

Chapter 3: Community Overview

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- Historic Renovation
- Events and Activities
- Arts and Culture
- Demographics



Photo credit: GBAJPB



Photo credit: True North Bemidji

VISION

Embraces a diverse community culture in the arts, natural resources, and heritage.

Introduction

This section of the Comprehensive Plan includes information and data that provide a foundation for understanding the current conditions within the Greater Bemidji Area community. Specifically, the overview discusses the community's location, history, and demography.

Location

The Greater Bemidji Area is in north central Minnesota and covers roughly 51-square miles of geographical area, consisting of the City of Bemidji and Northern Township (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Location Maps



Source: (GBAJPB, 2012-2017)

History of the Bemidji Area

The City of Bemidji is known as the First City on the Mississippi, located at the headwaters of one of the most prominent, prized, and historically diverse rivers in the country. The name Bemidji comes from the Ojibwe word Bemidjigamaag meaning “lake with crossing waters” (Society, Beltrami County Historical 2012). The Greater Bemidji Area was settled by ancestors of the Dakota Native Americans, Ojibwe Native Americans, Euro-Americans, African Americans, and other ethnic groups that sought to live in this wonderful place. This rich cultural diversity has helped shape the Greater Bemidji Area into what is it today.

How did it start?

Native Americans were the first settlers of the Greater Bemidji Area. In the 1600’s, the Dakota, which were known as being a tribe of the Great Plains, settled in the present-day City of Bemidji. In the 1700’s the Ojibwe people migrated westward, forcing the Dakota people to move west and south of the Greater Bemidji Area. By the end of the 1700’s, the Ojibwe people were established in the Greater Bemidji Area. During this same time, Euro-American people migrated into the Greater Bemidji Area to

capitalize on the fur trade. The Ojibwe people played a role in this movement, trading fur, food, and other amenities.

Important Citizens of the Beginning

“Chief Bemidji,” whose Native American name was Shaynowishkung, resided with his tribe on the south shore of Lake Bemidji.



Photo credit: Visit Bemidji

He spent much of his young life traveling up the Mississippi River from the Cass Lake area to harvest food with his family. Through early encounters with Euro-American settlers, Chief Bemidji passed on the meaning of the lake "Bemidjigamaag," which the Euro-American settlers interpreted to be his name. Throughout his life, Chief Bemidji played a very important role in developing relationships between the people of his tribe and the incoming settlers. In tribute to Chief Bemidji, a statue carved of wood was created in 1898, and was donated to the City of Bemidji and placed in Library Park. In June of 2015, a bronze statue was erected with a memorial in Library Park honoring Chief Bemidji and the Anishinabe people. Chief Bemidji passed away in 1904 and will always be remembered as one of the most important and respected citizens of the Greater Bemidji Area. A large monument has also been erected in Greenwood Cemetery honoring his life.

Tams Bixby was one of seven individuals that founded the Village of Bemidji in 1896. The Bemidji town site streets were platted and surveyed (First Street through Eighth Street). The street names were chosen based on the lake

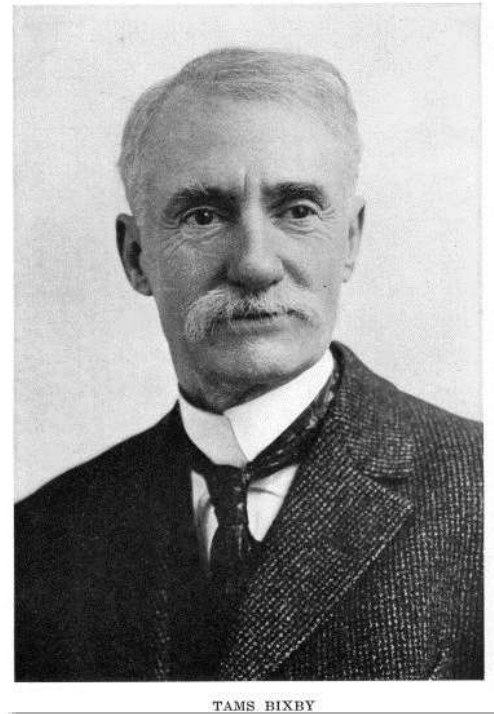


Photo courtesy of Okstate.edu

(Lake Bemidji Boulevard), village (Bemidji), county (Beltrami), state (Minnesota), and country (America). Tams Bixby once said, "Bemidji will become Minnesota's favorite summer and health resort, and the summer sojourner will find ready, at hand, an infinite variety of ways and

means with which to while away the long hours of a summer's day. The devotee of rod and reel and the chase could scarcely choose a more inviting point than that offered by Bemidji." (Society, Beltrami County Historical, 2012)

