

# 2040

# Comprehensive Plan

Bemidji Township,  
Minnesota

**FINAL**

June 11, 2019



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# Acknowledgements

This Comprehensive Plan would not have been possible without the collaboration of the Town Board and consultant staff. A special thanks to these team members for the dedication and effort they gave to make this Plan a success.

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# Vision Statement and Themes

## VISION STATEMENT

Bemidji Township is a retreat from urban life for residents who value shared governance and rural residential living. Every resident lives among open spaces and natural resources in a community that values its agricultural heritage and bucolic future. The township promotes rural residential living, preservation of open space and agriculture, cost-efficient rural services, and a government responsive to its people.

## THEMES

- Preserve the township's rural lifestyle by controlling development through the implementation and strict enforcement of planning and regulatory controls.
- Protect water resources from pollution and degradation through the use of sanitary regulations and population density limits where necessary.
- Encourage local grass roots democracy through community activities that promote the values of honesty, responsibility, humility, respect, and love in regard to the land and its people.
- Promote community cooperation and decision-making through the upgrading and maintenance of existing roads.
- Conserve the natural assets and resources of the area to provide a desirable living environment for future generations.

# Chapter 1: Land Use

## INTRODUCTION

Bemidji Township is a rural community in the Mississippi River Valley. Land uses have historically consisted largely of farming and rural residential uses on larger lots and the Township expects these patterns to continue through 2040.

Development pressures have impacted the area due to its proximity to the City of Bemidji, the Mississippi River, and the attractive natural amenities in the Township. Over the past 20-25 years, the Township's land use pattern has changed as the number of rural residential properties has increased and the number of large active farms has decreased.

The agricultural and rural residential land uses in the Township are supported in the Township's Vision Statement. Municipal sewer and water services are not available to serve development in the Township and are not planned through 2040. Bemidji Township continues to develop using on-site septic systems and private water systems are consistent with its Beltrami County classification as a Rural Community.

## Land Use Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Preserve rural character and open space.

Policies:

- Continue to require new or subdivided agricultural properties to maintain at least 10 acres.
- Continue to require new or subdivided residential parcels to include at least 2.4 acres.

Goal 2: Support a rural residential lifestyle.

Policies:

- Promote new housing developments that have private septic systems and wells that meet County and State requirements.
- Provide responsive government and cost-efficient rural services.

Goal 3: Protect natural and cultural resources.

Policies:

- Cooperate with Beltrami County and other public and private organizations to protect public open spaces and natural and cultural resources.
- Encourage green building practices and minimize impervious surfaces.
- Evaluate the township's context for potential historic designation.

Goal 4: Maintain and encourage agricultural land uses.

Policies:

- Promote agricultural endeavors including seasonal agriculture, small farms, and community- supported agriculture.
- Permit accessory alternative energy systems on residential and agricultural properties that are compatible with the rural character of the township.
- Encourage enrollment in farmland preservation programs, such as Green Acres.
- Use and update local ordinances to support the commercial viability of farming, including smaller farms and community-supported agriculture businesses.

Goal 5: Support the development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems.

Policies:

- Protect solar access through minimum lot sizes, setbacks, and maximum building height.
- Ensure that all variances protect solar access on adjacent parcels as a condition of approval.

## EXISTING LAND USE

Existing land uses in the Township are dominated by agriculture, single-family residential, parks, undeveloped, some commercial, and open water areas. Figure 1-3 shows the existing land use pattern of Bemidji Township and adjacent communities on the west and east. As a comparison, Figure 1-4 shows a generalized version of existing/current land uses that is more representative of the character of overall areas versus specific parcels.

Predominant existing land uses include:

- **Single Family Residential:** Properties in this category are generally dispersed throughout the Township but concentrated particularly around bodies of water like Lake Marquette, Carr Lake, and the Mississippi River.
- **Commercial:** Commercial activity is focused along major corridors.
- **Agriculture:** Agricultural uses are also generally dispersed with the introduction of large-site single-family residential properties throughout the Township.
- **Institutional:** Institutional uses include a church along Highway 71, a school and property owned by Independent School District 31 along Highway 71 and Adams Avenue SW, and Oak Hills Christian College on Lake Marquette.

Figure 1-1: The gateway to Oak Hills Christian College on Lake Marquette.



Photo Source: Stantec

## FUTURE LAND USE

Bemidji Township has three future land use designations as shown in Figure 1-5:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Agricultural

### Residential

Properties guided for residential use closely match the existing conditions in the Township but do not capture the agricultural lands that have been converted to large-lot residential in the recent past. The residential future land use category is concentrated north of Highway 2 and surrounding the lakes and Mississippi River. Many of these residential properties surrounding the bodies of water also have designated wetlands identified in the National Wetland Inventory (NWI).

### Commercial

Commercial uses are designated where existing commercial business exist. The Future Land Use map shows a large commercial node where Highways 2 and 71 intersect. Other pockets of commercial use can be found on the east side of Paul Bunyan Drive SE at Carr lake Road SE and at Highway 2 near Division Street West.

### Agricultural

Most of the Township is designated Agricultural on the Township's 2040 Future Land Use Map. The intent of the Agricultural category is to protect long term agricultural areas while permitting rural residential and other uses that are compatible with agriculture and would preserve a sense of openness and rural character. The zoning ordinance permits uses such as agriculture, single-family residential, utilities, churches, schools, parks and open spaces, and a number of incidental uses compatible with agriculture.

Figure 1-2: Agricultural and low-density residential uses are common in the Township.



Photo Source: Stantec

## LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

### BEMIDJI TOWNSHIP PROGRAMS

#### *Land Use Ordinance*

The Township has the authority to regulate land uses through its Land Use Ordinance and accompanying regulatory tools, such as the Sign Ordinance, the Rental Ordinance, and the Nuisance Ordinance. The Land Use Ordinance is an implementation tool of this Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the Land Use Ordinance is to:

