

Chapter 7: Community Facilities and Services

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Photo credit: GBAJPB



Photo credit: True North Bemidji

VISION

Maintain and enhance the Greater Bemidji Area as a great place to live through an emphasis on infrastructure to appropriately locate new public facilities based on population demand.

Introduction

Community facilities and services are the buildings, land, and programs that provide desired and essential services to the public, such as parks, schools, police and fire protection, health care facilities, and libraries.

The Greater Bemidji Area, along with private and nonprofit community agencies, maintains several community facilities for residents. The Public Works Department is responsible for maintaining the city's parks, pool, marina, recreation facilities, and city-owned buildings and facilities.

City Hall/Township Halls

Bemidji City Hall

City Hall in Downtown Bemidji at the intersection of 4th Street NW and America Avenue NW. The three-level building operates the city/administrative staff (upper level), the city building department and the JPB staff (lower level), along with a council chamber and conference room (middle level). The City Hall operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Northern Township Hall

Northern Township Hall is located along Town Hall Rd NW just off Irvine Ave NW. The Northern Township Hall operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Fire Department

The Bemidji Fire Department is made up of full-time and paid on-call fire fighters serving the City of Bemidji and the surrounding areas. Full-time staff are members of the International Association of Firefighters Union, Local #2302, and work a nationally recognized 24-hour shift schedule. The fire department has three locations in the Greater

Bemidji Area with its headquarters located at 318 5th Street NW. The fire department provides these services:

- Fire Suppression/Rescue
- Fire Prevention/Education
- Fire Code Inspection and Enforcement
- Vehicle Rescue/Extrication
- Basic Life Support/Emergency Medical Services
- Water and Ice Rescue
- Confined Space Rescue
- Hazardous Material Operations
- CPR and First Aid Instruction
- Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting
- Rope Rescue
- Trench Rescue
- Structural Collapse Rescue
- Wildfire Mitigation

Law Enforcement

The Bemidji Police Department is in the Law Enforcement Center, which is open 24-hours a day. The Police Department is responsible for protecting and preserving the peace within Bemidji City limits. The Law Enforcement Center is located at 613 Minnesota Avenue NW.

The Beltrami County Sheriff's Department is in the Law Enforcement Center. The Sheriff's Department is responsible for patrolling roughly 3,000 square miles in Beltrami County and protecting over 43,000 county residents.



Photo credit: Beltrami County

Health Care Services

The Greater Bemidji Area prides itself on having an excellent health care system. Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is the largest hospital in the region, with educational services, health care, and social assistance. Sanford Bemidji Medical Center is also a one of the largest employers within the

Greater Bemidji Area. Currently, Sanford Health employs more than 1,500 staff members, 130 physicians/advanced practice providers, and 500 volunteers. It is projected that more than 6,500 people are admitted to the hospital each year. It is important for any growing community to demonstrate an excellence in health care opportunities.



Photo credit: Sanford Health

The Greater Bemidji Area also has many healthcare clinics, as well as dental, eye care, and chiropractic offices.

Mental health is a continually growing problem in the Greater Bemidji Area and there are numerous mental health centers exist and continue to expand.

Schools

Bemidji State University

Bemidji State University (BSU), originally known as Bemidji Normal School, began its first school year in 1919 with approximately 38 students. By 1921, Bemidji Normal School became Bemidji State Teachers College and started offering four-year degrees. In 1957, the school was renamed Bemidji State College, in 1975 it was renamed Bemidji State University. BSU now hosts more than 5,300 undergraduates and graduate students annually.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Northwest Technical College

In 1965, Northwest Technical College (NTC), then known as Bemidji Area Vocational Technical Institute, began serving as a two-year college with two programs, carpentry, and automotive mechanic. Over the past 50 years, the college has grown by including several new programs and increasing its enrollment. NTC now houses more than 1,600 students annually.



Photo credit: Greater Bemidji

Bemidji Area Schools

Bemidji Area Schools are the schools in Independent School District 31 and is one of the largest school districts in Minnesota. Bemidji Area Schools serve the City of Bemidji, the Greater Bemidji Area, other communities, and rural areas. Students include those from the cities of Solway, Tenstrike, Becida, Turtle River, Wilton, Puposky, and portions of Cass Lake. The following Bemidji Area Schools are part of the Independent School District 31 located in the Greater Bemidji Area:

- Central Elementary
- J.W. Smith Elementary
- Lincoln Elementary
- Northern Elementary
- Horace May Elementary
- Gene Dillon Elementary
- Paul Bunyan Center
- Bemidji Middle School
- Bemidji High School
- Bemidji Lumberjack High School (ALC)
- Bemidji Alternative Education Center (AEC)
- Bemidji BYLaW
- First City School (NMJC)

- Oshki Manidoo Center

Public Charter Schools

The following charter schools are located in the Greater Bemidji Area:

- Trek North Charter High School
- Voyageurs Expeditionary High School
- Schoolcraft



Photo credit: Lakeland PBS

Private Schools

The following private schools are located in the Greater Bemidji Area:

- Bemidji Baptist Christian School
- Heartland Christian Academy
- St. Mark's Lutheran School
- St. Philip's Catholic School



Photo credit: St. Philip's Bemidji

Event and Convention Facilities

The City of Bemidji has one of the premier venues in Northern Minnesota with the Sanford Center. The Sanford Center opened its doors in October of 2010 and is home to the men's and women's BSU Beaver Hockey Teams. Attached to the Sanford Center is the George W. Neilson Convention Center. The convention center consists of three ball rooms that are up to 10,000-square feet large and have four lakeside rooms that are 1,000-square foot each. Between the Sanford Center and the convention center, numerous events take place such as: hockey, concerts, wedding receptions, expos, conventions, meetings, rodeos, and graduation ceremonies.