In Comes the Railroad, Logging and Sawmills, and Great Depression

By 1900, the railroad served by the Minnesota and International Railroad Company connected Bemidji to Brainerd and Minneapolis. By 1910, the Soo Line connected Bemidji to Duluth. By 1915, five different railroad companies were shipping goods to and from Bemidji.

Opportunities for the logging industry was created in the northern region of Minnesota with the advent of railroads. John Pillsbury, the cofounder of the Pillsbury Company and eighth Governor of Minnesota, owned many large white pine stands in the area. In 1903, Crookston Sawmill #1 was built on the south shore of Lake Bemidji by Thomas Shevlin and Elbert Carpenter, and by 1910 it was labeled the second largest sawmill in the nation. The Crookston Lumber Company had thirteen logging camps in the area supplying the sawmill. The end of the logging era in the Bemidji area slowed throughout the 1910's and ended in the 1920's due to a series of sawmill fires and the area being nearly logged out.

Beginning in 1929 and into the late 1930's, the United States was affected by the Great Depression. During this

time, the American economy failed forcing millions of people into unemployment. Bemidji and the surrounding area was not exempt from this travesty. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work relief program as part of the New Deal, put millions of young men to work over a nine-year period. The Greater Bemidji Area benefitted from the CCC with thousands of young men employed to replant and build the infrastructure for the national forests we have today. This program was a big step in pulling the Greater Bemidji Area out the Great Depression because local businesses thrived off the influx of employees providing goods and services.



Photo credit: Minnesota Historical Society

Historic Renovation

Beltrami County Historical Society

The Beltrami County Historical Society (BCHS) was founded in 1952, which at the time was located in downtown Bemidji at the present-day Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center. By 1993, the BCHS was in a building at the Beltrami County Fairgrounds. In 2001, the BCHS moved to its new and current location, known as Beltrami County History Center, at 130 Minnesota Avenue SW. The mission of the Beltrami County Historical Society is to provide connections to county history through public archives, collections, interpretive exhibits, and programs that educate, invite dialogue, and inspire self-reflection. The National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. **Table 1** shows NHRP within the Greater Bemidji Area.

Table 1: National Register of Historic Places—Bemidji

Name	Beltrami County Courthouse
Nation Register Information System ID	88000665
Year added to the Registry	May 26, 1988
Location	Beltrami Avenue & 6 th Street, Bemidji
Historic Significance	Event, Architecture/Engineering
Architect, builder, or engineer	Kinney & Detweiler Schmidt Bros.
Architectural Style	Beaux Arts
Period of Significance	1900-1924, 1925-1949
Owner	Public
Historic Function	County Courthouse
Current Function	County Courthouse
Name	Bemidji Carnegie Library
Nation Register Information System ID	80001936
Year added to the Registry	November 25, 1980
Location	426 Beltrami Avenue, Bemidji
Historic Significance	Event, Architecture/Engineering
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Gillespie, W.D.
Architectural Style	Classical Revival

Period of Significance	1900-1924
Owner	Public
Historic Function	Library
Current Function	Museum
Name	Bunyan, Paul, and Babe the Blue Ox
Nation Register Information System ID	88000204
Year added to the Registry	March 10, 1988
Location	3rd St. and Bemidji Avenue, Bemidji
Historic Significance	Entertainment/Recreation
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Dickinson, Cyril M. & Payton, Jim
Architectural Style	No Style Listed
Period of Significance	1925-1949
Owner	Public
Historic Function	Roadside Statue, Tourism
Current Function	Roadside Statue, Tourism
Name	Great Northern Depot
Nation Register Information System ID	88000673
Year added to the Registry	May 26, 1988
Location	Minnesota Avenue, Bemidji
Historic Significance	Transportation Exploration/Settlement

Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Unknown
Architectural Style	Other
Period of Significance	1900-1924
Owner	Private
Historic Function	Freight Depot
Current Function	Historic Museum
Name	Lake Bemidji State Park CCC/NYA/Rustic Style Historic Resources
Nation Register Information System ID	89001674
Year added to the Registry	October 25, 1989
Location	Off Co. Hwy. 20 NE of Bemidji
Historic Significance	Entertainment/Recreation/ Politics/Government/ Architecture
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Multiple
Architectural Style	Other
Period of Significance	1925-1949
Owner	Public-State
Historic Function	State Park
Current Function	State Park
Name	Nymore Bridge
Nation Register Information System ID	89001849
Year added to the Registry	November 6, 1989

Location	First St. over Mississippi River
Historic Significance	Architecture/Engineering
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Standard Reinforced Concrete Co. & Cheney, George M.
Architectural Style	Classic Revival, Other
Period of Significance	1900-1924
Owner	Public-Local
Historic Function	Bridge
Current Function	Bridge
Name	David Park House
Nation Register Information System ID	88000566
Year added to the Registry	May 16, 1988
Location	1501 Birchmont Dr.
Historic Significance	Architecture
Architect, Builder, or Engineer	Broaten & Foss Co. & Mahlum, Edward K.
Architectural Style	Modern, Other
Period of Significance	1925-1949
Owner	Private
Historic Function	Single Dwelling
Current Function	Single Dwelling

Events and Activities

The Greater Bemidji Area contributes over 400 lakes within a 25-mile radius as a year-round destination for fishing. Outdoor activities available in the Greater Bemidji Area are as diverse as its seasons. Named as one of Minnesota's "Fit Cities" in 2009, the Greater Bemidji Area was recognized for the available facilities, trails, and parks as well as its focus on encouraging active living and promoting numerous activities of physical recreation for all ages and interests, including:

- Biking
- Walking and hiking
- Bird watching
- ATV/OHV
- Skateboard Park
- BSU Outdoor Program Center (OPC)
- Disc golf
- Golf
- Hunting/Fishing
- Snowmobiling
- Snow Tubing
- Ice Fishing
- Snowshoeing
- Winter biking
- Downhill skiing and Snowboarding
- Cross country skiing
- Ice skating
- Hockey

The following is a sample of facilities, activities, and parklands within the Greater Bemidji:

- Lake Bemidji State Park offers recreational activities year-round, including swimming, boating, fishing, birdwatching, hiking, camping, biking, picnicking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and year-round naturalist-led activities.
- Bemidji Parks and Recreation provides facilities, activities, and parklands consisting of numerous parks, trails and pathways, year-round recreation activities for youth, arenas/outdoor rinks, and community garden plots.
- The Bemidji State University (BSU) Outdoor Program Center (OPC) is dedicated to providing the campus community with outdoor experimental learning opportunities. Recognized for offering “trans-formative programming,” the OPC has one of the highest participation rates in the country and is open to the public and campus community alike. The OPC’s facilities offer a host of diverse recreational year-round activities, including a state of the art indoor climbing wall, the Boathouse

(providing water-based recreational activities) located Lake Bemidji, and Hobson Memorial Forest.



Photo credit: Winterfest on Lake Bemidji

Arts and Culture

The City of Bemidji is home to thriving artisan community with galleries located along downtown streets. Showcase events are held year-round, as well as a variety of entertainment, including classical, folk, and popular music; live theatre; fine arts; Native America traditions; festivals; and workshops. These events combine to make the Bemidji area one of Minnesota's most important centers of culture. Examples of the Bemidji area's arts and culture consist of:

- The Bemidji Symphony Orchestra has performed for nearly 80 years, performing throughout the year with events like biennial concerts and a Summer Pops concert. The BSU choral and instrumental music students regularly perform in concerts and recitals as well as produce a biannual opera.
- Bemidji is known for its outdoor Sculpture Walk that was created in 1999. The Sculpture Walk is a program promoting public art throughout the downtown and vicinity. New works are added each year in May and are on display for a one-year

period. Returning or "Encore" pieces spend two to three years on the Sculpture Walk.

