

CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, January 9, 2024

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 pm, on Tuesday, January 9, 2024 at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid regular council meeting with the following members present: Mayor Julie Bruhn, Council Members: Bruce Albright, Paul Pinke, Dean Haarstick and Natalie Fischer. Absent: none. Also present: Clerk/Treasurer Julie Lammers; Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane; Liquor Store Manager Kyle Theisen; Attorney Tom Winters; Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum; and Citizens Carol Albright, Marcia Huddleson and Jim Courneya.

Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the meeting to order.

Mayor's State of Cities Address

Bruhn reviewed 2023 accomplishments. Bruhn ended with the city vision statement: The City of Vergas is a thriving community that we are proud to call home. We are committed to taking charge of our future and proud of our commitment to retaining its small-town charm; while continually improving our employment, housing, and technology. Our quality of life, friendly atmosphere, and sense of community help us retain residents as well as draw in visitors and new residents. Our community flourishes because of engaged community members, business owners, and leaders working together to advance and communicate common values, goals and priorities of the Vergas Comprehensive Plan.

Citizens' Concerns

No concerns addressed.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to approve the agenda with the following item added: Water service line and Treasurers report and the following item deleted: EDA/HRA report under the consent agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

Water Service Line

Lammers stated Josh Hanson dropped off an invoice from Ruther Excavating Inc for \$9,446.64 which included moving the water line and hydrant on Glenn Street. Albright stated in early August it was determined the hydrant needed to be moved due to the extension of Glenn Street. Hanson had received an estimate of \$6,800 for relocating the hydrant. The invoice was more than the original estimate because it took twice as long as expected because the city did not know where they wanted the hydrant. DuFrane did not agree with this statement and stated they could not find the water line because it was in the middle of the ditch. DuFrane stated the issue was finding the water line and not the city's hydrant. Bruhn questioned paying the invoice as this could commit us to paying future developments when they connect into the city water line. This new development does not contribute to the water fund and there is no way to recoup this cost. Currently the water fund has a negative balance, and this would not benefit our current users. Winters stated that if the Council is inclined to do something there will need to be some kind of findings. Motion by Fischer, seconded by Pinke to not help cover the costs of the Ruther Excavating Inc invoice. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to approve the following consent agenda with Albright having minor corrections to the minutes:

1. Council Minutes of the December 12, 2023
2. Bills paid between Council meetings and Council bills totaling \$168,350.04.
3. Liquor Store bills for December 2023 totaling \$66,185.20.
4. Late water/sewer bills

5. 2023 Investment Schedule/Bond Schedule
6. General Fund Special Revenue Money Market Account
7. 2022 Statement of Receipts, Disbursements and Balances
8. American Rescue Plan Funding 2021-2026
9. Committee Reports - requiring no Council Action

Planning Commission

Motion passed unanimously.

Set Time, Place and Date of Regular 2024 Meetings

Discussed the fact that both the Council and Lions have their large meetings on the same night. There are no handicapped parking spots left on our meeting night. Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to hold 2024 Council meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in a hybrid setting at the Vergas Event Center.

Appointment of Acting Mayor

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to appoint Natalie Fischer as acting Mayor. Voting yes: Pinke, Albright and Haarstick. Voting No: None. Abstain: Fischer. Motion carried.

Appointments

Bruhn reviewed the 2024 City of Vergas Portfolio's/Councils/Committees/Board. The ballfield committee will be a subcommittee under the Park Board once members can be found. Motion by Pinke, seconded by Fischer to approve the Council Portfolios as provided. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to approve the following appointments:

1. CDH-Vergas Fire Board Representative - Julie Bruhn
2. Planning Commission Representative and Appointments- Bruce Albright, Alex Ohman and Jim Courneya
3. Economic Development Authority and Housing Redevelopment Authority Representative and Member - Bruce Albright and Paul Sonnenberg
4. Event Center Advisory Board Members- Paul Pinke, Deb Jacoby and Jay Norby
5. Appoint City Attorney- Ramstad, Skoyles and Winters, P.A.
 - A. Annual Review of Contract
6. Designate Official Newspaper - Frazee-Vergas Forum
7. Designation of official place of advertisement of projects: www.cityofvergas.com
8. Designate Official Depositories: Vergas State Bank

Motion passed unanimously.

