

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA

Work Session – September 25, 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, September 25, 2023, at 5:33 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 Clerk/acting City Manager Michelle Miller

Others: Aimee Gourlay, League of MN Cities

Mayor Prince stated that the purpose of the work session was to discuss Council Goals and Priorities for the new City Manager.

COUNCIL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Council members discussed that the issues and desired outcomes for different topic areas overlap. The list below represents the first steps for the City Manager to take and is not listed in order of importance.

Understand and Respond to Housing Needs in Bemidji

- Conducting a housing study as the first step.
- The study will provide information for decision making and help the City take advantage of housing grants available.
- After gathering information, the Council will discuss:
 - The City's role in housing, the interrelationships with other agencies, and sustainability,
 - The balance of compliance vs incentive.

Manage City's Relationships

- Talk with tribes about housing and economic development and develop process for including council members in conversations.
- Clarify and create communication plans:
 - Recommend how to build connections/trust with community, (e.g., ward visits, get together, city within a city, user friendly website,). Define staff and council participation. There could be a need for new staff or to reassign duties.
 - Develop a communication plan for community outreach, emergency communication, and press releases.
 - Work with Council to ensure the council and staff have consistent messages. There is general agreement about the need to distinguish between the council speaking with one voice versus a council member sharing an opinion. Council members have different views of their roles and would like to have more discussion about expectations for communications.

Public Safety Priorities

- Identify fiscally responsible strategies to Increase retention in our police department. Consider competitive salaries and other creative retention incentives (e.g., address burn out, bonus, health, and other benefits).
- Investigate whether staffing level and tools (e.g., K9 officers) for police addresses community needs. Consider creative solutions to responding to calls using existing resources.
- Identify and build relationships with others to address public safety concerns (e.g., governmental units, courts, community groups, criminal justice organizations, all first responders).
- Define the role of police and investigate non-traditional public safety approaches (e.g., parks programs, connecting with existing social services, ordinance enforcement) and recommend services the city provides which might be alternatives to more policing.

Economic Development

Council members discussed that economic development covers a lot. They shared what they were thinking about as areas of focus for Bemidji:

- Long-term outcomes, what we do now may take years to fully develop
- Attract and diversify industry
- Keep and support current businesses
- Encourage diversity of businesses
- Partnerships such as academic institutions to connect employers with workforce development

- Attract workers – housing, living wages, childcare

Economic Development Priorities

- Ensure that Bemidji's Comprehensive Plan is that consistent with growth.
 - Review ordinances – business friendly and balanced.
- City Manager reviews and provides an objective assessment of our current relationships with businesses/organization to City Council.
- Provide information so councilmembers understand the economic development tools we have in our toolbox --- TIF, tax abatement, annexation, Council's economic development authority.
- Identify partners for economic development and define the City's role in those relationships.

Future Topics for Discussion

- City Council priorities for infrastructure
- Revisit the City's mission and vision

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Peterson, seconded by Eaton, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle R. Miller
City Clerk