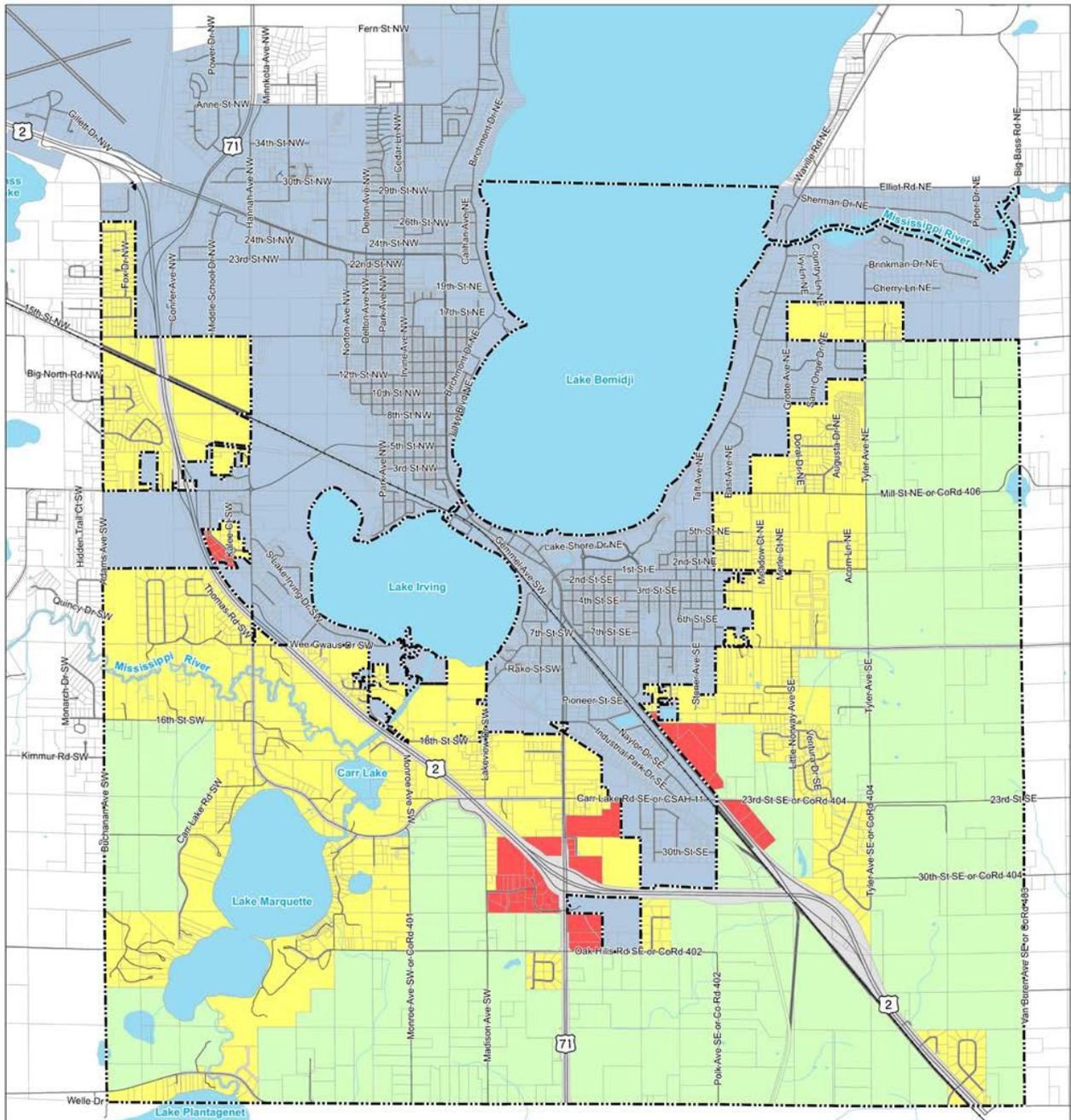
1. Protect the public health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience and general welfare.
2. Promote orderly development of the residential, commercial, industrial, recreational and public areas
3. Promote the conservation of the natural and scenic beauty and attractiveness of the Township.
4. Promote the conservation and responsible development of natural resources.
5. Provide for the compatibility of different land uses and the most appropriate used of land throughout the Township.
6. Protect agricultural areas.

### State of Minnesota Programs

#### *Green Acres*

Administered by the Minnesota Department of Revenue, the Green Acres Program provides tax relief for owners of agricultural property in areas where the market value of land is affected by development pressure, sales of recreational land, or other non-agricultural factors. This tax deferral program allows farm properties to be valued using an agricultural value instead of the estimated market value. Property owners can apply through the Beltrami County Assessor's Office.

Figure 1-3: Existing Land Use Map



### Official Zoning Map

Bemidji Township, Minnesota

**Zoning Districts:**

- AG - Agricultural District
- R1 - Rural Residential District
- COM - Commercial District

Bemidji Township Boundary

- City of Bemidji
- Open Water
- Right-of-Way
- Railroad



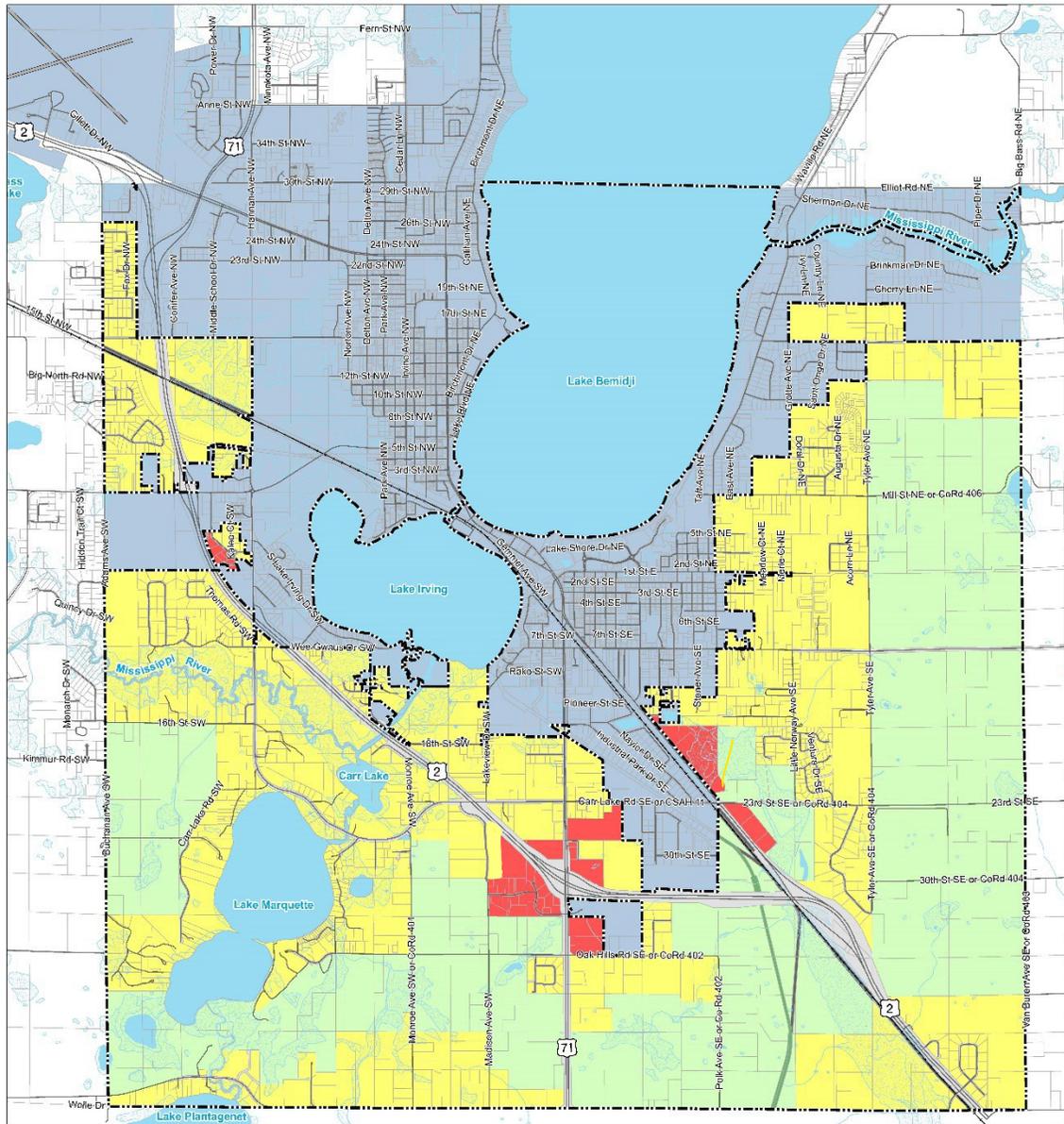
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May 18, 2018