- The Watermark Art Center is a non-profit, member-supported organization dedicated to encouraging growth and development in the Greater Bemidji Area. The Watermark Art Center provides gallery space for exhibitions, author readings, and workshops; and has displayed national, regional, and local artists in group exhibits, solo shows, and installations.
- The Paul Bunyan Playhouse and Bemidji Community Theatre provide venues for comedy, drama, and musicals at Bemidji's Historic Chief Theatre. The Paul Bunyan Playhouse is a professional summer stock company employing a wide range of talented actors from the Greater Bemidji Area, Twin Cities, and nation. Started in 1951, the Paul Bunyan Playhouse is the longest continuous running summer stock theatre company in Minnesota. Created in 1981, the Bemidji Community Theatre prides itself by learning through experience. Throughout the years, people have joined the Bemidji Theatre Company to share time,

talents, and interests ranging from acting and directing, to designing and building scenery, to advertising and selling tickets.

- The Bemidji Public Library holds an annual book festival that features readings and lecture, and BSU presents its Minnesota Northwoods Writer Conference in June.



Photo credit: The Chief Theater



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Demographics

A study of demographics is included in the Comprehensive Plan and provides information as to whether a community is growing, identifies the range of age and gender status of the population, and identifies trends that can help a community plan for its future. Income, as well as workforce statistics, were identified in development of the Comprehensive Plan, breaking down education attainment, labor force, commuting, and employment by industry.

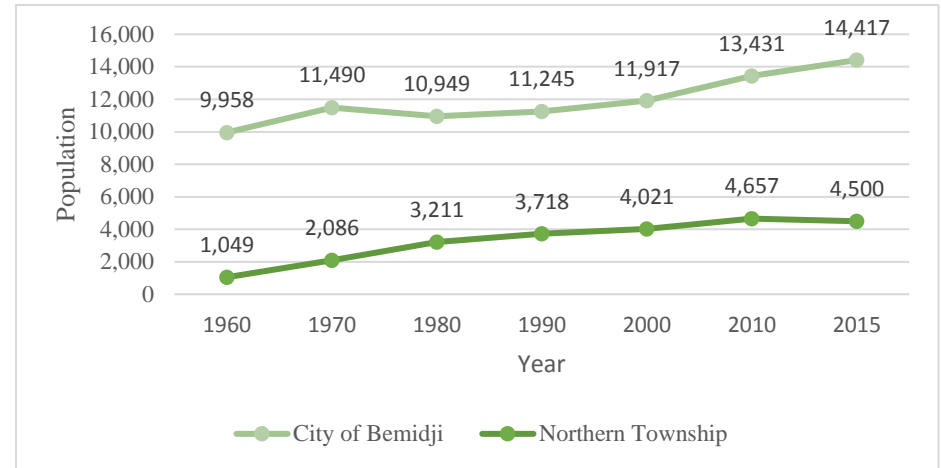
Greater Bemidji Population Growth

The Greater Bemidji Area has experienced steady and managed growth over the past century, which has allowed it to become the regional economic center. Since 1980, the Greater Bemidji Area has experienced steady growth, an increase of 33.6%. According to the 2010 census, the population for the Greater Bemidji Area was 18,088, increasing by 13.5% since 2000. Bemidji is the largest city in Beltrami County. **Chart 1** breaks down the population per decade for each of the communities within the Greater Bemidji Area.

Population Growth

Table 2 compares population trends of the Greater Bemidji Area communities to Beltrami County, the State of Minnesota, and the United States. Both communities within and outside of the Greater Bemidji Area experienced growth increases ranging from 12.7%-15.8% between 2000-2010. The growth rate increases of the Greater Bemidji Area follows the same growth increase pattern as Beltrami County for these time frames. Conversely, the State of Minnesota's population increase of 7.8% between 2000 and 2010 is substantially less. Using population estimate data for 2010-2015, the Northern Township fell in population by 3.5%, this was likely caused by annexation as the City of Bemidji increased by 6.8%. The average population increase for the Greater Bemidji Area ranges from 4.3% to 4.7% greater when compared to Beltrami County, Minnesota, and the United States.

