

Chapter 10: Active and Healthy Community

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Photo credit: Visit Bemidji



Photo credit: True North Bemidji

VISION

Provide an interconnected web of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors that afford passive and active programming, which promotes healthy lifestyles, a sense of place, and fun and enjoyment.

Introduction

The Greater Bemidji Area provides an interconnected web of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors that afford passive and active programming, which promotes healthy lifestyles, a sense of place, and fun and enjoyment. Active and healthy community includes basic outdoor recreation and sports, indoor recreation and sports, local foods, and good initiatives.

Parks and Open Space

In 2011, the City of Bemidji developed the *City of Bemidji Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan*. The purpose of the plan is to provide a blueprint for a comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable system of parks, open spaces/natural places, trails, and affordable recreation-oriented activities. A number of commonly held perspectives were developed from the focus group and public meetings that, collectively, establish a baseline value statement regarding the importance of the parks, open spaces, and trails within the city.

Key perspectives included:

- Parks, open spaces, and trails are considered very important to the quality of life in the community.
- The park and trail system within the city is commonly considered to be a regional-level asset that has the potential to serve the local, regional, and tourist populations.
- Maintaining a quality park and trail system is becoming critical to the long-term vitality and vibrancy of the city as a place to live, work, and recreate.



Photo credit: John Andringa

The extensive public process and open communication with citizens was instrumental in shaping a common vision for parks, open spaces, and trails that will serve the needs of Bemidji and the larger region. Key underpinnings of the vision included:

- Fostering the “city as a park” concept, whereby the parks and open spaces serve as primary
- factors in shaping the character of the community and creating a quality and desirable place to
- live, work, and recreate.
- Fostering an integrated system of trails and pedestrian-ways that connect the community together as well as to the larger region.
- Preserving and protecting the natural resource amenities within the community and make them accessible for human appreciation in a responsible way.
- Servicing neighborhood, community, and regional recreation needs by providing a balanced set of recreation facilities and amenities for both passive and active uses.
- Promote regional tourism and economic development.

Together, these elements supported the vision for the parks and open space system and defined its strength and enduring quality. The following provides an overview of each of the system elements.

Cornerstone Parks

Cornerstone parks are the hallmark parks of the system. These parks serve a very broad-based populace of local, regional, and seasonal populations. Although locally-based, the cornerstone parks serve the region and include:

- Brinkman Park
- City Park
- Diamond Point Park
- Paul Bunyan and Library Parks
- South Shore/Nymore Beach



Photo credit: GBAJPB

The five cornerstone parks each make a unique contribution to the local park system and, both individually and collectively, are vital elements to the quality of life in the City of Bemidji, Greater Bemidji Area, and the surrounding region. The cornerstone parks also provide significant economic value by attracting visitors to the region and providing quality of life incentives that bolster existing businesses, draw new business to the region, and entice families to reside in or near the community.

Nearby-Level Parks

Nearby-level parks serve the recreational needs of individual neighborhoods within the city. These parks also serve as neighborhood social centers and bring people together to recreate and socialize close to home.

Nearby parks are those in which their location, size, and character make them well suited to meet neighborhood recreational needs. Nearby-level parks include:

- Cameron Park
- Gordon Falls Park
- North County Park
- North Lake Irving Park
- Nymore Park

- Otto Schmunk Park
- Roger Lehman Park

Natural Open Spaces and Parks

The region around the City of Bemidji is fortunate to have outstanding natural open spaces and parks that give the area much of its character and appeal. Many of these areas are publicly owned by the DNR and are available for public use in a variety of ways. This significantly increases recreational opportunities for city residents. Several important natural open spaces around Bemidji include:

- Brinkman Park (also a designated cornerstone park)
- East Lake Bemidji Preserve
- Lincoln Park
- Menards Natural Resource Area



Photo credit: National Geographic

Other publicly owned natural open spaces that are instrumental to the Greater Bemidji Area's system include the following:

- Bemidji State Park (Northeast Side of Lake Bemidji)
- State Park Land (East Side of Lake Bemidji)
- DNR Land (Northeast Side of Lake Bemidji)
- Movil Maze Recreation Area (North Side of Northern Township)

Special Use Parks

Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose uses—such as a nature

center, historic sites, plazas, urban squares, aquatic centers, campgrounds, golf courses, etc. Overall size varies, depending on need. Special use parks include:

- Ralph Gracie Memorial Park
- Freedom Defenders Veterans Memorial

Trails

The Greater Bemidji Area also offers several trails in the region that may be utilized year-round for hiking, biking, cross country skiing, woodland strolls, and inline skating. The trail system plan outlined in the *City of Bemidji Parks, Open Space & Trail System Plan*, provides a comprehensive system of trails offering recreational value and pedestrian-level interlinkages throughout the city and region. The plan is an outgrowth of numerous independent plans developed in past years but not fully integrated into a cohesive and complete trail system plan. The plan also takes into consideration the growing regional and state trail system infrastructure that has taken shape in the Bemidji region. The trail system consists of the following trail types:

- Park trails pass through the city and connect with the state trail system. These trails are the backbone

of the trail system and provide both recreational value and the means to get around the community.