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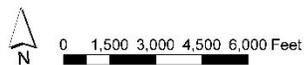
Figure 1-4: Future Land Use



**Future Land Use**

Bemidji Township, Minnesota

- Residential
- Commercial
- Agricultural
- Open Water
- Trail
- Railroad
- Right-of-Way
- Bemidji Township Boundary
- City of Bemidji
- NWI Wetland



October 1, 2018



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Source: Bemidji Township

# Chapter 2: Housing

## INTRODUCTION

Housing is an integral component of a township's landscape. This chapter identifies the Township's goals for its future housing stock, an inventory of existing housing, and identifies programs for maintaining affordable and diverse housing options in the region.

### Housing Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Ensure that future rural residential development maintains a rural community and a rural quality of life.

Policy:

- The Township encourages subdivision design to fit with a rural residential character, within the existing land use ordinance.

Goal 2: Encourage the development and preservation of diverse housing stock that balances the needs of all township residents.

Policies:

- Support County, State, and non-profit programs that meet the housing affordability and maintenance needs of a diverse and/or aging population through home improvement, home financing, in-home service assistance programs, and related programs.
- Continue to permit Accessory Apartments and Temporary Housing Units as Care Facilities in its Zoning Ordinance to meet lifecycle housing needs.
- Encourage the utilization of Federal, State, and County programs to help residents maintain older housing stock.
- Support Beltrami County in their mission to meet the residential needs of a diverse and/or aging population through home improvement and housing assistance programs.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

There are currently 1,381 housing units in Bemidji Township (with a 6.9 percent vacancy rate). Approximately 70 percent of homes in the township were built before 1990, with most of homes built between 1970 and 1989. The median home value is \$151,800 and the median monthly rent is \$675.<sup>1</sup>

### Land Use and Housing Demand

The Township's Land Use Plan provides sufficient areas for future rural development that can accommodate the growth in population and households through 2040. Because the Township is a Rural Community and does not have municipal sewer and water services, the new housing units are likely to be single-family residential units on large parcels with on-site septic systems and private wells that are built at market rates. An example of the rural housing options in the Township is included in Figure 2-1.

### Housing Affordability in Bemidji Township

Because of the rural nature of the Township, there is limited opportunity to develop land at densities that allow the Township to provide more housing that is affordable to households with incomes below the median value in the area. The Township does not have public sewer and water services available, and therefore does not receive development interest in developing rental housing or multifamily owner housing types.

The Township does not operate any programs to provide affordable housing or housing assistance. A small portion of Bemidji Township's existing housing falls within the range considered affordable to families with household incomes below the median value in the Bemidji area.

However, the Township recognizes that some households in the Township experience a housing cost burden, and that the Beltrami County provides services that can help residents to maintain and afford their housing.

Figure 2-1: An example of the Township's rural residential character.

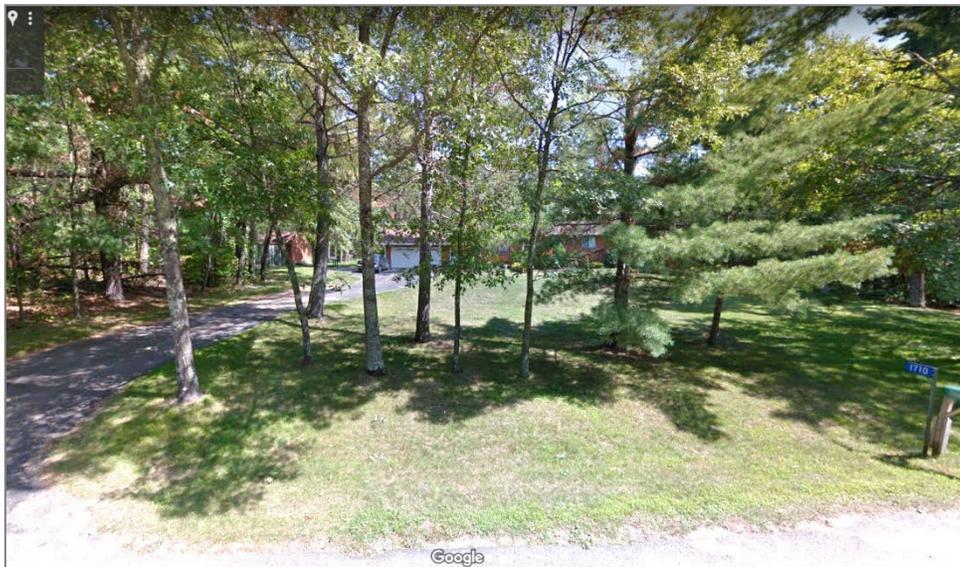


Photo Source: Google

<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 2012-2016

## HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

### Bemidji Township Programs

Although the township does not administer any affordable housing programs, it supports the development of housing and work completed by Beltrami County.

#### *Land Use Ordinance*

The Township's Land Use Ordinance permits Accessory Apartments within single-family residential units and temporary housing (typically manufactured homes) for care providers and farm workers. These options provide some affordable and life-cycle housing options.

#### *Transportation Policy*

The Township supports the County's programs to provide affordable housing in locations that provide transportation and services that meet the needs of seniors and others living in affordable housing.

### Beltrami County HRA Programs

In its initial years of operation Beltrami County HRA (Housing and Redevelopment Authority) focused its attention on the rehabilitation of substandard housing units throughout Beltrami County, accessing a number of state and federal grants to support that work. Starting in 1994 they developed affordable single-family houses for sale to moderate income home buyers in partnership with Northwest Technical College, Bemidji High School and Bemidji Area Habitat for Humanity. Beltrami County HRA also administers down payment assistance programs. They continue to be interested in those projects that assist low and moderate-income households obtain housing and working with communities in Beltrami County address their critical housing and redevelopment needs.

The Beltrami County HRA contracts with the Headwaters Regional Development Commission for staff support. The HRDC staff manages all HRA activities including development, down payment assistance, housing rehabilitation and creation of new initiatives.

#### *Housing Maintenance*

The Township recognizes the existing rental and affordable housing units in the Township and supports the maintenance and availability of these units through programs operated by Beltrami County. The Township and Beltrami County will also continue to enforce their codes and ordinances to maintain the quality of its existing affordable and rental housing (including the maintenance of viable septic systems and wells).