Chart 1: Population of Greater Bemidji Area, 1960-2015



Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010); (State Data Center of Minnesota, n.d.) (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Table 2: Greater Bemidji Area, County, and State Population Comparison, 1990-2010

	2000	2010	2000-2010		2015	2010-2015	
			Change	% Change		Change	% Change
City of Bemidji	11,917	13,431	1,424	12.7%	14,417	986	6.8%
Northern Township	4,021	4,657	636	15.8%	4,500	(-157)	(-3.5%)
Beltrami County	39,650	44,442	4,792	12.1%	45,434	992	2.2%
Minnesota	4,919,479	5,303,925	384,446	7.8%	5,419,171	115,246	2.1%
United States	281,421,906	308,745,538	27,323,632	8.8%	316,515,021	7,769,438	2.5%

Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010); (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Population Projections

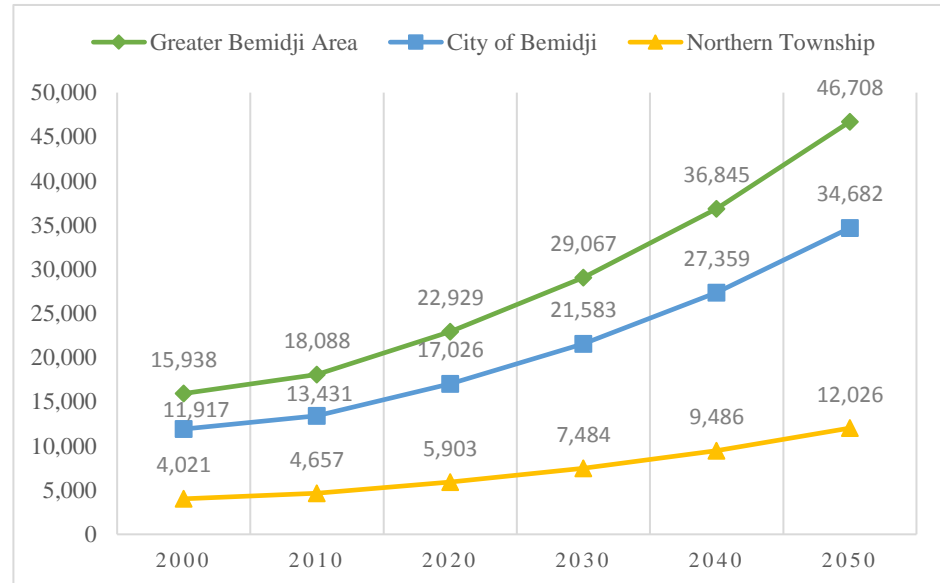
Population projection statistics can be impacted by several factors, including culture, infant mortality, quality of health care, life expectancy, and more. Future populations can be predicted through several methods that may or may not take these components into account. For the purposes of the Comprehensive Plan, a simple compound growth rate calculation for population projections was calculated. The Greater Bemidji Area has noted an annualized growth rate of .012% over the last 110 years (from 1900-2010).

Chart 2 illustrates population projection for the years 2020, 2030, 2040, and 2050. The simple compound growth rate calculates a conservative population growth estimate for the Greater Bemidji Area.

Regional Population Growth

Table 3 and **Chart 3** display the population growth of regional areas as compared to the Greater Bemidji Area. As the Greater Bemidji Area has a unique dynamic, comparing to cities alone would not provide an accurate comparison. So, these regional entities were chosen to compare growth as they are also regional centers. From

Chart 2: Population Projections, Greater Bemidji Area Combined



Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010)

2000 through 2010, the Greater Bemidji Area experienced an 11% population increase, but only an estimated 3% increase in the last five years. This could possibly be attributed to increased rural sprawl and development outside of the Greater Bemidji Area. The Greater Bemidji Area is growing at a similar pace as the Brainerd/Baxter area and Fargo/Moorhead from 2000-2010. In 2015, Fargo/Moorhead was continuing to grow at a similar pace as it was in the 2000's. In order to continue growing at a