The main mission of the Sanford Center is to enhance the quality of life in Northern Minnesota by providing a gathering place for cultural, recreational, educational, and entertainment events. The presence of the Sanford Center creates outstanding guest experiences while remaining fiscally responsible and contributing to the economic development of the City of Bemidji and region.

Chart 9 provides a list of event and convention facilities in the Greater Bemidji Area. This list breaks down each venue by maximum capacity and whether it offers breakout rooms, Wi-Fi, kitchen amenities, outdoor space, and if it is on a lake or not.

Chart 9: List of Event and Convention Facilities in the Greater Bemidji Area

VENUE	BREAKOUT ROOMS	MAX CAP	WI-FI	KITCHEN	LAKE	OUTDOOR SPACE
Beltrami County Fairgrounds	■	1,800	-	■	-	■
Bemidji High School	■	2,000	-	■	-	■
Bemidji State University	■	600	■	■	Bemidji	■
Holiday Inn Express	■	120	■	■	-	-
Hampton Inn and Suites	■	350	■	■	Bemidji	■
Sanford Center	■	4,373	■	■	Bemidji	■

Source: Visit Bemidji, 2015

Public Infrastructure and Utilities

Public infrastructure and utilities provide essential services to the Greater Bemidji Area. Services including sanitary sewers, water, electricity, natural gas, communications, waste, and recycling facilities are integral to a high quality of life. This section identifies and evaluates existing infrastructure and utilities serving the Greater Bemidji Area. Understanding the location, use, and capacity of infrastructure and utilities is important when planning for the future.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Water Supply

Residential and commercial customers are billed a monthly flat charge along with flow usage charge for each 1,000 gallons of water used. A customer, at their expense, may install a second meter to measure water usage for irrigation purposes only. The City allows homeowners to install a separate meter for sprinkling the lawn or garden. This provides a method to bill only for water used for that purpose. The City of Bemidji prepares a Water Confidence Report annually.

Sanitary Sewer

The City of Bemidji operates a Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) designed to treat municipal waste water. The waste is collected through a series of pipes totaling approximately 80 miles and has 31 lift stations. The City of Bemidji's WWTF was completed in 1985 at a cost of \$12 million. Currently, the plant treats approximately 1.2 million gallons per day. The plant operates under a permit issued by the state of Minnesota which imposes waste limits. The City of Bemidji's plant has the strictest limit for phosphorus discharge in the state at .3 mg/l (milligrams per liter). The City of Bemidji is the first major discharger of wastewater to the Mississippi River, and has a phosphorus effluent

limitation of 0.3 mg/l which is the most stringent in Minnesota and among the lowest in the United States.

Stormwater Management

The City of Bemidji's stormwater system storm sewers and related water quality and holding ponds help control the quantity and quality of rain and snow melt entering the area rivers and ponds. This is important for all water bodies, but it is especially important because the City of Bemidji is the First City on the Mississippi River.

Solid Waste Services

The City of Bemidji currently provides hauling services for residential homes only without recycling pickup. Beltrami County is served by transfer stations as well as rural recycling sites placed at strategic locations and operated by Waste Management. There is also a local private refuse collection services for commercial and residential construction and hazardous waste recycling. It is important for the Greater Bemidji Area to continue its efforts to promote and enhance recycling opportunities. No residential or commercial on-site pickup for recycling currently exists.

Community Facilities and Services Strengths

- The continuous growth of health care facilities and services.
- Minnesota Department of Transportation District 2 Headquarters is located in Bemidji.
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Northwestern Region Headquarters is located in Bemidji.
- Minnesota Department of Health Northwest Region Headquarters is located in Bemidji.
- Federal Government Services in the City of Bemidji, including Beltrami County Administration Building, Judicial Building, Jail, Law Enforcement Center Community Service Center, County Fairground, and Highway Department. Having all of these buildings located in the Greater Bemidji Area provides for excellent opportunities for public service.
- Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College campuses located in Bemidji.
- Four fire stations located within the Greater Bemidji Area serving the city as well as surrounding rural communities and townships. Mutual aid

agreements with surrounding townships allow expansion of emergency services.

- Independent School District #31 and a variety of Charter Schools serve the region.