The Headwaters Regional Development Commission and Beltrami County HRA provide housing loan assistance to rehabilitate properties in the community. The County's In-House Rehabilitation Loan Program helps to assist low- and moderate-income families make necessary repairs to keep homes safe and healthy. Features of the loan program include:

- Higher loan-to-value ratio than traditional lending loan products
- Maximum loan amount is \$15,000
- 3% fixed interest rate for the life of the loan
- Monthly payment amount will be based on household's ability to pay
- Maximum repayment term will be 20 years<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Headwaters Regional Development Commission: <http://www.hrhc.org/loans-by-county>

# Chapter 3: Natural and Cultural Resources

## INTRODUCTION

Bemidji Township values and protects its unique place in the larger Mississippi River Valley. It offers a rural atmosphere that contrasts with and complements the adjacent urban and suburban areas of the City of Bemidji. Bemidji Township is fortunate to have a wide variety of natural and cultural resources. The Mississippi River, lakes and streams, groundwater, hills, views, wildlife, woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural lands make up the natural environment in the Township. Residents are proud of early settlement remnants that identify elements of its cultural history. Preserving and retaining these resources for the future is an important value in the township. The Mississippi River is a nationally-significant resource and is the major river in Beltrami County and Bemidji Township.

## Natural and Cultural Resources Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Protect and preserve the natural environment including hills, woods, wildlife, surface and ground water resources, and rural views and vistas.

Policies:

- Carefully manage development in environmentally sensitive areas using the Shoreland Overlay District as well as County and State regulations.
- Preserve natural drainage/wetland systems as development occurs by requiring wetland delineations and dedication of drainage easements.
- Provide education to residents about managing on-site septic systems and well protection and support County enforcement of its SSTS ordinance.
- Continue to regulate new residential properties at no less than 2.4 acres.

Goal 2: Integrate preservation of historic and cultural resources into Township planning processes.

Policies:

- Pursue public ownership of historic and cultural resources when feasible and appropriate.
- Coordinate with other public agencies on other historic sites and structures under public ownership.
- Promote the preservation and continued use of historic and cultural sites among residents, property owners and visitors through the Township's Zoning Ordinance and policies.
- Encourage good stewardship of historic and cultural resources in private ownership.
- Preserve the Town Hall as a symbol of grassroots government.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Natural Conditions

The Township has used data and maps from a variety of sources to understand and map its natural resources. Natural resource information available from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program provided a basis of understanding for the areas within the Township. The Mississippi Headwaters Board has completed detailed natural resources inventories and management plans for their district. Their plans have mapped the significant natural areas in Bemidji Township, and completed quality rankings and management recommendations for the natural areas remaining in the Township. The natural areas include a range of Woodlands, Wetlands, Agricultural, and the Mississippi River. Highest quality natural areas remaining in the Township are located around the Mississippi River and in Agricultural areas. Bemidji Township environmental features can be found in Figure 3-3.

The Township has extensive gravel deposits from glacial lake outwash exiting on the south shore of Lake Bemidji and running to the east. The deposits have been and are still being mined down to the water table level. The hills in the SE section of the Township have as much gravel reserve as has been mined in the vicinity to date. This low-level valley from the southeast shore of Lake Bemidji goes east into adjoining Frohn Township, cuts across a corner of Hubbard County, then spreads out as it nears the Cass Lake-Mississippi River drainage. The valley became the roadbed for several railroad rights-of-way, and then for significant highways up to the present.

Bemidji Township is currently covered by Beltrami County, the Mississippi Headwaters Board the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District. The Beltrami County Environmental Services Department and the MN DNR manage permits and related enforcement activities within the Township. Beltrami County has a Comprehensive Local Water Plan.

Beltrami County has joint land use authority with the Township in floodplain and shore land areas, in the Mississippi River District, and for mining uses. The Township has adopted its own Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance that identifies the areas of joint authority.

Beltrami County issues permits and regulates and inspects subsurface septic treatment systems (SSTS) within Bemidji Township. The County has implemented an onsite sewage maintenance program for townships and Bemidji Township participates in the program.

### Cultural Conditions

Proximity to the growing city meant that Bemidji township people benefited early. For example, the Township had telephone service by 1915. The highest point in the township is in Sec. 11, SE of SE, on County Road 405, a mile from Lake Bemidji. It once had a state forestry lookout tower but today displays a number of broadcast antennae which can be seen for miles. The earliest recorded school, District 6 in Sec. 4 (1895) was a log building in which the first town board met to organize. It was named the Nye school for teacher Porter Nye. In 1902, a Pine Grove school was established for children in the south of the Township but was consolidated in 1916 and continued outside Beltrami supervision. The Carr Lake community had a school very early, and its enrollment grew until a two-story, brick structure was built in 1921 (Sec. 29, the NE corner). It became an independent district (#33) in 1957 but was dissolved in 1966 because costs were too high. Pupils then went to Bemidji School District (#31). The Carr Lake School brick building is in use today as a private business (Figure 3-1). The adjacent ball field with so many memories also remains intact.

Figure 3-1: Photo of The Old Carr Lake Schoolhouse



Photo Source: Stantec

Figure 3-2: The entrance to Farmers Beach.



Photo Source: Stantec

Farmers Beach Park is located within the Township on Lake Marquette (Figure 3-2). The Township keeps it mowed and maintained and residents use it frequently for picnics and swimming in the summer. The Mississippi River also runs through the Township and is used for fishing, boating, and swimming. School Craft River runs through Lake Plantagent into Lake Marquette and into Carr Lake. Carr Lake and the Mississippi River meet at the north side of Carr Lake before entering into Lake Irving and then into Lake Bemidji.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

### Beltrami County Programs

#### *Shoreland Management Ordinance*

Permits are required for the placement of structures or structure additions, including such activities as construction of residences, garages, decks, signs, second story additions, basements, grading and filling activities, and septic systems. .

#### *Beltrami County Historical Society*

The mission of the Beltrami County Historical Society is to provide connections to County history through public archives, collections, interpretative exhibits, and programs. The Farmers Beach and Old Carr Lake Schoolhouse would be valuable to research and archive, if not already done so.

### Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB)

The MHB, along with its public and nonprofit partners, has developed programs to protect and preserve the natural qualities of the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. MHB promotes water quality monitoring, education, and stewardship activities for shoreland property owners.

#### *Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Easement & Acquisition Program*

Through the Habitat Program, landowners have the option to request acquisition by a conservation partner to permanently protect their land. They can also enter into an easement program that protects their values while still retaining ownership of the land. Acquisition and easement priorities should focus on parcels that provide access to existing County, State, and Federal public lands along the Mississippi River, headwaters lakes, and connecting streams to increase habitat and corridor connectivity.

### State Programs

#### *Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage Grants*

Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society, the program is designed to preserve and enhance access to Minnesota's cultural and historical resources and to support projects of enduring value. Program funds are used to supplement, not substitute, for traditional sources of funding. Eligible projects fall into three categories: community history projects, historic preservation projects, and structured grants. Grant cycles are split into Small Grants of \$10,000 or less and Large Grants over \$10,000.