- Connector trails provide safe routes within existing street rights-of-way and serve as feeders to the park trails.
- Sidewalks also provide safe routes along the streets and serve as feeders to the park trails.
- On-street bikeways also play an important role in the Bemidji trail system in that they augment the trails and sidewalks by providing a safe alternative for bicyclists and in-line skaters.
- Cross-country ski trails are in select parks.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Neighborhood Sidewalks and Trails

The residential pattern of the neighborhoods near central Downtown Bemidji retains a linear grid and higher density of sidewalks, which is typical of these types of neighborhoods. The City of Bemidji offers a sporadic sidewalk system with several walking and biking trails. Sidewalks are available throughout the downtown district. As is typical of most growing communities, the low-density area has taken on a more suburban form with bent and curving grids, larger lot sizes, dead-end cul-de-sacs, and no sidewalks.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Recreation and Natural Resources

The Greater Bemidji Area maintains its natural and recreational assets assuring long-term amenities for community members. The Greater Bemidji Area operates and manages several recreational facilities in the area.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Recreation Facilities

- Sanford Center
- Gillett Recreation Center
- Bemidji Curling Club
- Evenson Memorial Baseball Fields
- Bemidji Youth Soccer Fields
- Paul Bunyan Playhouse
- Headwaters Science Center
- Headwaters School of Music

Several lakes in the area, such as Lake Bemidji, Lake Irvine, Lake Movil, and others, offer abundant opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the area's natural resources. Fishing and boating are supported by the availability of fishing piers and boat launches.

Food in the Community

In recent years the Greater Bemidji Area has been emerging as the regional hub for local food accessibility as well as food service initiatives.

Bemidji Community Food Shelf

The food shelf, currently made up of seventeen churches, has been serving people in need throughout the Greater Bemidji Area and northern Minnesota since 1982. The food shelf obtains food from donations, churches, local citizens, grants, and local food drives. The food shelf serves about 3,000 families and distributes over 700,000 pounds of food per year. One of the most recent developments with the food shelf is the Farm Project which started in 2013. The Farm Project is a sustainable farm located in the City of Bemidji Industrial Park. The farm includes seasonal outdoor crop production, a seasonal greenhouse, and a recently constructed Deep Winter Greenhouse allowing for year-round food production.

Bemidji Area Farmers Market

The Bemidji Area Farmers Market was launched in 2010 with a mission to provide the Greater Bemidji Area with high-quality, locally produced foods and improve the quality of life throughout the community. Made up of like-minded folk with a passion for locally produced food as well as other specialty items and crafts, the farmers market operates during summer months in downtown Bemidji.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Harmony Food Co-Op

The Harmony Food Co-Op increases the opportunities for Greater Bemidji Area customers to purchase locally grown food. It gives Greater Bemidji Area residents the opportunity to purchase into the cooperative model through shopping for healthy food and sustainable products is a benefit to the Greater Bemidji Area. In addition to being community owned, the co-op offers many community classes on local foods and has a full commercial kitchen that can be rented for other community organizations to put on classes.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Active and Healthy Community Strengths

- Existing public facilities, including city and regional park and trail systems.
- Many established, large community events that are healthy-minded, such as the Loop the Lake Festival, Bemidji Dragon Boat Festival, and the Blue Ox Marathon. Several smaller health-minded events also exist, providing active recreation opportunities.
- Bemidji State University Outdoor Program Center and Sustainability Office provide active and healthy opportunities community wide.
- Bemidji Area Schools Community Educated offers classes and programs to all ages of the public to promote healthy lifestyle choices to improve quality of life.
- Active user groups maintain area trails and provide educational opportunities.
- Active farmers markets within the community, including the Bemidji Area Farmers Market. Farmers markets provide access to locally sourced goods that can be difficult to sell in retail stores.

- Harmony Food Co-Op improves access to local foods and organizes community classes and events focused on local food and healthy lifestyle choices.
- Bemidji Community Food Shelf Farm and Deep Winter Greenhouse can provide high-quality, fresh produce to families year-round and provide educational opportunities to learn gardening skills.
- The local population has a commitment to clean air, water, and environmental quality. This commitment helps ensure active outdoor recreation and local agriculture remain possible.