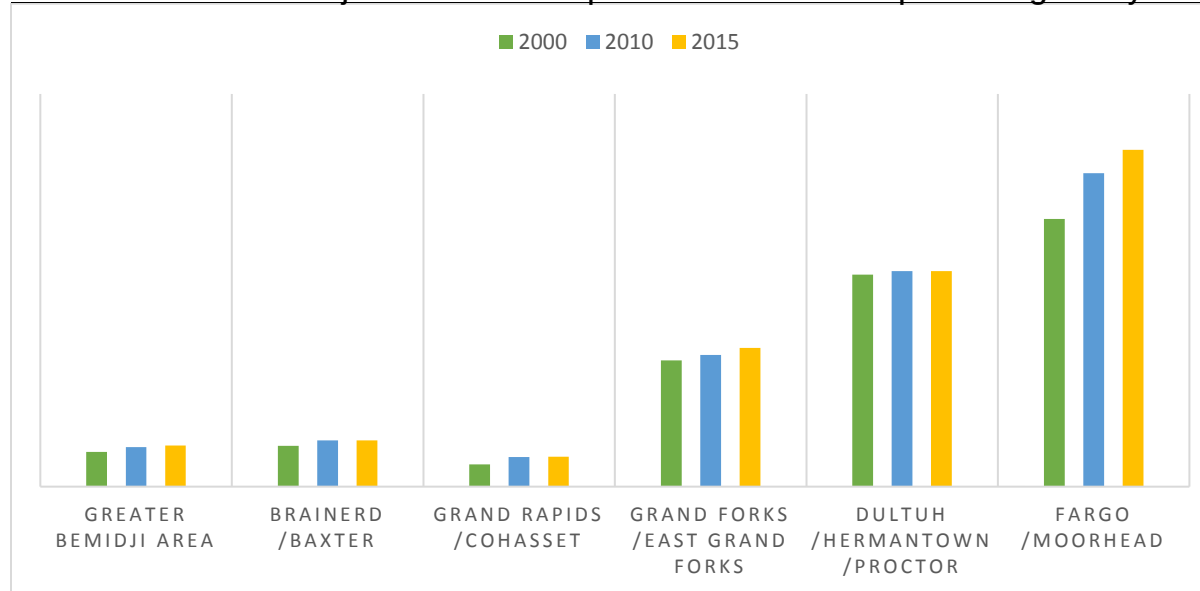
similar pace as the 2000's, it will be important to continue to increase a balance of employment and housing opportunities.

Table 3: Greater Bemidji Area Recent Population Change 2000-2010

	2000	2010	2000-2010		2015	2010-2015	
			Change	% Change		Change	% Change
Greater Bemidji Area	15,938	18,088	2,150	13.5%	18,917	829	4.5%
Brainerd/Baxter	18,733	21,200	2,467	13.1%	21,230	30	0 %
Grand Rapids/Cohasset	10,245	13,567	3,322	32.4%	13,733	166	1.2%
Grand Forks/East Grand Forks	57,922	60,339	2,417	4.2%	63,555	3,216	5.3%
Duluth/Hermantown/ Proctor	97,218	98,736	1,518	1.5%	98,865	129	0%
Fargo/Moorhead	122,776	143,614	20,838	16.9%	154,399	10,785	7.5%

Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010); (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Chart 3: Greater Bemidji Area Recent Population Growth Compared Regionally 2000-2010