#### *Surface Water Assessment Grants*

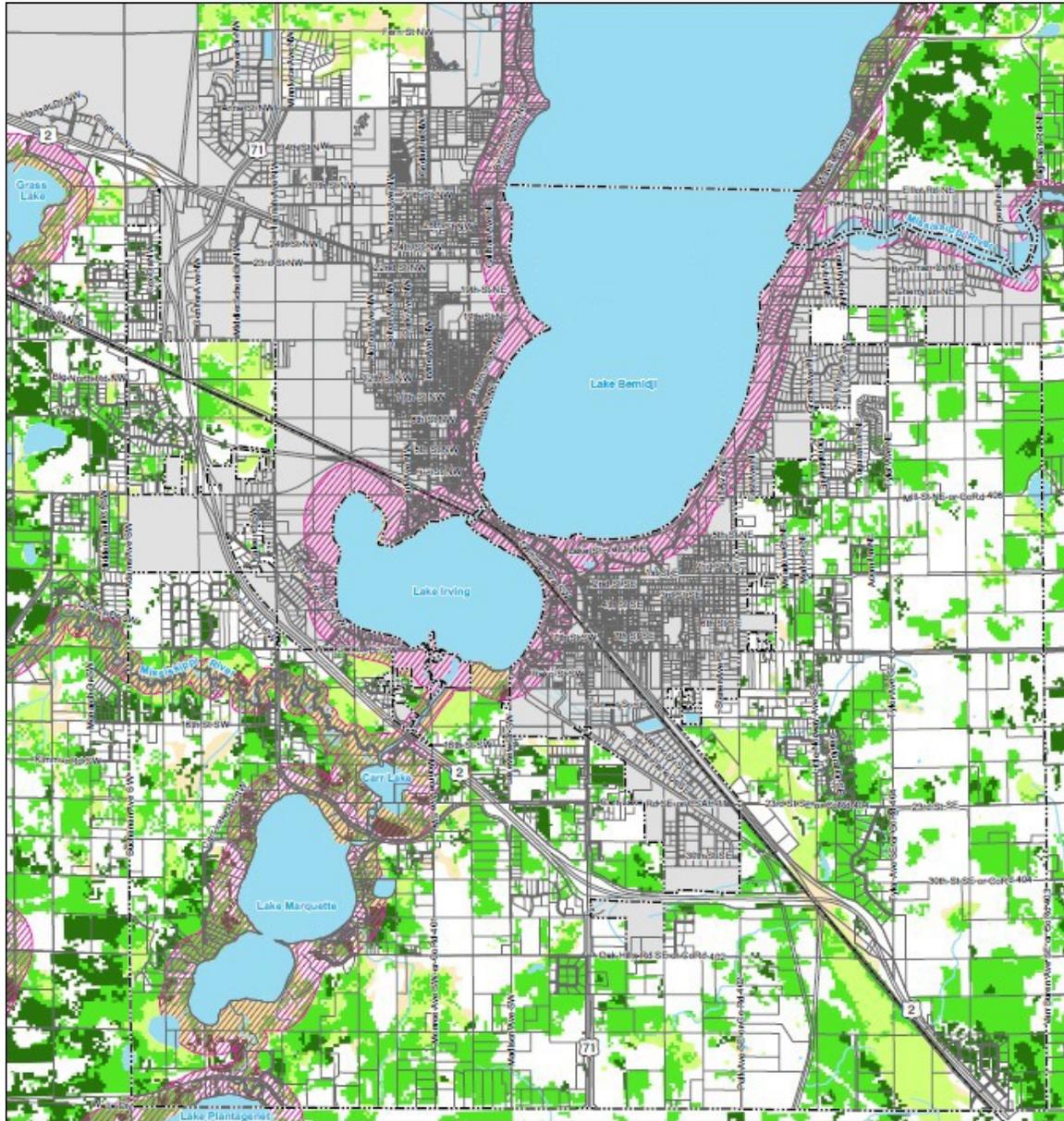
As a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) program, the primary objective of the grant program is to determine the health of lakes and streams in the state. Local partners collect information that identifies waters which are in need of restoration or protection strategies. Townships are eligible partners.

### Federal Programs

#### *National Register of Historic Places*

Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is the official list of historic properties recognized by the federal government. Listed properties must meet standards established by the National Park Service. There is no regulatory obligation to maintain or restore privately owned properties unless the properties are listed on the National Register, eligible for listing on the Register, or may be impacted by a project that receives state or federal funding. In some cases, Federal and State tax credits are available to private property owners as an incentive to restore listed historic properties.

Figure 3-3: Township environmental features



### Environmental Features

Bemidji Township, Minnesota

- Deciduous Forest
- Evergreen Forest
- Mixed Forest
- NWI Wetlands
- Hydric Soils
- Shoreland District
- Bemidji Township Boundary
- City of Bemidji
- Open Water

May 16, 2018



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# Chapter 4: Transportation

## INTRODUCTION

Bemidji Township supports maintaining services that are cost-effective and perpetuate a rural lifestyle for its residents. The Township works with Beltrami County on County Road planning. Several roads in the Township are under the County's jurisdiction. Upgrades and other capital improvements are planned via the County's Transportation Improvements Plan (TIP).

### Transportation Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Strive for cost-efficiency in providing rural services.

Policies:

- Actively participate in the County's annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) update.
- Coordinate services with adjacent jurisdictions, including Beltrami County.
- Pave roadways only when necessary for safety and functionality.

Goal 2: Explore alternative modes of transportation for health and recreation benefits.

Policies:

- Research County and State programs and grants for increased opportunities to walk, bicycle, or snowmobile through the Township.
- Identify ways to connect to bicycle trails in neighboring jurisdictions.

### History

The first official township road began in 1897 on the south shore of Lake Bemidji, ran along the east shore of Lake Irving, into the Carr Lake community continuing south and then west across the Schoolcraft River and along the west shore of Lake Plantagenet, taking travelers to Park Rapids. Township roads were always a major problem for the township board. At one time the board had to get a ruling from the state attorney general on the legitimacy of a road location. Early settlers had to pay a poll tax or work specified days on township roads. In 1913, the board gave a resident 50 pounds of FREE dynamite to blow out stumps on "his" road. Many township roads - once the poor, neglected relatives of state roads - are now all-weather and hard-surfaced. A highway bypass circles the city so that through- traffic is expedited, and major state divided highways run East to West, and North to South through the township. Better roads have meant development (Rural Residential) in part of the township land.

### Existing System

#### *Roadways*

Bemidji Township has two Principal Arterials that connect it to the larger region – US Highway 2 and Trunk Highway 71. One of the primary Minor Arterials is Paul Bunyan Drive SE which runs adjacent to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad. Bemidji Township owns a bridge over the Mississippi River that it ensures stays in compliance with MnDOT standards.

### *Trails*

US Bicycle Route 45, or the Mississippi River Trail, comes from the east to travel along the southern end of Lake Bemidji and then head west along Division Street W. The Paul Bunyan State Trail also travels along Lake Bemidji and primarily uses an off-street dedicated trail in the eastern portion of Bemidji Township.

