

# First Impression Report

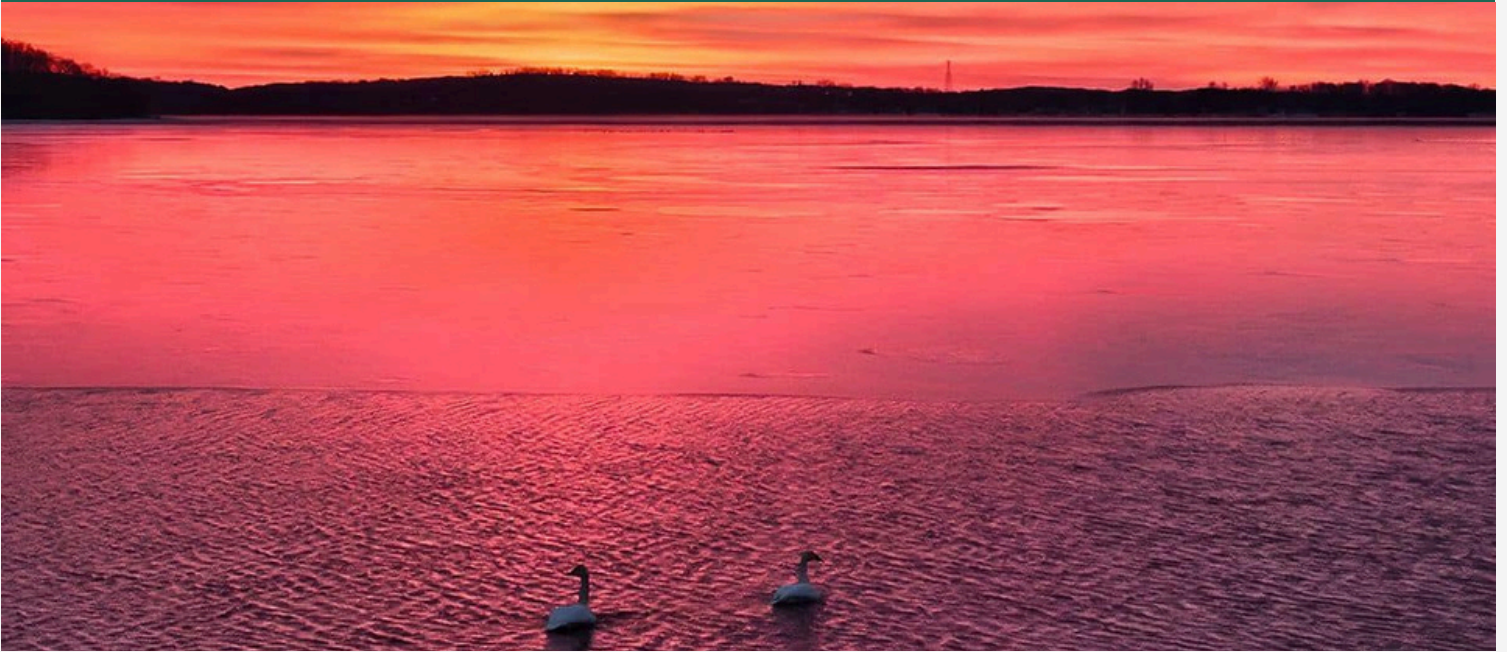
Generated for: Vergas



**CEDA**  
Community and Economic  
Development Associates



# Introduction



The purpose of this First Impression Report is to provide the City of Vergas located in Otter Tail County with information on assets and opportunities as observed by an objective, first-time visitor.

This report does not constitute a proposed work plan and may include items that the City has previously discussed or declined to move forward. The report should instead be viewed as first-hand observations and suggestions ascertained and conveyed by visitors through a community development lens.

This report was authored by Jordan Grossman. The date of the community visit was May 3rd, 2024.

**About CEDA:** CEDA was created in 1986 as a private, 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation then called the Southeastern Minnesota Development Corporation. In 2010, the agency became Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) as a result of increased interest and inquiries received from communities outside of the agency's original service area of southeast Minnesota. The name change reflects CEDA's commitment to provide services that fit the needs of any rural community. CEDA provides ongoing and/or project based economic/community development, grant writing, and planning services to rural communities and counties. Our team brings with it over 200 years of collective development experience.

