

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, September 16, 2025**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 pm, on Tuesday, September 16, 2025 at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid regular public hearing.

2025	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dwight Lundgren, Mayor	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P ^{7/2}					
Julie Bruhn, Mayor								P	P			
Bruce Albright, Member	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/A/A	P	P			
Paul Pinke, Member	P/P	P	P/P	A	P	A	P/P/P	P	P			
Dean Haarstick, Member	P/A	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P			
James Stenger, Member	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P			
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P			
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P/A	P	P/A	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P			
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P/A	P	P/P	P	P	P	A/P/A	A	A			

P: Present. A: Absent

Also present: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum, Engineer Blaine Green; and Citizens, Attorney Karen Skoyles, Marcia Huddleston, Shannon Charpentier, Ann Richards, and Cal Miller.

Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Citizens' Concerns

Lammers reported receiving citizen feedback regarding the lack of handicap parking on Main Street. A gentleman had visited the city office that afternoon and expressed concern about the difficulty of shopping or doing anything in Vergas without handicap parking spots available on Main Street.

Albright explained that the Street Committee had previously examined various locations for handicap parking. The committee initially considered placing a spot near the bank and Loon's Nest, but the incline on the hill made it unsuitable for handicapped individuals. Another option near the hardware store on Main Street was evaluated but would have taken up approximately three parking spaces due to proximity to a fire hydrant.

Stenger noted there was already a handicap spot, but it had been placed on the wrong side of the street rather than on Main Street as intended.

Albright further noted that a brand-new parking lot was coming, but it would be a distance from most businesses. He emphasized that the town wants to be accessible for people with handicap permits but faces challenges due to the street layout and inclines.

Marcia Huddleston mentioned that she had spoken with county commissioners about crosswalks, noting they would be installed this fall between the hardware store and Wildfire Fur by the state's contractor.

The Council requested that the Street Committee re-examine the issue to find a better location for handicap parking on Main Street.

Huddleston also addressed the council regarding the impact of city ordinances on teen activities, specifically mentioning restrictions on derby cars. She noted September is Suicide Prevention Month and expressed concern

that city rules might prevent teens from pursuing certain interests like derby cars, suggesting this could negatively impact teen happiness in Vergas.

Albright explained that planning and zoning rules require vehicles parked in yards to be licensed and operable, with exceptions for vehicles on trailers. He acknowledged the importance of providing activities for teens but emphasized the need to balance this with maintaining the town's appearance. He encouraged residents to bring specific situations to the planning and zoning committee for consideration.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

Mayor Bruhn requested adding a CERTS (Clean Energy Resource Teams) grant as item #10 on the agenda.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Albright to approve the agenda with the addition of the CERTS grant as item #10. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Mayor Bruhn requested that the Liquor Store Committee report be pulled from the consent agenda for separate discussion due to concerns raised at the previous meeting about revenue and income loss.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Haarstick, to approve the consent agenda with the Liquor Store Committee report addressed separately. The motion passed unanimously.

Stenger reported on the Liquor Store Committee meeting. He stated that sales numbers were down according to both the store manager and distributors. The committee identified several concerns, including the lack of proper signage for the liquor store following its remodel. Despite repeated requests, no action had been taken on adding signage, which may be contributing to decreased visibility and sales.

Stenger noted that he had observed patrons at Billy's (where he bartends) asking where the liquor store was located, suggesting the lack of signage was impacting awareness. The committee asked the store manager to provide more inventory information, and he would be presenting his quarterly report at the next council meeting.

Mayor Bruhn added that the liquor store was projected to be unable to transfer the planned \$30,000 to the general fund this year, which would impact the city's budget. She noted this would primarily affect improvements but assured that the city had adequate reserves.

2025 Parking Lot and Storm Drain Project

Engineer Blaine Green provided an update on the parking lot project via Zoom. He reported that significant progress had been made with much of the storm drainage system installed. An additional inlet structure was being added for the hardware store to better manage roof drainage.

Green noted that some soft spots were discovered after removing the pavement, particularly in the area near the former county garage parking lot. This necessitated bringing in sand to properly rebuild the subgrade. The estimated cost for this correction was between \$6,000-\$8,000, which would use most of the project's contingency funds. Green and Lammers had approved this expense to ensure the parking lot would be properly built to last.

The project timeline included finishing the remaining storm drainage work, with concrete pouring likely being delayed until the following week due to anticipated rain. Green estimated concrete work would begin early the next week, with paving to follow late next week or the week after.

Lammers reported that during construction, they discovered an additional curb stop and water service to the building at 123 Main St (behind the city office) that had been in place since 1993 but had never been billed. She explained that legally they could back charge for up to three years of base water rates.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to collect three years of water base charges for the property. The motion passed unanimously.

Further discussion ensued about potential water and sewer connections for the 123 Main St property, with concerns about cutting into the new asphalt for future connections. Mayor Bruhn asked Dufrane to speak with property owner regarding water and sewer connection.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Albright, to approve capping the curb stop at the 123 Main St property if requested. The motion passed unanimously.

Siren

Mayor Bruhn presented the results of a survey regarding the city's warning siren. The survey received 239 responses, with 116 respondents indicating they lived within city limits or owned property in Vergas.