Photo credit: City of Bemidji

Community Facilities and Services Challenges

- Independent School District #31 is one of the largest school districts in Minnesota, making transportation a challenge.
- Expanding city water and sewer utilities beyond the city limits. Geographic obstacles such as wetlands and development densities of lots one acre or greater per dwelling unit add to this challenge.
- Development request for high-density residential development where it would be cost prohibitive to expand municipal services to.
- Development around lake shore is best served by municipally owned and managed utility systems.
- Current wastewater treatment plant may be reaching capacity without costly improvements.
- Community facilities require mitigation to ensure they are protected from the threat of natural hazards, including hazards caused by increased expansion of the built environment.
- Ensuring that the power supply is available to maintain water supply and other vital functions during a large-scale natural hazard event.



Photo credit: Bemidji Pioneer

- Need for a veterans' home to serve the regional veteran community.
- Lack of an accessibility to recycling for all residents, currently recycling needs to be hauled to sparsely located drop-off points.

Community Facilities and Services

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 7.1: Preserve and Enhance our Public Services and Private Utilities

Cooperation is important when planning for public or private expansion of services, encouraging private and public entities to work together on major improvements and promote reasonable expansion projects while supporting the maintenance of existing facilities.

1. **Plan for expansion of public service facilities through partnerships in planning with adjacent communities.** Continue to support initiatives that expand public service facilities to surrounding areas that are not currently adequately served where appropriate, while being mindful of the capacity of the provided service to not strain resources.
2. **Plan for expansions of waste water treatment facilities.** Consider expanding the City's existing facility and/or adding a new facility to take on future growth. Relocation of a new facility would not only enhance the south shore of Lake Bemidji and the northeast shore of Lake Irving, but it would also

lessen the possibility of pollutants entering the Mississippi headwaters.

3. **Promote the objectives of the wellhead protection plan.** When making land use decisions, look to further the overall purpose of the well head protection plan to ensure clean drinking water is accessible for all.
4. **Encourage cooperation connecting governmental agencies and utility companies to continue expansion and maintenance of all utility infrastructure.** When making infrastructure or land use decisions, encourage cooperation between all entities, including private and public services, to reduce the social and environmental impact on utility projects.

Objective 7.2: Preserve and Enhance Area-Wide Stormwater Treatment Systems for All Public and Private Development and Educate Public on Importance of Stormwater Management

Land use decisions need promote the stormwater management plan, meeting or exceeding local and state regulations will continue to protect water quality and protect the functionality of the public stormwater treatment system.

1. **Enhance drainage systems to reduce or eliminate stormwater backups and street flooding.** Support projects that will enhance drainage systems to protect existing stormwater infrastructure from being overloaded, which causes street flooding and increased sedimentation runoff into area lakes and streams.
2. **Allow flexibility for private development providing enhanced on-site stormwater retention and treatment facilities.** Providing an enhanced stormwater facility that goes beyond the minimum local and state regulations can enhance the overall stormwater system.
3. **Promote low-impact development practices and native plants for stormwater management.** Incorporate stormwater management practices such as raingardens, vegetated swales, tree filters, bioretention, permeable pavement, and others throughout the Greater Bemidji Area.

Objective 7.3: Enhance Public Safety Response Time

Land use planning can improve public safety response time. Sprawl development or development that negatively

impacts the transportation system can reduce response times.

1. **Plan for high risk hazardous materials emergencies.** High-risk hazardous materials can threaten public safety; land use decisions that present a risk for hazardous materials emergencies need to be reviewed to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and agencies.
2. **Coordinate with Beltrami County Emergency Management when planning for natural hazard events.** Land use decisions that concentrate a dense population or buildings together increase the threat to public safety during a natural hazard event more so than low density development. High-density development should comply with any natural hazard mitigation measures currently recommended by Beltrami County Emergency Management.
3. **Utilize land use planning to preserve and enhance life safety response time.** Land use decisions will involve emergency personnel to ensure adequate space for emergency vehicles and access for emergencies.



Photo credit: Bemidji Pioneer

Objective 7.4: Improve Sustainable Waste Management Practices, Including Recycling, in the Greater Bemidji Area.

Improving opportunities for sustainable waste management initiatives with development can provide an ease of access for residents to recycle or exercise sustainable waste management practices.

1. **Support educational initiatives in the community on existing recycling opportunities and improve accessibility.** Increasing education and making decisions that improve access to recycling is in keeping with the sustainable values of the community.
2. **Support educational initiatives in the community on the benefits of composting.** The Greater

Bemidji Area will encourage residents to learn about the benefits that composting can have by improving waste management efficiency, reducing the amount of waste that needs to be hauled and placed in landfills.

3. **Support educational opportunities for businesses or institutions on implementing recycling programs.** When recycling programs are implemented, it can increase the amount of overall recycling in the community, recycling practices that become habit at work can become habit in people's daily lives.

Objective 7.5: Assess Infrastructure Vulnerabilities to Natural Hazards for All Public and Private Development

1. **Map critical infrastructure to plan for protection from natural hazards.** Infrastructure that is vulnerable to natural hazards can exponentially increase dangerous situations in a natural disaster situation including a wildfire. Accurate mapping of critical infrastructure will reduce risk, improve public safety, and aid in hazard mitigation planning.