Active and Healthy Community Challenges

- Limited safe bicycle parking throughout the community.
- Societal changes increasing sedentary lifestyle and the health risks that come with little to no physical activity. Younger populations do not grow up with a need to use alternative means of transportation, increasing dependence on technology creates less opportunity for active recreation.

- Limited places to rest along recreational trail corridors, making it difficult for some to use trails.
- Harsh winter weather limits access to active recreation and healthy locally grown foods.
- Poverty limits access to healthy foods and active recreation.
- Large shopping centers, including grocery stores, are not easy to access by walking or bicycling.



Photo credit: John Andringa

Active and Healthy Community Objectives and Strategies

Objective 10.1 Promote Active Living and Healthy Community Initiatives

When managing growth and future development, healthy lifestyle opportunities for the entire community, including indoor and outdoor active recreation, local food programs, and educational programs will help increase the overall quality of life.

1. Promote programs for populations that need additional services or opportunities to be active.

It is vital to promote healthy lifestyle choices as a community. Programs that broaden the opportunities for all citizens to engage in healthy lifestyles are encouraged.

2. Encourage activities and programming for alternative and emerging recreational trends.

Active recreation trends are constantly adapting and new trends are becoming popular, it is important to adapt and have diverse opportunities for active recreation.

- 3. Promote high-density residential development near schools and services with access to multimodal transportation opportunities.** An active, healthy community is best when all members of the community can have the opportunity to live a healthier lifestyle. Neighborhood schools that teach about multimodal transportation, including walking and cycling, at a younger age can create healthy habits. Accessibility to goods and services is important to provide opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles for all residents.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Objective 10.2 Promote All Forms of Recreational Activities

Recreational activities are a key part of the community. These activities can consist of local, regional, national, and even international events that bring the community and visitors together to participate in a wide array of healthy and active events. Events are a great way to promote recreational activities; however, it is important to maintain and increase opportunities for recreation that are not event-related.

- 1. Promote awareness of available recreational opportunities.** Supporting endeavors aimed at creating awareness of all recreational opportunities can help community residents make healthy lifestyle choices. Informing the community on parks and trail connections throughout the area.
- 2. Promote and encourage active recreation as a part of any community development or redevelopment.** Active and healthy opportunities provided by developers should be supported and encouraged. Opportunities for active living within developments are becoming the norm and will be

looked upon favorably as development and redevelopment projects are implemented.

- 3. Engage the community on public recreation projects and encourage private development.** Transparency on recreation projects is key to ensure that the needs of the community are being met.
- 4. Promote health and enhancement of water-oriented recreational opportunities offered to the community.** Water-orientated recreational activities are becoming increasingly available. Appropriate developments should provide access to water-orientated recreation opportunities. Public access to water needs to be preserved and increased where appropriate.
- 5. Support education about environmental stewardship and the impacts of human activity on the natural environment.** While increasing outdoor recreational activities and overall usage, it is important for the resiliency of the natural environment to have well-educated citizens be its stewards and care takers.

Objective 10.3 Promote Active Recreation and Healthy Living Year Round

Harsh winters can be a challenge; encouraging a culture supporting outdoor opportunities to stay healthy and active year-round is important for sustaining and improve the overall quality of life in the community.

- 1. Promote the development of an outdoor gathering space for farmers market or indoor market to be used year-round.** The Greater Bemidji Area community supports efforts for providing access to local goods and food year-round.
- 2. Preserve and maintain outdoor and indoor ice facilities, as well as curling facilities and other outdoor winter sites.** Ice skating, figure skating, hockey, curling and all other outdoor winter activities such as cross country skiing, winter biking, and ice fishing are important to northern Minnesota culture. Access to these activities should be maintained for active winter recreation.

Objective 10.4 Preserve and Enhance Existing Local Goods and Foods Initiatives

Opportunities for locally crafted merchandise or locally grown food are important to the community. Generally, the nutrients are much richer in locally grown food, providing a great health benefit. Shopping locally also has a climate benefit by reducing the amount of energy it takes to transport goods and foods, reducing carbon emissions and protecting air quality for outdoor recreation.

- 1. Support the development of a local food hub.** A local food hub would support local farmers and producers to market and distribute products regionally as well as allow for regional producers to access a larger market. This development is important for ongoing efforts to become a more sustainable, healthy, and resilient community.
- 2. Encourage responsible urban agriculture as well as partnerships to promote the growth of urban and sustainable farming practices.** When done responsibly, urban agriculture can benefit the community in multiple ways: increasing the amount of quality healthy good grown locally, reducing carbon emissions, community building through

community gardening projects, and improving food security for families. Cooperation of local groups could provide a bigger impact through education of responsible practices, growing community gardens, and overall increasing urban agriculture opportunities.



Photo credit: GBAJPB