Survey findings included:

- Most respondents (97%) knew the siren was used to indicate time
- 45% of city residents relied on the siren daily, while 55.1% used it rarely or never
- 72% of city residents thought the current schedule was appropriate
- 67% of city residents preferred keeping the schedule as is, while 32% wanted fewer sirens
- 74% of city residents reported the siren did not disrupt their daily activities

Mayor Bruhn highlighted comments from the survey regarding the siren's impact on children, including concerns about it waking children at 7 AM, during naps, and deterring them from visiting the park. Some respondents mentioned the loudness of the siren, and one comment suggested people might move out of Vergas because of it.

Stenger noted some issues with the survey methodology, pointing out that the question about property ownership excluded renters, including long-term residents like those in assisted living. He also emphasized that among 18 comments from city residents, only one or two mentioned each concern cited by the Mayor.

Albright asked if the volume of the siren could be adjusted. Lammers explained that the county controls the siren for emergency purposes and maintains a required decibel level. She noted that the timing system is an older dial mechanism that is difficult to program for different schedules.

Haarstick spoke about the siren being part of the town's heritage and noted that many other sounds in town, such as train whistles and vehicle noise, were also loud.

Pinke explained that while the fire department primarily uses pagers and cell phones for notifications, the siren is still occasionally needed for emergency calls if not enough personnel respond.

Motion by Haarstick, seconded by Pinke, to maintain the current siren schedule. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

Park Advisory Board

Pickleball

Shannon Charpentier presented plans for improvements to the pickleball courts, including adding a concrete pad with an apron around the court and installing a sail shade structure. She reported that all necessary funds had been

raised through donations, with Franklin France, Vergas Hardware, and Helping Construction of Moorhead as the vendors for the project.

Charpentier explained that while coordinating with Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane, they identified an opportunity to add concrete in front of the bathrooms at the park. This additional work would cost \$2,310, which could be covered by funds from the baseball committee and community club. Due to timing constraints, she requested the city consider using park improvement funds for this portion.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the pickleball court improvements and bathroom area concrete as presented, with the bathroom concrete expense to be shared through parks budget or baseball committee funds made. The motion passed unanimously.

Event Center

Resignation

Stenger reported that Deb Jacoby had resigned from both the Lions Board and the Event Center Board, as she was the Lions representative on the Event Center Board.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to accept Deb Jacoby's resignation. The motion passed unanimously.

Projector

Stenger reported that the Event Center Committee had investigated options for replacing the 11-year-old projector, which was not bright enough to be used with lights on. The committee recommended purchasing a new projector for \$1,400 that would better meet the needs of renters. Stenger explained that while they could spend more, this model would be adequate for the building's usage patterns and would be tested before final installation.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke to approve the purchase of a new projector for the Event Center for \$1,400. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Utilities Superintendent Report

DuFrane reported that he had submitted his written report and mentioned he would be scheduling hydrant flushing before the next council meeting. He also noted that during the parking lot project, they had replaced four curb stops: at the liquor store, city office, 123 Main St property, and one by the post office building that wasn't on any maps.

Council members inquired about the parking lot project progress, and DuFrane confirmed that the contractors were doing excellent work. He also discussed potential water and sewer connections for the 123 Main St building, noting that adding sewer would be particularly expensive due to infrastructure complications in the alley.

Clerk-Treasurer Report

Lammers reported that Corporate Technologies had informed her that Windows 10 would no longer be supported after October 14, and her 7.5-year-old computer would need to be replaced. She was in the process of obtaining quotes for a new computer and would present them at the next meeting.

Lammers reviewed posting council meeting recordings on YouTube with comments disabled, similar to practices in Detroit Lakes and Pelican Rapids. She recommended a policy allowing up to five days for the deputy clerk to upload the recordings.

Motion by Albright seconded by Pinke to begin posting council meeting recordings on YouTube with comments disabled and allowing up to five days for upload. Voting yes: Pinke, Stenger and Albright. Voting no: Haarstick. Motion carried.

Lammers provided an update on the solar project, stating that she had signed the necessary paperwork and would be signing grant papers on Monday. Once completed, West Central Initiative would transfer the funds, allowing the equipment ordering process to continue. Installation was expected in October.

2026 General Fund Budget

Mayor Bruhn presented the preliminary 2026 budget, noting a 4.2% property tax increase and an overall budget increase of 3.52%. Mayor Bruhn and Stenger had served on the budget committee and had thoroughly reviewed each line item.

Lammers noted several budget challenges, including a 14% increase in insurance costs and the new state-mandated Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) program starting January 1, 2026. The budget also included funds for necessary equipment replacements, including a lawnmower and a garage door at the shop.

Mayor Bruhn explained that the preliminary budget, once approved, could be reduced but not increased before final adoption in December.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Albright, to approve the preliminary 2026 budget. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Bruhn discussed a request from West Central Initiative for a donation. After discussion, the Council determined that using city funds for such donations would be inappropriate, as noted by Albright and Attorney Karen Skoyles, who questioned the governmental purpose of such donations.

CERT Grant

Mayor Bruhn explained the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTS) grant would fund an energy fair to showcase the city's solar panels and battery storage system, with participation from various energy partners. The grant would provide 100% funding (up to \$10,000) without requiring matching funds.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to approve applying for the CERTS grant. The motion passed unanimously.

Information & Announcements

Mayor Bruhn noted that the Holiday Tour of Homes event had been canceled.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting called was completed and adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer