

City of Vergas Planning Commission Public Hearing
Monday, October 27, 2025 at 6:00 pm
Government Services Building and Zoom

The City of Vergas Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on Monday, September 22, 2025, on Zoom and at the Vergas Government Services Building with the following members present: Alex Ohman, Bruce Albright, Shane Hasse, Rebecca Hasse, and Jim Courneya. Absent: None. Also present: Clerk-Treasurer Julie Lammers and Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane; and citizens Editor Bob Williams with Frazee-Vergas Forum, Deb Sonnenberg, Paul Sonnenberg, Marcia Huddleston, Mallory Huddleston, Melissa Moltzan, Ricky Moltzan, Ethan Bachmann, Julie Bruhn, Loren Menz and Garrett Boeowicz.

Call to Order

Chair Ohman called the public hearing to order at 6:00 PM.

Conditional Use Permit request for 511 W Glenn Street. Paul Sonnenberg explained that he was applying for a conditional use permit to move his auto dealership license to Vergas. He acknowledged that the area is residential but emphasized that the business would remain inside their building. He stated that their office would be inside their new "shouse" in Vergas with no cars displayed outside, as it's for wholesale use only. They would need to follow Minnesota state rules for their dealer's license, which they have held for over 60 years.

Deb Sonnenberg clarified they wanted to move their business office from their Perham location to Vergas as they are approaching retirement. She explained that while dealer's license requirements state they need a place to display vehicles, they would not be carrying any inventory at the shed in Vergas. She confirmed they would need to display a small magnetic sign (approximately 18" x 22") on their building showing "Marlo Motors" and their phone number as required by the state.

When questioned about traffic, the Sonnenbergs confirmed there would be zero increase in traffic as their business dealings occur at other locations. P. Sonnenberg explained that when buying vehicles for other dealerships, he goes to their locations to transfer paperwork, with no customers or vehicles coming to their Vergas property.

Mallory Huddleston asked what would happen if the business was sold someday, specifically if future owners could display vehicles on the property. P. Sonnenberg confirmed that the conditional use permit would only apply to the original applicant and their dealer's license would end at that point.

Loren Menz expressed concern that approving this request might set a precedent for other commercial uses in the development. Lammers clarified that while anyone in the residential area can apply for a conditional use permit, each application would go through the same process independently, though she acknowledged it does make it more difficult to deny similar requests in the future.

Ohman read a letter from Erik and Ellie Moltzan expressing opposition to the proposed conditional use permit, citing concerns about changing the character of the residential area, potential impacts on property values, and disruption to the residential atmosphere. See attached letter from the Moltzans.

Ohman called three times for public comments. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing at 6:30 PM.

City of Vergas Planning Commission Minutes

Monday, October 27, 2025 at 6:30 pm

Government Services Building and Zoom

The City of Vergas Planning Commission held a regular hybrid meeting on Monday, October 27, 2025, on Zoom and at the Vergas Government Services Building.

2025	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alex Ohman, Chair	A	P	P	P	P	P	N/A	P/P	P	P		
Bruce Albright, Liaison	P	P	P	P	P	P	N/A	P/P	P	P		
Shane Hasse, Member	P	P	A	P	P	P	N/A	A/P	P	P		
Rebecca Hasse, Member	P	P	P	P	A	P	N/A	P/P	P	P		
Jim Courneya, Member	P	P	P	P	P	P	N/A	A/P	P	P		
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P	P	P	N/A	P/P	P	P		
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	P	P	P	P	P	N/A	A/P	A	P		

P: Present. A: Absent N/A: No Meeting

Also present: Citizens; Editor Bob Williams with Frazee-Vergas Forum and Marcia Huddleston.

Call to Order

Chair Ohman called the planning Commission meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

Agenda Additions or Deletions

Lammers requested the conditional use permit be added as item #6, with subsequent items renumbered accordingly.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Courneya, to approve the agenda with the addition of the conditional use permit. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

Motion by Ohman, seconded by R. Hasse, to approve the minutes of September 22, 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

Status or Council Recommendations

None.

Conditional Use Permit

Ohman opened discussion on the conditional use permit application from Paul and Deb Sonnenberg.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Ohman, to recommend to City Council to approve the conditional use permit. The motion passed unanimously.

Albright discussed the city ordinances that should guide their decision, noting the purpose of zoning regulations is to ensure public health, safety, and general welfare, as well as to protect and maintain property values. He determined the application would be considered a commercial use since it involves financial gain.

Ohman reviewed the specific standards for home occupations in Section 151.21(C) of the ordinance, confirming with the Sonnenbergs that:

- The occupation would be carried on in the main building.
- Not more than 25% of the floor space would be used.