### **Maintenance**

Bemidji Township has a five-year Township road plan and works with the County to ensure that it receives the best benefit for its taxpayers. Maintenance and snowplowing on Township roads is contracted.

Figure 4-1: Arrowwood Overlay.



Photo Source: Bemidji Township

## TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

### Beltrami County Programs

#### *Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)*

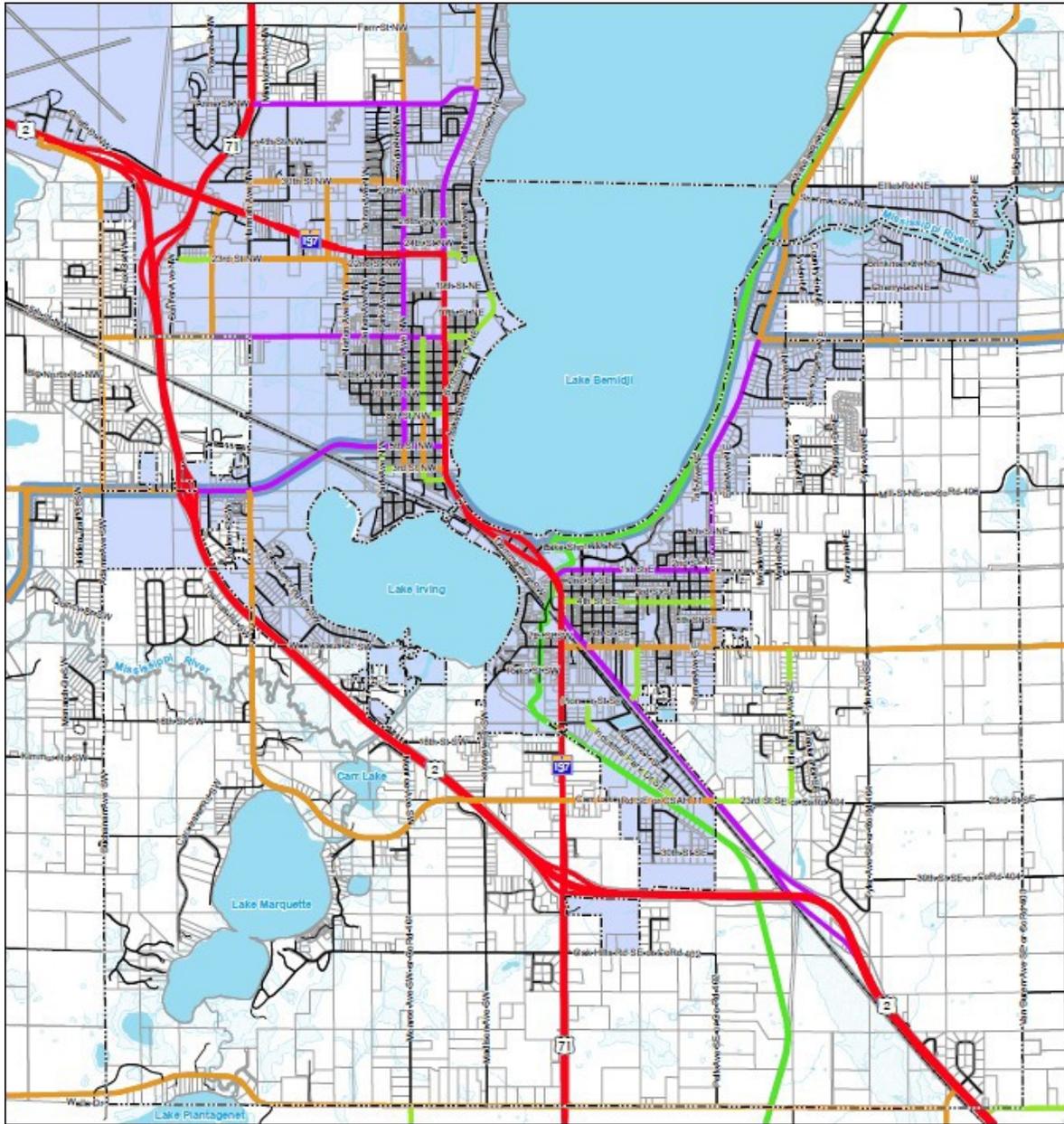
The road system in Beltrami County is made up of a combination of ownerships including State and Federal Agencies, the County, Bemidji Township and other townships, tribal governments, and private roads. The TIP includes County State Aid Highways and County roads. The TIP is reviewed and revised on an annual basis.

### State Programs

#### *DNR Regional Trail Grant Program*

The purpose of the program is to provide grants to local units of government to provide development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Funding for the program is from "In Lieu Of" lottery proceeds, established in Minnesota Statute 85.019. Townships are considered eligible participants. Grants reimburse up to 75 percent of eligible project costs but recipients must provide a non-state cash match of at least 25 percent. The minimum grant request is \$5,000 and the maximum award is \$250,000.

Figure 4-2: Map of existing transportation system in Bemidji Township.



### Existing Transportation System

Bemidji Township, Minnesota

Principal Arterial	US Bike Route 45 (Mississippi River Trail)
Minor Arterial	Paul Bunyan State Trail
Major Collector	Open Water
Minor Collector	NWI Wetland
Local Road	Bemidji Township Boundary
Railroad	City of Bemidji

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May 16, 2018  
**Stantec**  
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Source: Beltrami County

# Appendix: Background

## TOWNSHIP GOVERNANCE

The State Legislature has described township government as a governance model that efficiently provides services in areas developed for agricultural, open space, and rural residential purposes. Bemidji Township is considered a "Rural" township in Minnesota, and as such is able to exercise a number of municipal powers, including regulatory and bonding authority, while remaining a township form of governance.

Bemidji Township's Comprehensive Plan must be consistent with Regional plans and policies.

The Beltrami County Board and Bemidji Township retain joint zoning authority in shore land, and floodplain areas, in the Mississippi River District. In 2017, Bemidji Township updated its own Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances so that its regulations supported its rural setting.

The Township government is led by five (5) Supervisors elected at large, a hired Town Clerk and a Zoning Administrator. Township Supervisors are elected during the general elections in March. All terms are for 3 years. An annual Town meeting is held each year. The meeting is run by town citizens and the attending citizens annually adopt the proposed property tax levy.

The Township has an appointed township citizen Planning Commission that makes recommendations to the Town Board in their respective areas. There is also an appointed Treasurer and hired consultants for legal, engineering, and planning.

Figure 1: 2018 Town Board discussion of the comprehensive plan



Photo Source: Stantec

## HISTORY

Bemidji Township was surveyed in 1874, and organized in 1896, twenty-four days after the village of Bemidji was chartered, and is the oldest township in the county. In 1897 the county attorney declared the original Bemidji Township organization illegal (no reason given), and the Township reorganized June 26, 1897. "Bemidji" is the shortened name derived from the Ojibway name for Lake Bemejigamaug, the lake with water (river) running across it. Both the village and the township took the local name. In a referendum about changing the name so as to distinguish itself from Bemidji village, the township settlers decided to stay with "Bemidji" two to one.