# Community Demographics



The subsequent section of this report outlines demographic data on the City. This is relevant because it provides perspective as it relates to population density, resources, location, and more.

Beyond typically viewed data such as median household income and population, this analysis offers workforce information such as major industries, commute times and flow, primary jobs, etc. Because workforce augmentation and retention is a major part of community and economic development efforts, this information is useful and timely.

All data acquired for the creation of this section was collected from the US Census Bureau's Data and On the Map tools. Population numbers will be pulled from the State Demographer's office to offer a more current and accurate portrayal.



# Community Demographics

## Community Name



### Population

Population in City:  
348

Population in County:  
60,081

### Location

Vergas is located in Northern Otter Tail County, roughly 60 miles from Fargo, ND and a few hours from the Twin Cities.

### Transportation

Hwy 4, Hwy 17, and Hwy 228 all begin in Vergas and are connectors to other neighboring communities.

### Other

Median Household Income: \$68,125

Median Home Value: \$157,900

Median Gross Rent: \$625



# Workforce Analysis

## **Age Groups of Workers:**

29 and younger:	23.2%
30 - 54:	50.7%
55 and older:	26.1%



## **Workers by Earnings:**

\$15,000 and under:	28.3%
\$15,012 - \$39,996:	39.1%
\$39,996 - \$74,000+:	32.6%

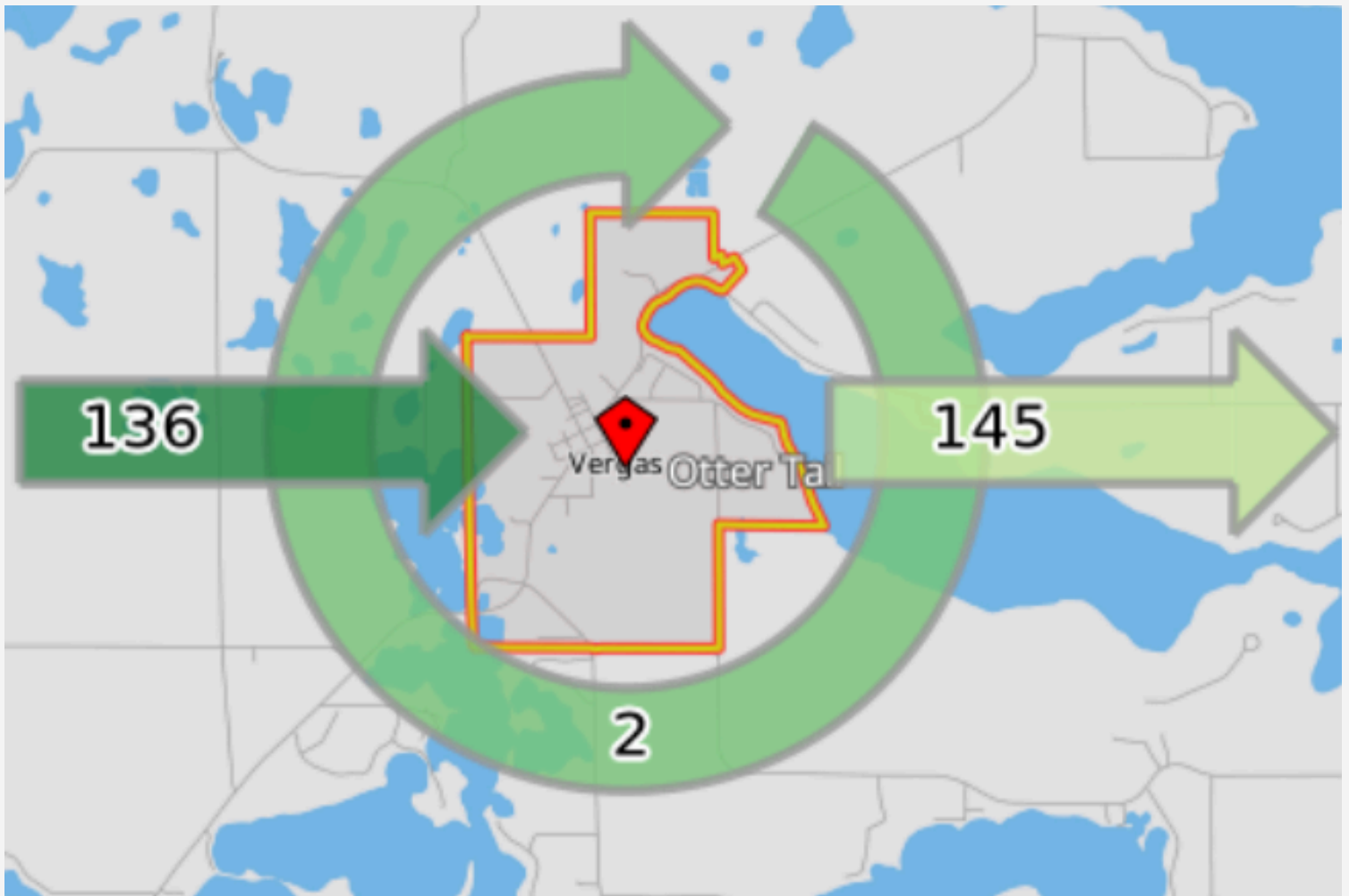
## **Workers by industry of employment**