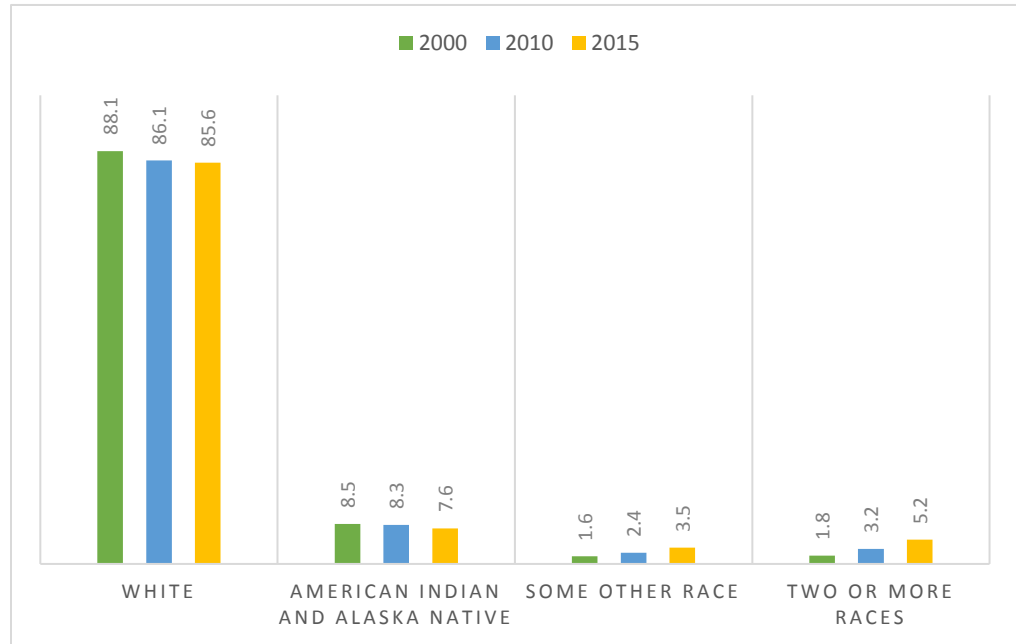


Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010); (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Race

Chart 4 illustrates a predominantly white population with a much smaller racial diversity, which is typical of northern Minnesota. The next most predominant population by race is “American Indian and Alaska Native.” The Greater Bemidji Area is centrally located between three tribal nations of Anishinaabe Indians. The Red Lake Nation is to the north, White Earth is located to the southwest, and Leech Lake is located to the southeast. As economic opportunities, housing, and public services are more difficult to come by in each nation, many Native Americans choose to move to the Greater Bemidji Area in search of employment, housing, or other necessary services.

Chart 4: Greater Bemidji Area Race by Percentage, 2000-2015

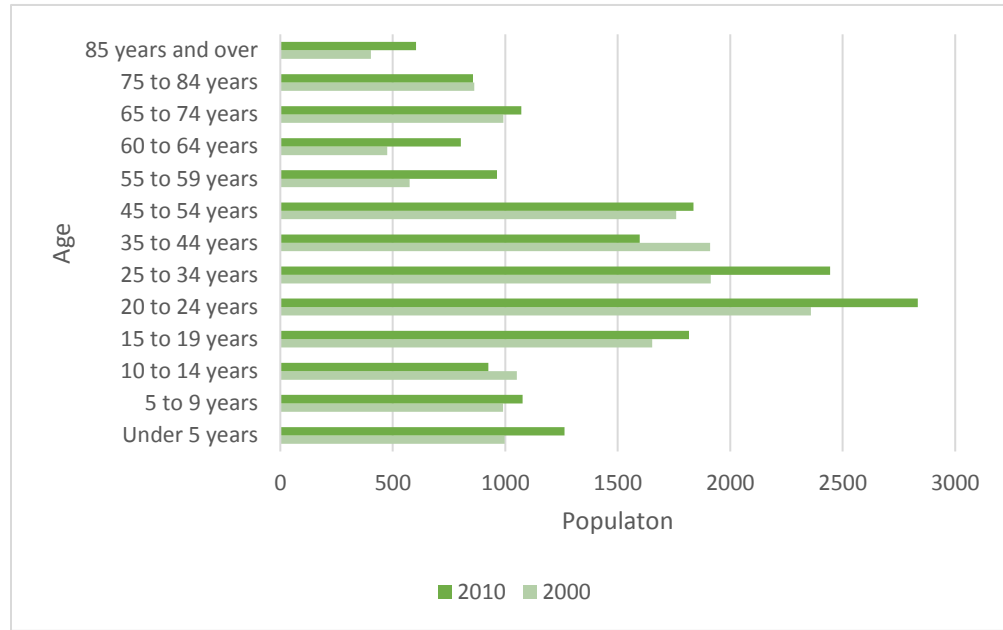


Source: (US Census, Decennial Census, 2010); (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Age Composition

Chart 5 shows the population distribution by age in the Greater Bemidji Area in 2000 and 2010. Starting at the age range of 45 to 54 and extending to 59, the Greater Bemidji Area has seen an increase in the number of people in each age grouping. Because this is aging census data, it can be assumed that many people in this population are at or nearing retirement age. By reviewing the age composition data, it is evident that an aging population trend is occurring. This trend is similar to what is occurring throughout Minnesota and across the nation. It is imperative that long-range planning take into consideration the Greater Bemidji Area's aging population as well as the decrease in the traditional workforce age bracket.

