

Vergas Comprehensive Plan 2024 Progress Review

Land Use & Built Form

Goal: Capitalize on in-fill opportunities and direct growth to new areas where infrastructure is planned to be cost-effective and sustainable

Strategies:

- When considering expansion options, prioritize expansion that follows a set of guidance developed through a growth and management plan.
- Investigate annexing shorelines across bodies of water when landowners are favorable to the request

Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Develop tiered system for expansion based on Vergas water & sewer capacity, EMS services and other public services & facilities.	Water/Sewer Committee is developing a tiered system for expansion based on capacity.	
Identify possible annexation areas and contact owners.	Planning Commission looking at W. Lake Street	Zoning map identified potential expansion.
Pay close attention to and abide by shoreline regulations governed by the state.	Planning Commission changed permit process and updating shoreline management ordinance	Updated Shoreline Management ordinance. Discussing Shoreline Management inspection services with Otter Tail County.
Participate in preserving the health of lakes and surrounding wildlife.	Storm water runoff being discussed	Widseth Engineering evaluated water drainage issues in downtown main street alley ways. Vergas was the recipient of the Dave Neiman Source Water Protection Award. Updated Local Government Unit Wetland Conservation Act information. Working with East Otter Tail Soil & Water Conservation and State of MN (BWSR).

Goal: Land use and build form decisions support and celebrate the existing character of the town

Strategies:

- Encourage land uses that strengthen Vergas' reputation as a family-friendly, safe place with a small-town charm.
 - Limit land uses that allow for big box stores, chains, large processing plants or other developments that have short-term gains and long-term losses of community character and environmental protection.
 - Ensure that any land use involving light industrial development has a plan for maintenance and accessibility.
- Encourage or offer tax incentives for parking for new construction.

Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
EDA/HRA develop incentives to encourage uses identified above.		
Planning and Zoning develop policies regarding use identified above	Planning Commission updating zoning map with review and modification of city ordinances.	Zoning map updated and approved. In the process of conducting codification of all ordinances.
EDA identify areas appropriate for light industrial development.		

Explore above and underground parking.	Parking lot identified and planned for OTC building site.	Plan to pave parking lot and alley ways. Informational meeting was held with those affected. Call for bids to go out in spring.
Housing		
Goal: Identify affordable housing lots that can be developed with the next 5 years		
Strategies:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop partnerships with Otter Tail Co. to share county-level resources with local developers and future residents via existing incentives and initiatives. 		
Conduct and inventory and promote lots available.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
EDA develop a fact sheet regarding available assistance programs		Pamphlet for Sunny Oaks Properties with County/City incentives.
Utilize city website by adding housing resources comparable to neighboring cities		
Transportation		
Goal: Make Vergas accessible for all modes of transportation and for people of all abilities		
Strategies:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key places across the city that can improve handicap accessibility. Communicate and market existing transportation services. Identify additional locations for downtown parking. Construct handicapped parking spots and sidewalks along Co Rd 4. Explore advantages and disadvantages of rerouting Co Rd 4 through downtown to reduce thorough traffic on Main Street. Explore options for reducing stopped trains and subsequent stopped traffic. 		
Promote programs for ridesharing networks and services		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Conduct an ADA audit or other type of evaluation to identify key areas for improvement across the city.		Cross walks placed at intersections on Main Street.
Create short reference guide for residents and visitors describing local and regional transportation options.		
Work with Planning Commission to determine if vacant or undeveloped property could serve as space for new parking lots, and potential diagonal parking.	Parking lot planned for OTC building property that was acquired by the city.	Parking lot area available with plan to asphalt in spring.
Contact Canada Pacific to explore moving the exchange.		Working with County, State and CP Railroad on notification process to identify and track delays and issues. Communications with CP broadly advertised. Ultimate goal is to move track switch.
Streets, sidewalks and yard waste committee review possibilities of collaboration with OTC Highway Department.		Working with OTC Highway Dept. on identifying handicap parking locations and signage for downtown. Working with OTC Highway Department on main street sidewalks with future Hwy 4 road work.
Goal: Increase connectivity between Vergas and regional trails		
Strategies:		

Consult entities, like MN DOT, DNR, WCI and Partnership 4 Health, about pursuing grants for planning and infrastructure for a trail connection.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Work with OTC to pursue grant funding to connect the Heartland Trail along Co.Rd 4.	Feasibility study conducted for Heartland and Heart of Lake trails. Approved by Council and plan for Heart of Lakes trail connected with Co. Hwy 35 project	Plan to connect with future Hwy 35 road work
Add multi-use path to the update of the 2019 Capital Improvement Plan to ensure that it is included in future city budget.		
Business & Economic Development		
Goal: Maintain the small business atmosphere		
Strategies:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertise local businesses regionally 		
Review and update city laws and ordinances that support small business owners		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Work with neighboring Chambers of Commerce to advertise and access resources	OTC Lakes Country Magazine	
Collaborate with the Community Club to identify opportunities and resources to market regionally.	Facebook on ongoing bases features a Vergas business, and hosts events to promote businesses, i.e new event Shops n' Hops. Vergas advertising and featured highlights in OTC Lakes Country Magazine. Established a full Vergas/lakes billboard that features map of area and Vergas hosted Events. Also have a brochure with Vergas events that was distributed and in stores for ongoing access and have full size posters in the businesses that shows 2023 events. Weekly TV3 Vergas show that highlights Vergas	Ongoing. Vergas Community Club is active in regional marketing. Has Facebook site with high volume access.
Submit stories, ads, and updates to surrounding local papers.	Frazee Forum has featured a number of Vergas stories, i.e. Maple Syrup Fest, Art Camp, Vergas Art Program. Ads in Frazee forum on an ongoing basis.	Ongoing. Vergas events routinely featured in Frazee Forum and DL paper.
Invest in enhancing the City website		
Preserve existing protections within city laws and ordinances		
Explore state and federal incentives for small businesses, especially those making positive impact in nearby communities.		EDA Grant program with OTC Community Fund and CEDA money. Business Facade Improvement Program being offered.
Goal: Invest in Human Capital		
Strategies:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in local childcare options Create opportunities for socializing, connecting, creative placemaking year-round. 		

Provide opportunities for retirees to utilize their knowledge and experience and increase social connection.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Connect with OTC Early Childhood Coordinator to identify needs and resources.		Meetings and discussions are being held with OTC and WCIF regarding childcare needs in Vergas.
Improve marketing of existing community activities, from small socializing to large events.	As above, Facebook, OTC Lakes Country magazine, event brochure and billboard	Ongoing.
Identify gaps in existing community programming and recruit volunteers to host one and/or recurring events.		
Explore development of spaces for families to recreate and your specific activities.	Detroit Lakes water ski club practicing Long Lake city park and offering ski shows	Improvements made to Vergas Event Center and future improvement plan for Long Lake Park. Community events are family oriented and hosted at various sites throughout the community as event center, long lake park, ballpark and main street
Identify and invite volunteers to join planning and implementation projects.	Ongoing. Is part of event planning to reach out for volunteers.	Ongoing process with city events.
Goal: Prioritize business development that provides daytime and evening activities for residents		
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create more opportunities to recruit local businesses, especially where gaps in existing services Increase awareness of state and regional resources for small business owners and entrepreneurs.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Work in partnership with Vergas EDA to integrate public feedback into business development and expansion strategies		EDA is working with CEDA for a business retention and expansion plan. First impressions report and survey with businesses regarding their needs. Local Business Facade Improvement Grant established.
Host a business and entrepreneurship fair in partnership with OTC with targeted outreach based on survey results and public input.		Digital Marketing workshop held for businesses.
Leverage partnerships with existing programs; i.e WCI, MN DEED, SCORE business mentors, Vergas Community Club, West Central Small Business Development Center, Women's Ventures, OTC Small Business Coaching.		Established partnerships related to receiving energy grant. Partnerships with CERTS, ESMC, RSDP, University of Minnesota Architecture program, Green Cities, and WCIF in pursuing Municipal Building energy efficiencies and integration of clean energy. Working with OTC Lake Shore Management on lake shore inspection services. Work with CEDA Rural Capacity Program.
Goal: Develop and expand job opportunities		
Strategies: <p>Maintain and increase number of visitors</p> <p>Pursue opportunities for light manufacturing</p> <p>Support digital entrepreneurs and remote workers</p>		

Action item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Advertise business and recreational opportunities and events regionally.	As noted previously; Facebook, OTC Lakes Country magazine, TV3 Vergas show.	Ongoing. Continue to utilize a number of resources in advertising.
Pursue and invest in trail development.	Feasibility study conducted to examine Vergas connection to Heartland and Heart of Lake Trails	City Council approved feasibility study. Heart of Lakes Trail to align with OTC Hwy 35 project.
Cultivate more year-round attractions and events.	Year round event calendar, 9 of 12 months community event. This does not include events by other businesses and groups.	Vergas Community Club has an established calendar of events throughout the year. Other organizations also host events. I.e. Lions club and churches and local businesses.
Identify land available for development and purchase.	City purchase of 8 lots from OTC foreclosed land (Eva/Diane street)-Sunny Oaks. OTC to build 4 Senior living housing units in the development.	Three new housing developments and EDA are active in the sale of Sunny Oaks lots.
Offer the Event Center as coworking space by appointment.	Event Center improvements and updates being made to make the space more visibly appealing and marketable. Hired part time Event Center Coordinator to promote event center space.	Updating kitchen at VEC. Lions 170 hours of volunteer hours at the Event Center. Vergas Community Club provided over \$20,000 in donations.
Maintain and develop broadband capabilities.		Maintain internet access inside and outside VEC for community use.
Connect with neighboring communities to participate in county-wide networking opportunities. (host pre-existing groups for a meeting).	Regional Mayor meetings , Regional City Clerk meetings	Continue active participation with the Region 4 Mayors Network, Regional City Clerk meetings and Otter Tail Lakes Country Association. League of Minnesota Cities hosted a regional meeting in Vergas and OTC Commissioners hosted an open house in Vergas.

Public Services and Facilities

Goal: Maintain adequate public facilities and services to meet the health, safety, education, and leisure needs of all Vergas residents.

Strategies:

- Prioritize infrastructure investment based on existing facilities with deficiencies first, and retrofitting of facilities second, and future facility needs third.
 - Engage in strategic partnerships to ensure that Vergas is identified as a community for investment in fiber optic cable to increase broadband access.
- Conduct a needs assessment to understand more about the barriers and opportunities to improve resident access to medical facilities. (transportation, awareness).

Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Encourage various committees to complete prioritization exercise.	Water Sewer Committee is working on prioritizing needs by making a project list.	Revised community zoning map approved.
Explore expanded services, particularly MN DEED Border-to-Border Broadband opportunity.		
Collaborate with EDA/HRA to oversee a needs assessment.		EDA business survey conducted regarding their needs.
Goal: Ensure highest quality standards and services for public safety given Vergas' existing resources and staff capacity.		
Strategies:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure safety of navigation throughout city streets and sidewalks. <p>Make Long Lake Park a desirable location for recreation year-round.</p>		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, update, and publicize the city's planning and zoning maps to accurately indicate which city sidewalks are to be maintained by the city vs residents. 	Planning Commission updating zoning maps	Revised community zoning map approved. Clarification provided on sidewalks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a parking study. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the possibility of a MNDOT Complete Streets project for Vergas. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renovate and upgrade public restroom facilities at Long Lake park. 	Park improvement proposal developed, park board working with NDSU, which includes improved facilities. Painting and lighting improvements to restroom. Loon Art for the park fundraising event to support park improvements. Community feedback on plan at the Loon Art for the Park event.	Long Lake Park improvement plan devised and reviewed with the community. Includes new bathhouse. Funding raising in process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore opportunities to work with rental company for non-motorized watercraft. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider snowshoe rental companies. 		
Goal: Ensure that services and facilities allow residents and visitors of 55 years or older to age in place.		
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure safety of navigation through city streets and sidewalks. Work to develop a full spectrum of transitions in senior housing needs, from accessibility options to access of services and skilled nursing.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Develop handicap parking spots		Streets Committee is working with OTC to identify handicap parking locations and signage.
Work with ED/HRS to conduct a needs assessment and feasibility study for expanded senior housing options.	Have 2021 Comprehensive plan, 2019 EDA/HRA Housing study and working with OTC Housing & Redevelopment	
Parks & Open Spaces		
Goal: Support Community Art and arts programming		
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the number of displays of interactive art around town, in parks, and open spaces. Increase community education arts programming.		
Action Items	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a directory of local artists. 	Studio Crawl is planned for Sept 23, 2023 and this is step in the direction to create a directory. VCC has local artist creating loon pieces placed around Vergas.	Active Vergas Arts Club and has the annual Studio Crawl which identifies local artists. Club has been applying for grants and received funding for Pert Near Sandstone band at Shops and Hops event.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to offering summer youth art camp. 	Continues to grow. In 2023 had 126 youth art Youth pottery classes available	Continue to have youth art camp each year in June. Have held since 2020. Youth play production and Viking Library production offering.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a listing of events on city website. 	On City website, VCC Facebook, and posters Established a Vergas Arts Program, aligned with VCC. Hosted 3 performing arts (Chmielewski band, Tony DeBlois, and Siama Story Teller).	A VCC website was established that city website has links to. City website continues to provide a listing of community events.
Goal: Update public facilities at Long Lake Park		
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue working with NDSU to develop concept designs for Long Lake park. Communicate with county and regional stakeholders in parks and recreation the desire to pursue state and federal funding.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Follow guidelines and budget in Capital Improvement plan for restroom facilities specifications and budget.		Park improvement plan priority is a new bathhouse at the beach.
Park Board present ideas to Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council for implementation.	Park Board presented park improvement plan	Long Lake Park improvement plan broken down master plan into phases. Fundraising in process.
Goal: Leverage existing amenities to create a culture that celebrates physical activity and community-based sports that are complementary to school sports schedules.		
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for sports and physical education. Begin offering adult leagues for baseball, softball etc.. Explore opportunities for additional recreational space development.		
Action Item	2023 Progress	2024 Progress
Example; Offer lessons for pickleball, classes for local fitness trainers, dance classes.	Lakes Fit offers classes and pickleball has classes for beginners	Pickle ball Association has offered lessons and has held events as women's night & during Looney Days.
Coordinate community education for implementation.	Continue to collaborate with Frazee community education for Vergas swimming lessons	Continue to collaborate with Frazee community education for Vergas swimming lessons and summer youth play.
Conduct a feasibility study for soccer fields and/or frisbee golf.		
Planning and Zoning identify sustainable areas.		