Construction	26.8%
Manufacturing	0.0%
Wholesale trade	0.0%
Retail trade	25.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	0.8%
Health Carer and Social Assistance	0.0%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	6.5%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0.7%
Educational services, healthcare, and social assistance	0.0%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation and food services	29.7%
Public administration	7.2%
Other services	2.9%

# In-Flow/Out-Flow Analysis

The map below shows that the City of Vergas has jobs filled by non-residents, residents who leave the City for work and residents who live and work in the community.

As depicted below, approximately 136 people work in Vergas but commute in from other communities. ~2 people live and work in Vergas, and ~145 individuals live in Vergas but commute elsewhere for work.



# Online Presence

In today's society, many prospective and current residents and businesses are seeking information on communities through online channels. It is imperative that communities have a robust and easy to navigate website and social media presence to provide ease of access to information. Below, a summary of the City's online presence is articulated.

## **Website:**

The homepage of the Vergas City website is clean and organized. The slideshow photos at the top of the landing page are eye-catching. The drop-down tabs are full of information on community facilities and the Events tab is a great way to promote tourism. Having a clickable link to the Comprehensive Plan on the main page is a great way to engage community members who visit the website. Consider adding City Hall hours and a phone number on the landing page. The census data on the main page should be updated with icons/photos, currently an error photo appears. Navigation to different departments and categories is easy. It appears this website is frequently updated. Consider updating photos to highlight new community assets like the Mercantile building.

## **Location of Information:**

The home page displays several tabs for the various departments and categories. The tabs lead you to different pages with the correct information. Consider a link to the new City online bill payment system under the City tab. The website offers quick links to learn more about the City, the EDA vacant lots, and the Event Center. The EDA page has up to date information on available lots and contact information for viewers to learn more. In addition, there is a zoom link to City meetings which encourages community engagement. By the amount of information posted to the City website, it is apparent the community offers a lively event schedule, business development, and housing development opportunities.

## **Functionality and Accessibility:**

Most of the tabs and links throughout the website are functional and lead you to the correct page. City Hall hours should be added to the top of the website. Overall, the City website is well done.

The City may want to explore having an audit of the site completed to ensure ADA accessibility compliance for colors, images/alt. text/ etc. Website accessibility audits ensure the removal of any barriers and assist in creating digital inclusion for all.

# Online Presence

## Social Media:

Facebook is a great beginning platform for social media content in your region. Consider adding different social media platforms to increase your digital presence and grow the market reading your digital content. Continue to promote community events and updates. Adding a digital series on Vergas Fun Facts over the winter months is a way to consistently have content to post so your page stays relevant.