Chart 5: Greater Bemidji Area Population Distribution by Age Group, 2000-2015

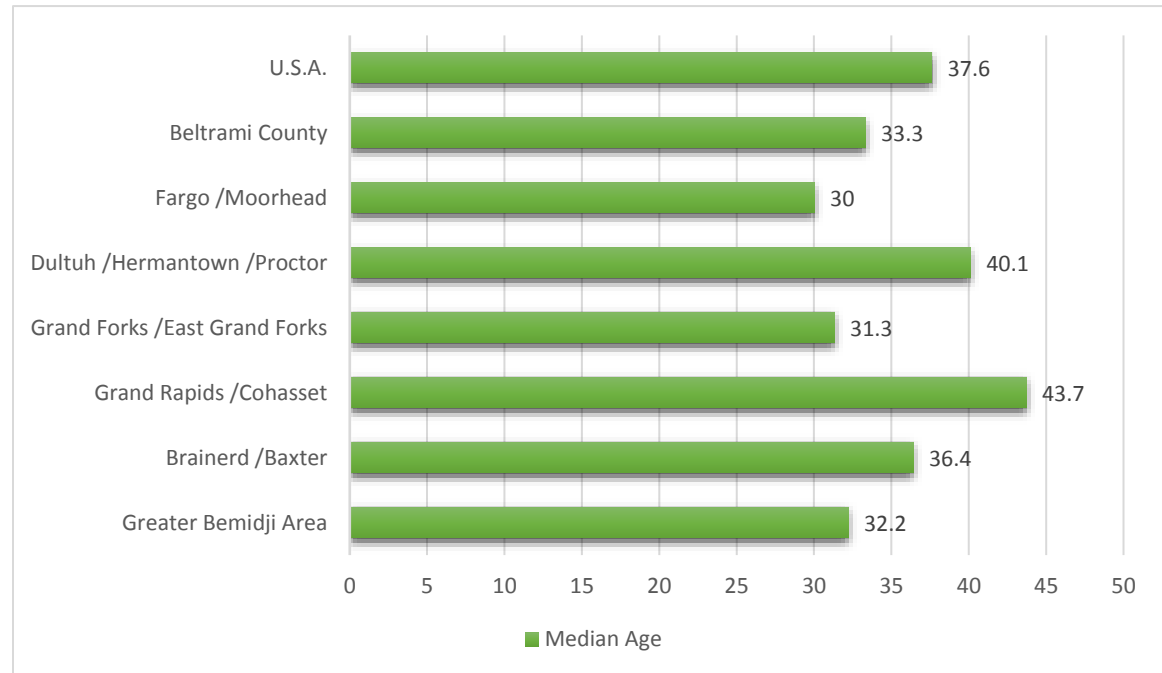


Source: (US Census, Decennial Census, 2010)

Median Age

According to the 2010 Census, the median age of residents in the Greater Bemidji Area was 32.2 years-of-age—four years younger than the overall median age in the United States. The median age is lower than many other communities in the region as shown in **Chart 6**. One of the key challenges will be to continue creating a community that attracts people of all ages and allows for growth.

Chart 6: Greater Bemidji Area Median Age, 2010



Source: (US Census, Decennia Census, 2010)

Income

A breakdown in the median household income shows that 21.86% of the Greater Bemidji Area's households have a median income over \$75,000, as compared to the State of Minnesota with 40.4% of households with incomes over \$75,000, a difference of 18.54%. Comparing household incomes below \$35,000, over 43.33% of households within the Greater Bemidji Area are low income compared to the 27.6% of households within the State of Minnesota, a difference of nearly 15.7%. Incomes ranging from \$35,000 to \$75,000 are all within 3% when comparing the Greater Bemidji Area to the State of Minnesota.

Chart 7 breaks down the income per household in the Greater Bemidji Area, Beltrami County, Minnesota, and United States.

Source: (US Census Bureau, ACS, 2011-2015)

Chart 7: Greater Bemidji Area Income Breakdown

