



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 19, 2023

**CONTACT: Tom Barry
Beltrami County Administrator
701 Minnesota Ave. NW
Bemidji MN 56601
Office (218) 333-4109
tom.barry@co.beltrami.mn.us**

County Pivots on Jail Location

BELTRAMI COUNTY, MN – Beltrami County, MN – The Beltrami County Board of Commissioners has officially withdrawn its offer to purchase property in the southwest area of Bemidji along Jefferson Ave northwest of the US Highway 2/71 Bypass that was intended to be used for the new Beltrami County Jail. The property, known as the Wiebolt Property, was the favored location for the facility based on scoring criterion developed by the Design and Operations Committee.

On July 12th, 2023 the Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board (GPAJPB) acted to impose a moratorium on jail construction on all residentially zoned areas. The zoning of the property was a contingency of the purchase agreement as the Wiebolt Property is zoned as residential.

Following public feedback and input, the Beltrami County Board had already requested the County Administrator and Design and Operations Committee to explore and evaluate other suitable options for a new location of the Beltrami County Jail. The County continues to evaluate and identify other non-residentially zoned properties in the City of Bemidji using the established scoring criterion, which was slightly updated to include a broader evaluation of neighborhood impacts. Minnesota State Law requires the county jail be located within the city limits of the county seat.

“It is not uncommon for controversial projects like this to take several twists and turns as they come to fruition,” said County Administrator Tom Barry. “The County Board was already in the process of considering other locations based on the feedback it received at the June 20th public hearing. I think they have shown that they were listening and eager to look for a compromise. The actions of the GBAJPB just helped to spur that along,” Barry said.

The Beltrami County Board plans to continue its work to identify the best location for the new jail while keeping neighborhood considerations in mind. It is expected that a new location will be identified soon and that the Board may be able to announce that location in early August. "It is imperative that this project continue its momentum," said Sheriff Jason Riggs. "The Department of Corrections is watching closely what happens with our project and we need to show continued progress to avoid any closure actions by the DOC," Riggs continued.

Residents will be asked this November to approve a local option sales tax to finance the \$80M project. Many County Board Members see sales tax as the preferred funding option because 50% of sales tax revenue comes from visitors and nonresidents. That would reduce the project cost to residents by half. "Sales tax collections do not apply to food and clothing either, so it is a more sensitive funding source for families with lower incomes who spend more on those staple purchases," said Commissioner John Carlson.

###