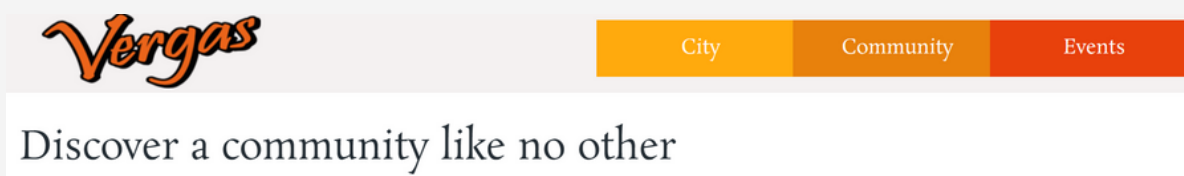
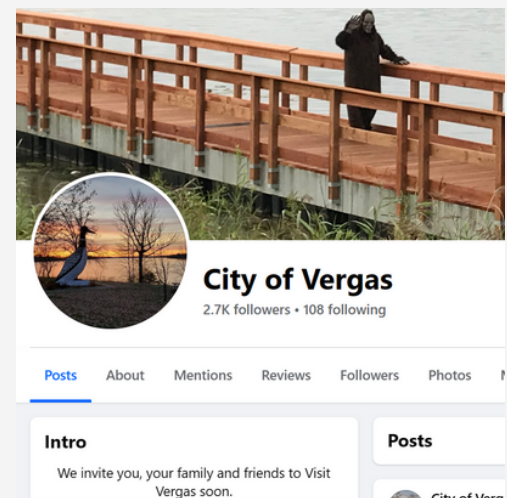
**Facebook:** The Vergas Facebook page has over 2.7K followers which is great for a community of 348 residents. Information on weather updates, council meetings, events, and lost animals is the most frequent content posted. Consider partnering with the Vergas Community Club on post creation and sharing that organizations posts to increase tourism, especially during the lively summer months.

**Instagram:** We were unable to locate a City account.

**Twitter:** We were unable to locate a City account.

**LinkedIn:** We were unable to locate a City account.

**Other:** We were unable to locate a City account.



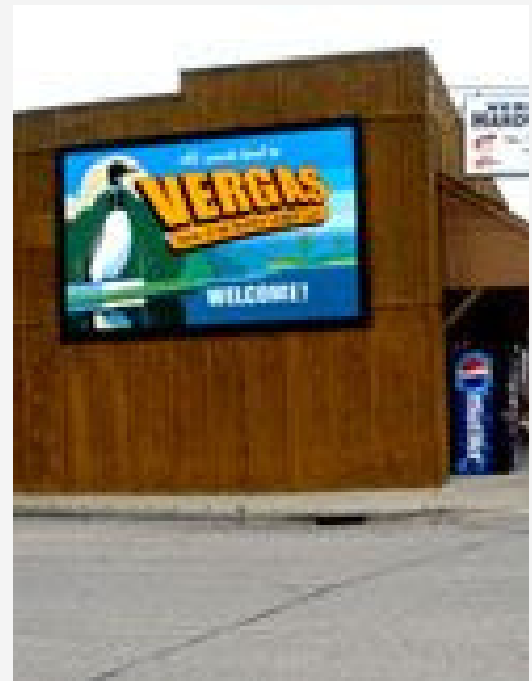


# Signage

## Signage:

Signage is important in community development. It can not only welcome people into/out of your City, but also signage can aid in directing people to some of the most prominent (or tucked away!) assets, amenities, and features your community has to offer. Signage encourages a welcoming and uncomplicated experience.

Vergas has ample signage by the entrances into town. The Event Center is easy to locate with large signage as well as City government buildings. Consider reaching out to search engines like Google to optimize your City for top of the page results when searching for City Hall or the Event Center online.



# Housing

## Housing/Residential:

In order to grow population and attract businesses of varying types, communities need to have ample housing stock to suit the needs of their residents. This section analyzes the observations surrounding housing in the City

According to the 2020 Housing Study, the median age of housing in Vergas is 64 years old. While this is not atypical in many rural communities, there may be some programs worth exploring to assist residents with rehabilitation or energy efficiency upgrades. When researching online, the CEDA team found four homes listed for sale and one on auction. The team could not find any rental units available or other multi-family housing listed online. More multi-family and workforce housing options may be beneficial to continue to attract new residents to the community.



# Education

## Education:

Many individuals and families are concerned with the quality and accessibility of education when making decisions about where to live and work. As such, it is important to have a foundational understanding of perceptions about the City's educational options.

### **School District(s):**

The Frazee Vergas Public Schools are located in Frazee, MN; approximately 8 miles away from Vergas in Becker County. The school district contracts with Anderson Bus Company of Frazee, Inc. to provide rides to children ages 5-18 to and from school in the Vergas community. The school district has 866 students enrolled in 2024. The student teacher ratio is 13:1 providing individualized attention to each student and an enhanced classroom environment. The graduation rate for students attending this school is 75%-79% which is close to the MN State average of 84%.