- No articles for sale would be displayed visibly from the street.
- There would be no change in outside appearance except for one small sign.
- No increased traffic would be generated.
- No retail sales activity would occur.
- No outside employees would be involved.
- No outside storage would occur.
- Business hours would be within 8:00 AM to 9:00 PM.
- Only one commercial vehicle would be parked on site.

Ohman proposed amending the motion to include these specific standards.

Motion by Ohman, seconded by Courneya, to amend the motion to include compliance with the specific standards outlined in Section 151.21(C). The amendment passed unanimously.

Motion by Ohman, seconded by Courneya, to recommend approval of the conditional use permit to the City Council with compliance with Section 151.21(C) required. The motion passed unanimously.

Ohman advised the applicants that the City Council would consider their application at their November 18, 2025 meeting, and reminded them they would need approval for any signage.

Construction Permits

A. Active Construction Permits

None.

B. Approved by Clerk-Treasurer Permit

Lammers reported approving permits for:

1. 136 & 146 E Main St to replace roof.
2. 320 E Frazee Avenue to replace shingles.

C. Approved by Otter Tail County

None.

D. Permits Needing Approval

The commission reviewed a permit application for 123 W Mill St to remove hop buildings (21' x 36') and a wood building and shed, and to build a greenhouse (24' x 66').

Lammers explained that the corner of the proposed greenhouse would be 11 feet from the property line (exceeding the 10-foot minimum requirement) and 52 feet from the property line at the back of the building. She noted that Olson Oil owns the lot and has provided signed forms giving permission for the construction. The contractor was identified as Scott Orvik.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Courneya, to approve the permit for 123 W Mill St. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

A. Nuisance Properties

The commission discussed three nuisance property issues:

1. **Demolition Vehicles:** The commission reviewed advice from the city attorney regarding demolition/derby cars. After discussion, they decided to follow the attorney's recommendation to enforce the ordinance as written without special exceptions for demolition vehicles.

Motion by Albright, seconded by S. Hasse to adopt the attorney's recommendation to read the ordinance as is. The motion passed unanimously.

2. **350 S Pelican Avenue:** Lammers reported that the property has been under a court order since 2019 requiring abatement of hazardous and unsanitary conditions. The attorney recommended that city staff compile a specific list of items needing correction and set a deadline, after which the city would abate the issues at the owner's expense if not addressed.

Motion by Albright, seconded by R. Hasse, to require abatement of the nuisance problem (removal of garbage and either removal or repair of garage to city codes) by May 1, 2026, or the city will take appropriate action. The motion passed unanimously.

3. **Property behind the nursing home:** Lammers noted this property receives frequent complaints. The attorney recommended a similar approach as with 350 S Pelican Avenue, but the commission decided to address this in the spring.

Ohman requested that Lammers send him a nuisance letter regarding leaf bags at his property so he could experience the process from the citizen's perspective and potentially help improve communication.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Courneya, to send Ohman a nuisance letter regarding leaf bags at his property. Voting Yes: Albright, Courneya, R. Hasse, and S. Hasse. Voting No: None. Abstained: Ohman. The motion carried.

DuFrane, Utilities Superintendent, expressed frustration that while he and Lammers enforce ordinances, they sometimes feel unsupported when issues come before the commission. The commission acknowledged these concerns and discussed ways to improve the narrative around enforcement and better support staff.

B. City Ordinance Update

Lammers mentioned that water source-related ordinances need review, but no specific updates were provided at this time.

New Business

None.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by S. Hasse, to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Recorded by Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Secretary,

Julie Lammers, CMC

Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer

Council Recommendations

To recommend approval of the conditional use permit for 511 W Glenn St to the City Council with compliance with Section 151.21(C) required.

Follow Up Actions

- Paul and Deb Sonnenberg: Obtain sign permit from Lammers when installing the magnetic sign on their building at the Vergas location.
- Lammers: Prepare written agreement for property owner at 360 South Pelican Avenue outlining abatement requirements with May 1st, 2026 deadline, including consent for city to place expenses on property taxes if not completed.
- DuFrane and Lammers: Meet with property owner at 360 South Pelican Avenue to discuss and obtain signature on abatement agreement.
- Lammers: Have Deputy Clerk send nuisance letter to Ohman regarding leaves next to his garage
- Planning Commission: Consider purchasing 500 custom business cards with nuisance complaint submission information to distribute to Utility Employees.
- Lammers: Prepare list of specific ordinance violations and required actions for property on Frazee Avenue for discussion at May meeting.
- Planning Commission: Review comprehensive plan items from 2025 at next month's meeting.
- City Council: Final decision on Sonnenberg conditional use permit at November 18th meeting.