

To the people of Bemidji and surrounding area.

On Saturday, in consultation with our chief of police and city manager, I ordered a curfew be imposed to protect citizens, businesses, and public assets from harm. Thank you to everyone in Bemidji for staying home last night. The curfew will be in place again today, Sunday, May 31 at 8:00pm to Monday, June 1 at 6:00am.

The implementation of a curfew yesterday and today is not in reaction to peaceful protests, but in response to a specific series of credible threats to property and people.

We share your pain, sorrow and disgust at the violent death of George Floyd and we join you in demanding justice. We support and honor your cries of anguish and your peaceful protests. We also acknowledge the truth of historical injustice and structural racism in the United States in general and Beltrami County in particular.

While we honor your right to protest, it is our duty to respond to threatening individuals or groups to keep Bemidji safe. In addition to the curfew, the city took additional steps to protect our community including asking for assistance from area law enforcement and staffing our fire halls overnight for rapid response if needed.

We also took preemptive measures to reduce the potential for fires by calling in Waste Management to empty dumpsters in the downtown at 6pm Saturday. Many of those dumpsters were found to have already been laid with accelerants (gas) and flammables (bags of leaves and broken up pallets).

We are aware of multiple inaccurate rumors on social media that can lead to misunderstanding and violence. The city did not request, nor do we condone vigilantes patrolling within the city limits, now or at any time.

We have received a complaint for violation of curfew related to this. An outside agency will be requested to investigate the complaint and their findings will be forwarded to the prosecutor for review and charges.

No city or law enforcement department has a perfect record with regards to minority policing, including Bemidji. It is our sincere goal to recognize the failures of the past and to help our community to heal and improve through community engagement, training, and understanding. For some years, leadership in law enforcement has participated in local efforts at Truth and Reconciliation and, while there is much work to do, we have been heartened to see many community members come together to begin the process of structural change and the healing of historical wounds. It is our pledge to continue those efforts and to help make Bemidji a healthy, happy, and peaceful community.

Please stay alert and aware when you read or share news. Please continue to make your voices heard and follow the curfew so that our community stays safe and that we can continue to work together to make Bemidji a just community for all its citizens.

Mayor Rita Albrecht