In addition, the Pelican Rapids Public Schools and the Perham Public Schools offer open enrollment to children in Vergas and provide bus transportation to and from school.

### **Childcare:**

Jesus' Little Lambs Preschool is located in the City and provides a pre-kindergarten environment to children ages 4 and 5. A brief internet search shows one licensed in-home daycare in the City who is able to accommodate up to ten children. Consider assessing the community need for more childcare options as you plan to grow your tax base.



**FRAZEE-VERGAS**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS | ISD #23



# Services

## Services:

Based on a limited visit and cursory online research, community members may be evaluating the services that your City offers to residents. As such, this section is included.

### **Emergency Services (including Fire/Police):**

The fire department has a nicely upkept building with great signage in town. There is not a local police department in Vergas. Law enforcement services are provided by the Otter Tail Sheriff's Office on a call-in basis.

### **Healthcare:**

The community does not have a healthcare facility within City limits. Clinics & Hospitals serving the residents are located in Detroit Lakes, Wadena, and Fergus Falls.

### **Utilities:**

Otter Tail Power Company provides electric utilities to the City, Great Plains Natural Gas company provides natural gas services to parcels in the City and Arvig, Inc provides phone and internet services. In addition, all major cell phone carriers have services for phone and internet in the City of Vergas.



# Downtown

## Downtown:

In small communities, the downtown corridor is an important facet of the City. CEDA staff worked to understand the downtown structure and make up to offer observations and suggestions.

**Retail/Commercial:** There's a mix of hospitality and retail businesses in City limits. Some facades appear to be dated while others are more modern and updated. The City could look into implementing a facade improvement program to assist property owners and catalyze bigger improvement projects. There are some interesting businesses in the community that may capture visitor attention. The local corner restaurant and bar, Billys, is an exciting fixture that could be an intriguing draw and source of entertainment. The newly built Mercantile building houses a modern top of the line fitness center, bakery, and grocery store. This multi-use building is located on prime real estate for people driving by to consider stopping in town. The facade of this building is up to date and can be used as a suggested guideline for other businesses looking to update their exterior. The City website has a page for all of the businesses in town. It is very helpful to have the directory in alphabetical order and have hyperlinks to the businesses Facebook page or website. If it isn't being done already the City could also produce a printable business listing/directory to promote shopping and dining for visitors that are less tech savvy.

**Building Aesthetics:** Overall, the downtown appears to be a source of pride for the community with the well-kept flowerbeds and clean sidewalks and streets. A handful of the commercial structures may benefit from facade updates and improvements. Signs for businesses could also use refreshing or updating. The City could look into the creation and promotion of facade improvement programming.

**Parking:** The City could invest in signage for current public parking lots and look into funding sources for investing in more public parking. The City has limited parking in the Commercial zone of town. The City should consider a parking survey or talk with businesses to ensure that availability of spaces exists throughout various periods of the day.



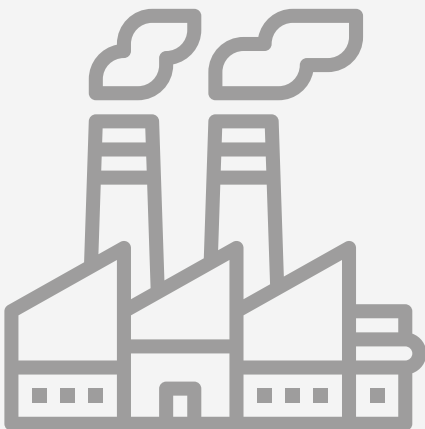
# Industrial

## **Industrial Development:**

This section seeks to describe the industrial development in the City. CEDA team members drove through the community and did some online research to determine types and levels of industrial businesses operating in the community.

**Land/Building Availability:** Vergas has a portion of land designated for Industrial Development. The city should look into capacity to house a new industrial business or expanding the designation to surrounding land to create an industrial park. Franklin Fence & Company, Ford Equipment Company and Kading Farm & Home Center could be relocated to Industrial zoned land to start an Industrial Park and open up expansion opportunities where the businesses currently sit.

