

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Work Session – July 10, 2023

Pursuant to due call and notice, a work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, July 10, 2023, at 5:35 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Prince presiding.

Upon roll call, the following Councilmembers were declared present: Prince, Fiskevold Gould, Peterson, Johnson, Rivera, Eaton, Thayer

Staff Present: City Attorney Katie Nolting, City Engineer Sam Anderson, Fire Chief Justin Sherwood, City Clerk/acting City Manager Michelle Miller.

Others: Aimee Gourlay, League of MN Cities

Mayor Prince stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Council Code of Conduct.

Council Code of Conduct

Aimee Gourlay, with the League of MN Cities, again facilitated the code of conduct discussion with council. The council reviewed the notes from the June 12 work session and affirmed the following code of conduct norms from that work session, with some edits provided to Gourlay.

Council discussed additional ideas and agreed on the following norms:

- Council members should not use electronic media during Council meetings to access social media or for any other personal use. Members may access documents or City information which is necessary for Council deliberations.
- City Council members, may choose to provide their individual opinions to others, including posting and/or commenting on various social media sites using their personal accounts. In these instances, City Council members will be clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the City of Bemidji or the City Council.
- Constituent questions or complaints should be directed to an appropriate City staff member and ask the staff member to confirm when the constituent's need has been addressed.
- Council Meetings
 - The council agreed that each member would take the time they need to express their ideas during Council meetings. They did not wish to have set amounts of time to speak.
 - The council agreed that they would go through one round of questions/comments, with each member having the opportunity to speak or pass on an agenda item, before making a motion. The Mayor will check in with each member in rotation, starting with a different member until all have had the opportunity to speak first, and then start the rotation over.
 - Council members agreed that they will not interrupt another member who is speaking during a meeting. They will wait until the speaker concludes their thoughts before offering clarification or adding additional information. The council discussed that the only exception to this norm could be if a member calls a question of personal privilege to address an urgent issue which must be addressed for the person calling the privilege to participate in the discussion. An example would be to explain an unfamiliar acronym, clarify a term, or to be excused for a personal emergency.
 - The council agreed not to engage in sidebar conversations.
 - The council agreed that nonverbal communication which expresses personal reactions to other speakers is inappropriate. They council members agreed to take personal responsibility to remain focused and listening rather than reacting to others' comments. They acknowledged that sometimes reactions are outside of conscious awareness and may happen from time to time. If a member's nonverbal behavior is becoming frequent, the Mayor will have a private conversation with them.
- The Code of Conduct and supporting materials should be reviewed with newly elected officials during orientation. The Council should revisit the Code annually to consider whether changes or additions are desired.

Prince called for a brief recess at 6:30 p.m. Meeting reconvened at 6:36 p.m. with all members present.

Council reviewed example Codes from Bemidji staff, Mankato, Austin, Edina and Duluth. They provided the following direction for staff when drafting the Bemidji code:

- Prefer a shorter document (Mankato)
- The charter should be easy to digest, user friendly and accessible
- Liked the use of charts/visuals (Edina) to show roles and relationships

- Would like details about MN laws, regulations, Bemidji City Charter to be provided by adding hyperlinks to the source content.

Council directed staff to draft a resolution for Bemidji's Code of Conduct, incorporating their agreements from the June 12 and July 10 workshops and feedback on format, with a working deadline of Monday, Aug. 21.

Council discussed additional items, which were outside of the Code of Conduct discussion, but raised and are noted information:

- Refresher on open meeting laws
- Expectations/norms for Boards and Commissions
- Council priorities/goals discussion

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Peterson, seconded by Thayer, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk