throughout the entire community was also discussed. No decisions were determined.

## **Financial Aspects of Annexation**

The financial aspects of annexation were discussed. The Orderly Annexation Agreement provides for the structured turnover of revenues from the Townships to the City. Given the current financial crunch, it is certainly an issue as to how the City will pay to extend services to the annexed areas. The City indicated that it would certainly help if the Townships would help bear some of the initial costs until revenues begin to match. However, the City has agreed to go ahead on its own if no help is secured.

The City asked the Townships to open a dialogue on the matter, and both Townships agreed to discuss the matter with the City. It was also indicated that it is not realistic for anyone being annexed to expect immediate improvements relative to City services upon annexation.

## **STRATEGY**

A communication strategy for the residents in the annexation areas will be completed by Staff from the LGU's and the JPB. It will be presented at the JPB's November meeting on 04 November 2009 and implemented by the end of the year. In addition to increasing the level of communication, other strategies were discussed.

The City is to decide on the exact timing of the annexation and will keep the Townships informed to the greatest possible extent. There are factors, such as the Census and elections which complicate the matter. The expectation is that annexation will occur on

April 1 or earlier. The City will make a final determination on this actual date of annexation no later than their first meeting in November.

Discussion ensued as to whether the Orderly Annexation Agreement allows the JPB to assume responsibility for the rental issue. More research is needed on the matter, but it seems that it could be made to work if the desire is present. Staff was directed to research the issue and bring that information to the LGU's by the end of the year.

It was decided that these joint LGU meetings will be held more frequently, at least for the time being. Whichever LGU holds the Chair position, will host the joint meetings at least bi-annually in spring and fall with help from JPB staff. The relationship(s) can and will be strengthened by maintaining open lines of communication and transparency in order to develop trust. Tweedale strongly emphasized that building the relationships is the key to making all of these issues easier to understand and work through.

Discussion regarding liquor stores within the annexation areas ensued. The City indicated their intent to grandfather these businesses in. The details were discussed, and it was discovered that more communication on this matter will have to occur.

### **ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jinger Pulkrabek  
Administrative Assistant