**Business Retention and Expansion:** The City should assess the feasibility of investing industrial expansion by analyzing the positioning of existing industrial businesses outside city limits in relation to Highway 17 and the designated industrial land within the City limits.





# Recreation

## Recreation:

Cities of all sizes are striving to offer entertainment and recreational opportunities to their residents and visitors. This report outlines the perceived recreational opportunities and suggestions for continued growth of the amenities.

**City Parks:** There are multiple parks that a first- time visitor notices, with Long Lake Beach Park being the largest in size and amenities offered. The City Park successfully captures attention by using both open space, playground facilities, and the beach to draw visitors in. This park features one shelter, playground equipment, a fishing pier, public bathrooms, and a sandy beach. The City appears to do a good job of keeping the parks well-maintained and clean. The park is inviting to families and tourists.

Other City parks are Peterson Park, Lion's Park, and the Ball Fields. They are easily accessible by foot or bike and have similar amenities. The Ball Fields Park has new pickleball courts that attract summertime campers to town for a fun activity.

**Trails:** The Vergas Long Lake Trail is approximately two miles long and features a beautiful boardwalk over Long Lake. This trail connects Long Lake Beach to the City. The City providing dog waste bag stations along the trail and trash receptacles is a great way to promote keeping the trail clean and attractive.

**Events:** The Vergas Community Club has a large online presence and a full list of activities in the City in the summer and throughout the entire year. Through an online search, this organization appears to do a great job marketing community events and shining a positive light on Vergas. Considering a partnership with the Community Club and sharing social media posts can increase the City's digital following.



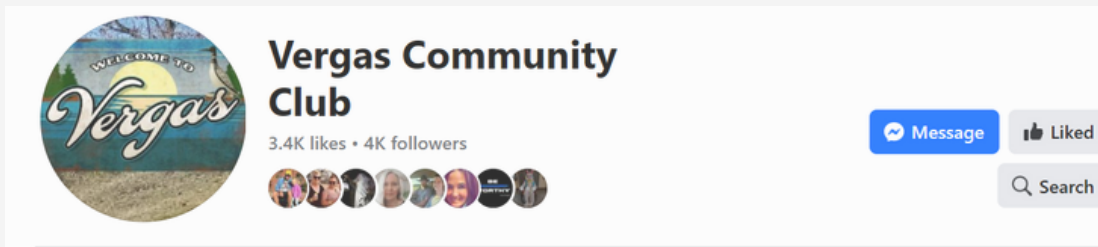
# Community Promotion

## Community Promotion:

Whether they're looking to attract residential growth, industrial companies, or more commercial businesses, cities need to promote themselves effectively. This section of the First Impression Report outlines some general perceptions of the City's marketing efforts (internal and external).

**Internal Marketing:** The City website and Facebook page could be viewed as internal marketing in addition to monthly newsletters. Residents and city officials would be the main visitors on the site, and residents are able to pay their bills online through the city utility payment feature. Consider linking this payment option onto the City website. The City may also want to explore the opportunity to utilize various social media outlets to distribute information. A community survey could be useful to understand the types of amenities that citizens currently enjoy and would like to see created. The City could explore monthly “fun facts” segments where they could educate citizens and viewers about various pieces of Vergas history or up and coming news.

**External Marketing:** From a first-time visitors perspective, the City’s main external marketing channel is the Community Club’s Facebook page. The Community Club mostly promotes events, fundraising opportunities, and important City news. We are unable to gauge the analytics on the reach of this marketing without further research.



# Conclusion

Some highlights from this report include:

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## Online Presence

- Partner with the local community club to grow your digital audience
- Add online payment information to the City website

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## Downtown

- Appears well kept, flower beds downtown are a great addition to beautification efforts
- Ask residents what they think the town needs

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## Recreation

- Advertise the boardwalk on Long Lake Trail to draw visitors
- Explore funding opportunities to expand current parks capacities

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## Conclusion:

The City of Vergas located in Otter Tail County has many amenities and resources. It has significant opportunity for potential projects that could benefit residents and businesses. With some attention given to the zoning map and housing development opportunities, it could be an even more appealing location for a new business or home for new residents. The City parks are incredible assets that the City can use for marketing content.



# Contact Us:

Our team is happy to discuss this report in depth or to talk about potential next steps.

Our contact information is provided below, so please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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