Homestead claims were made early on land near the lake and the Mississippi River, with passable wagon trails leading west into the already settled townships. Near South Lake Irving grew a cluster of settlers' cabins which would informally be named Carr Lake, after an early settler (1893). Carr Lake was never chartered, yet its importance to the area can't be too highly rated. A school, a co-op, a farmer's club, 4-h clubs, sports teams and family recreation began early in the community and continues to the present. The Community is proud of itself and of the many families who came early to settle and whose descendants remain today.

Outside of Bemidji and Nymore village post offices, only one other was established in the township in 1903 at Rosby, a rail stop and farm products shipping station in Sec. 1. The discontinuation date of the post office is uncertain and the widening and realignment of the major roadways has obliterated all remaining vestiges of the original Rosby "community".

The township has had numerous churches organized, dissolved, and reorganized, with buildings erected, moved, sold and/or rededicated. Moving from its confined location in Nymore, Calvary Lutheran Church appears spacious to motorists passing by on Hwy. 197. Calvary's cemetery remains in Nymore, in Sec. 24, at the intersection of Lake Avenue and Roosevelt Road. The Evangelical Free Church has a new building at the intersection of Highways 197 & 404. Faith Baptist Church is on Roosevelt Road. Bemidji Baptist Church is on Paul Bunyan Dr. SE. The county Pauper's Cemetery is located on Mill Avenue. Oak Hills Christian College has a private cemetery on the college grounds on the east shore of Lake Marquette.

Today, much land is residentially developed and is glowingly described by realtors as desirable rural residential living only XX miles from Town. Such township development can mean larger lot sizes with higher priced real estate and an increased tax base. In Bemidji Township the usefulness and importance of township government has been reasserted with the need to exert more land management. Increasing commercial pressure and with the resultant increase in land values continues to spread out into the rural township.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

The population of Bemidji Township is very diverse. The largest concentration of population exists in plats. The activities of most of the people in Bemidji Township are linked very closely to those in Bemidji. The wage-earners of most of the year-round resident families in the township are employed, at least part time, by a Bemidji-based commercial or industrial establishment or government. Most of the children in these families attend schools within the Bemidji School District. Health and welfare facilities and programs are available to the people of Bemidji Township in the city of Bemidji. Fire protection is provided by the Bemidji Rural Fire Association contracted with the Bemidji Fire Department. Maintenance and snowplowing of township roads is contracted. In the early 1970s, a trend began in the Bemidji area of city residents moving outside the city limits to live in the country. Most of these people kept their jobs in Bemidji, or if they moved in from other parts of Minnesota or the United States they shortly secured

employment in Bemidji. This desire to have a country home was instigated by such factors as crowded cities, traffic congestion, crime, high taxes, cheaper rural land prices, a desire to get back to the land to enjoy the open space of the countryside, and for many other reasons. With them, the people brought the luxuries of city living in modern dwellings, along with children who now had to be bused to school, the need for extended mail service routes and the need for improved roads to commute to work and back. The result of this movement of people and increased demand for living space sent the prices of land skyrocketing. In 1970, land only ten miles from Bemidji with a sandy soil and growing jack pines was selling for \$20 per acre or less, whereas in 2000 the same land, if available, was selling for over \$650 per acre, and in 2011 was selling for over \$1920 an acre. The people of Bemidji Township have been directly affected by this activity. Most of the township is within 2 to 3 miles of Bemidji, Land has been speculated on, and some people have profited by selling their land to developers. Land, however, is not a renewable resource, and once it is gone, it is gone forever. Land that is used for housing developments, highways, and industrial and commercial enterprises ceases to produce food and fiber. People must live somewhere, though, and this is one of the major reasons that the people of Bemidji Township looked into land use planning as an alternative to helter-skelter development and the uncontrolled wasting of the land resource. The question that faces Bemidji Township citizens is, "How can we benefit from the growth in our community without destroying the existing resources and the social and economic character of people?" Controlled growth through planning and the implementation of land use (zoning) regulations appears to be a positive step in that direction. Although it is difficult to plan and zone at the township level, we believe it to be necessary in preserving the human and natural character of the community. This grass roots government control gives most of the citizens a voice in the decisions made about the future development of the township. Socially, economically, and ecologically, this procedure should help maintain the balance of one small community.

## INTERGOVERNMENTAL INTERACTION

### Sheriff's Office

The Beltrami County Sheriff's Office is dedicated to the principles of protection and service. They work in partnership with the community by offering professional administration and enforcement of all federal, state and local laws, as well as being responsible for the provision of other services to the public through all divisions of the Sheriff's Office. They strive to provide professional service through field patrol deputies, criminal investigators, civil process officers, 911 communications officers, bailiffs, corrections officers, records technicians, sentence to serve staff, boat and water and snowmobile patrol officers, emergency management as well as administrative staff.

### Roadways

Bemidji Township works with Beltrami County on County Road planning. Several roads in the Township are under the County's jurisdiction. Upgrades and other capital improvements are planned via the County's Transportation Improvements Plan (TIP), which is updated each year.

### Land Use Planning and Code Enforcement

Beltrami County has joint land use authority with the Township in floodplain and shore land areas, in the Mississippi River District, and for mining uses. The Township has adopted its own Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance that identifies the areas of joint authority.

### **Beltrami County Township Officers (BATO)**

This is an organization of all the townships in Beltrami County which keeps informed about what is going on in the County and State by having County Commissioners, State Legislators, County Environmental Services staff, Solid Waste staff, the County Engineer, and other public officials from the County and State speak to the group on current events and upcoming changes.

### **Rural Fire Association**

This is a group of 18 different townships from Beltrami County and Hubbard County. They work with the city of Bemidji to have fire protection.

### **Septic System Regulation**

The Beltrami County Environmental Services Department issues permits and regulates and inspects subsurface septic treatment systems (SSTS) within Bemidji Township. The County has implemented an onsite sewage maintenance program for townships and Bemidji Township participates in the program.

### **Watershed Districts**

Bemidji Township is currently covered by the Beltrami County Environmental Services Department, the Mississippi Headwaters Board, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District. The Beltrami County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan includes maps that identify the watershed geographic areas. The Beltrami County Environmental Services Department and the MN DNR manage permits and related enforcement activities within their areas of the Township.

### **Other Governmental Units**

There are a number of other local governing bodies that the Township interacts with on matters of common concern. BATO, (Beltrami Association of Township Officers), BRACO (Bemidji Regional Animal Control Organization), surrounding city and township governments, School District #31, Beltrami County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and the National Park Service are among the agencies that the Township works with on either an on-going or issue-related basis.