Vergas Arts Club

Carol Albright representing the Vergas Arts Club requested the city allow the Arts Club to apply for a \$3,000 grant from the Lake Region Arts Council for Pert Near Sandstone a blue-grass band based in the Twin Cities to perform in Vergas with June 8 or August 10 on their behalf. Albright will write the grant, requesting to use the City as the applicant and fiscal agent. Motion by Pinke, seconded by Fischer to allow Albright to write the grant with the City as the Applicant and fiscal agent. Voting yes: Pinke, Fischer and Haarstick. Voting No: None. Abstain: Albright. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

Personnel

Bruhn reviewed the personnel committee meeting held December 28, 2023 (minutes available at the Vergas City Office). The utility Superintendent and Clerk-Treasurer have both successfully met their criteria. Every 3 years if employees successfully meet the rating, they are eligible for a step increase. Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke to approve Lammers and DuFrane at step 9 of the pay table. Motion passed unanimously. Lammers question the 3% increase for 2024 pay table. Fischer stated this was approved last month with the pay table. Updated personnel policy was presented to Council with changes highlighted in yellow. Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick to approve the updated personnel policy. Motion passed unanimously. Haarstick questioned if the use of City Vehicles policy

could be changed to allow DuFrane to take city vehicles to EMS calls. There has been a record number of calls, and he would like to see the city allow city vehicles used for rescue calls. DuFrane can often not make it to the EMS garage before the truck leaves and would like to drive to calls without returning to the shop to get his personnel vehicle, as sometimes minutes count. Lammers stated this was put in the policy due to an insurance concern with bringing the snowplow to an accident. Lammers will check with City insurance company and Use of City Vehicle Policy will be added to the February agenda.

Staff Reports

Utilities Superintendent

DuFrane brought a new request form for the removal of the Christmas trees along Main Street. DuFrane stated they have time to fulfill the request. Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke to authorize the work request form to pick up Christmas trees. Motion passed unanimously.

Liquor Store Manager

Theisen reviewed the 2023 income and expenses for the Liquor Store. Theisen stated there is more space dedicated to wine than any other produce and he would like to see space for beer. Theisen provided 3 quotes for shelving to reduce the space for wine. All beer could then be on the floor, and it would eliminate the amount of handling the product. Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright to allow Theisen to purchase shelving units. Motion passed unanimously. Starting February 1, 2024 there will be THC products sold at the Municipal Liquor Store.

Treasurer Report

Lammers reviewed the 2023 income and expenses. Provided a graph representing spending in 2023. End of the year actual numbers show we did not receive the income we projected with the budget, and we exceeded our spending. The majority of overspending was in the streets department. In 2024, the council will be getting a monthly budget comparison instead of the quarterly budget comparison they have received in the past. The largest expense came from capital outlay or improvements.

Information & Announcements

Trainings:

1. MN Rural Water Conference – March 5-7, 2024 in St Cloud (DuFrane)
2. MN Clerks and Finance Officers – March 19 -22, 2024 in St Cloud (Lammers)
3. Clerks Advanced Academy- September 19-20, 2024 (Lammers)
4. LMC, Loss Control Workshop March 26 in Mahanomen or March 27 in Alexandria (DuFrane, Engbretson, Lammers)
5. League of MN Cities Annual Conference June 26-28, 2024 in Rochester (Mayor, Council & Lammers)
6. Municipal Beverage Association (MMBA) (Theisen) Arrowwood

Events:

Local Board of Review, April 10, 2023 Vergas Event Center Council Chambers, 1:00 pm (Mayor, Council and Lammers)

Marcia Huddleston informed the Council she attended the Otter Tail County Commissioners meeting and they have taken a stand on the train crossing. Huddleston stated she has made a formal complaint as the train does not break apart when sitting for more than 10 minutes. The commissioners have authorized Deputies to begin investigating this safety issue regarding the railroad.

Adjournment

The business for which the meeting was called having been completed, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Vergas Clerk-Treasurer
Julie Lammers, CMC