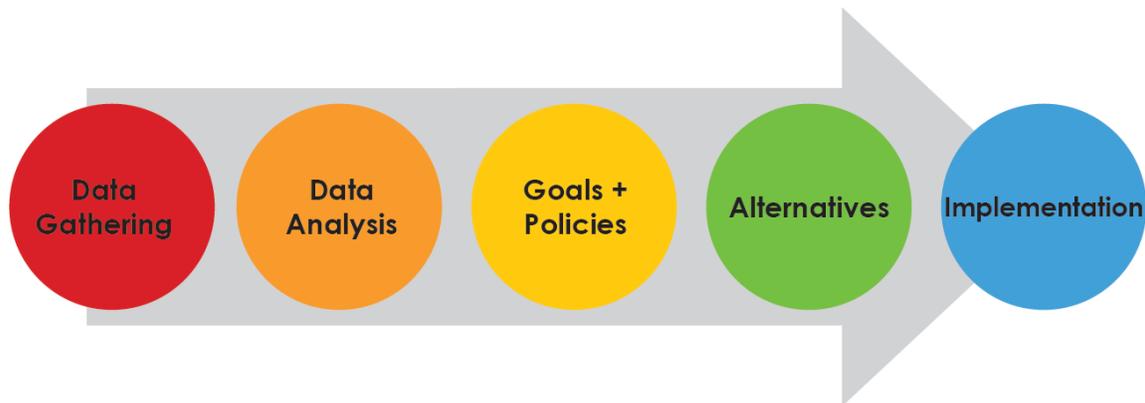
# Appendix B: How to use this Comprehensive Plan

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

Comprehensive planning is a systematic, ongoing, forward-looking process of analyzing opportunities and constraints to accomplish a community's goals and objectives. The Comprehensive Plan focuses 20 years into the future to identify strategies for protecting resources, thoughtful development, and managing Township budgets to ensure that all residents enjoy a high quality of life. This grass roots government control gives citizens a voice in the decisions made about the future development of the township. The plan will help maintain the social, economic, and ecological balance of the community.

### The Planning Process

The planning process consists of five steps, ranging from data gathering to implementation. The Bemidji Township Town Board has worked with a consultant team to conduct research, identify goals and policies, and develop strategies to implement those goals and policies.



### Features of the Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan addresses existing natural, social, and built conditions in the Township as well as policies to guide changes in the future. Areas of concern in the plan include land use, housing, transportation, and natural and cultural resources. Each chapter includes a summary of existing programs and features, goals and policies for the future, and implementation strategies to make those goals a reality. Features of the Comprehensive Plan are discussed further in the “How to Read the Comprehensive Plan” section of this chapter.

## WHY ARE COMPREHENSIVE PLANS NEEDED?

### Value of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan adds value to the Township and its governance structure by...

- Identifying areas for future development and areas for protection
- Balancing competing stakeholder interests
- Guiding decisions for the Town Board and Planning Commission that reflect the desires of constituents
- Protecting and maintaining public investment
- Assisting with budgeting and capital improvements

### Function of the Comprehensive Plan

The Iowa State Extension program has worked with communities in the region to develop Comprehensive Plans that serve local governments in rural and agricultural areas. According to the organization's research, Comprehensive Plans in rural areas serve many of the same functions as an urban or suburban comprehensive plan:

- Creating a common framework for changing government officials
- Balancing private land-owner interests and nuisances
- Protecting valuable natural and agricultural resources
- Shaping the appearance and design of the community (dense housing or open farmlands or suburban neighborhoods)
- Residents can shape the development of their community and see their values reflected in policy and practice

The Bemidji Township Comprehensive Plan will serve as a tool to help residents benefit from the growth in our community without destroying the existing resources and the social and economic character of people living there.

### State Regulations

The State of Minnesota supports the development of comprehensive plans as a way to manage land uses and protect natural resources across the State. The following excerpts of State Statute illustrate the regulatory purpose of the plan.

#### *§394.23 Comprehensive Plan*

Bemidji Township has the authority, granted by the State, to develop a comprehensive plan, addressing the built and natural elements of the town.

"The board has the power and authority to prepare and adopt by ordinance, a comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan or plans when adopted by ordinance must be the basis for official controls [including zoning]".

#### *§394.33 Town Powers*

The Township also has the authority to develop zoning ordinances, consistent with the comprehensive plan.

"The governing body of any town including any town with the powers of a statutory city pursuant to law may continue to exercise the authority to plan and zone as provided by law."

## HOW TO READ THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

### Plan Elements

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Comprehensive Plan is divided into chapters, based on different elements. Each element is a major issue in the community that the Township hopes to address in the future. Elements of this Plan include:

- **Chapter 1:** Land Use
- **Chapter 2:** Housing
- **Chapter 3:** Natural and Cultural Resources
- **Chapter 4:** Transportation

Each element includes goals and policies about future change. In this plan, the Township defines goals and policies as:

- **Goal:** a broad statement of community aspirations
- **Policy:** A specific approach or method of action to achieve community goals

Maps are also included in many of the chapters to illustrate the existing conditions and issues across the Township. This gives a spatial context to the policy language included in the plan.

### Definitions

Comprehensive plans rely on goals and policies to give shape to the community vision. These statements often include language that can be interpreted widely by different users. For the purposes of implementing this Comprehensive Plan, Bemidji Township's goal and policy language will be interpreted using the definitions below.

- **Create:** Bring about the desired goal, usually with Township staff involved in all levels, from planning to implementation, and which may involve Township financial assistance.
- **Continue:** Follow past and present procedures to maintain desired goal, usually with Township staff involved in all levels, from planning to implementation.
- **Encourage:** Foster the desired goal through Township policies, which may involve Township financial assistance.
- **Endorse:** Subscribe to the desired goal by adopting supportive Township policies.
- **Prevent:** Stop described event through the use of appropriate Township policies, staff action and, if needed, finances.
- **Promote:** Advance the desired state through the use of Township policies and staff action at all levels of planning.
- **Protect:** Guard against a deterioration of the desired state through the use of Township policies, staff action and, if needed, financial assistance.
- **Provide:** Take the lead role in supplying the needed financial support and staff action to achieve the desired goal. The Township is typically involved in all aspects from planning to implementation to maintenance.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Developing and implementing the Comprehensive Plan is a detailed process, involving the public, township staff, and elected officials. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities can help to ensure that decisions are made, and that goals and policies are implemented.

### Township Staff

The Township Staff, including the Zoning Administrator, have roles to implement the Plan and provide information to residents wishing to alter their property. Staff is responsible for:

- Administering the planning process
- Providing initial contact with applicants and developers
- Preparing planning reports
- Providing technical advice to the public, commissioners, and board members

### Planning Commission

The Planning Commission is an advisory body, making recommendations about land use issues to the Town Board. Planning Commission members are responsible for:

- Preparing and recommending a plan for the community's future
- Serving as a Board of Adjustment (for variances and appeals)
- Making recommendations on:
  - Comprehensive Plan Amendments
  - Rezoning
  - Subdivisions
  - Conditional Use Permits
  - Variances
  - Planned Unit Developments

### Town Board

The Town Board is the decision-making body in Bemidji Township. The Board is responsible for balancing private and public interests and representing the needs of their constituents. Town Board members are responsible for:

- Acting as the legal, decision-making authority for the government
- Adopting the Comprehensive Plan
- Controlling the budget
- Making decisions on:
  - Comprehensive Plan Amendments
  - Rezoning
  - Plats
  - Variances
  - Special Use Permits