

Water Sewer Committee Meeting

The Vergas Water/Sewer Committee met at the Vergas Government Services Center on Wednesday, November 25, 2025, at 9:00 AM.

P: Present A: Absent N/A: No meeting

2025	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dwight Lundgren, Mayor	N/A	N/A	P	P	P	N/A						
Bruce Albright, Liaison											P	P
Dean Haarstick, Liaison	N/A	N/A	P	P	P	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	N/A	N/A	P	P	P	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P
Mike DuFrane, Utilities Superintendent	N/A	N/A	P	P	P	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P

Also present: Engineer Blaine Green with Widseth.

Call to order

Lammers called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM.

Additions and Deletions

None.

Minutes

Albright noted a correction needed on page 1 of the November 5, 2025 minutes. The minutes incorrectly stated that the committee discussed issues with water service charges at 123 Main Street involving a curb stop "which wasn't being used but was still being billed" when it should have stated "and was not being billed."

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to approve the minutes with the noted correction. The motion passed unanimously.

Ordinance Review

The committee discussed the city ordinances regarding water service responsibility, particularly focusing on the property at 123 Main Street. Lammers noted she had provided additional ordinance information but had not found documentation of when the city changed the policy regarding responsibility for service lines. She recalled this change happened during a freeze-up year when multiple cities experienced problems. The committee discussed the timeline of ordinance changes, with Lammers noting that in 2013, ordinances 83 and 84 were amended, but the changes regarding water line responsibility must have occurred sometime after. The members recalled it was related to a particularly cold winter when many cities experienced frozen water lines. Albright noted that current ordinance 78 clearly states that from the curb stop to the house is the owner's responsibility, and from the curb stop to the street is the city's responsibility. Lammers confirmed this was still the language in the 2013 ordinance as well. The committee also discussed requirements for sealing unused wells in the city. Lammers reported that the city had received a grant to seal wells, with 8 of 10 identified wells being sealed. Two wells inside homes were not sealed due to the high cost. She mentioned that three more property owners would like their wells sealed, and the city may apply for another grant after completing the water plant fence project.

Regarding the property at 123 Main Street, the committee discussed billing issues for an unused curb stop. Albright recommended that the property owner should be billed going forward but not be charged retroactively for past service since the curb stop location was unknown. He also noted the property owner does not require a new easement as any existing easements would have been conveyed with the property.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to recommend to the City Council to forgive the last 3 years of charges for the property at 123 Main Street, charge going forward from August 2025, raise the reconnection fee to \$40, and not require an easement. The motion passed unanimously.

Sewer Line Jetting and Televising Policy

Lammers and DuFrane presented a draft policy regarding sewer line jetting and televising as requested at the previous meeting. DuFrane discussed the benefits of televising sewer lines, noting that it has helped identify problems that weren't previously known. He shared examples of issues found through televising, including root intrusion at properties on Glenn Street. The committee discussed whether property owners should be informed of potential issues discovered during televising. While informing residents could be helpful, there were concerns about creating expectations that the city would address problems on private property.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to recommend adoption of the Sewer Line Jetting and Televising Policy to the City Council. The motion passed unanimously.

Lead and Copper

Lammers reported that 24 properties still need to be inspected for lead and copper compliance. She noted that approximately 6 would likely be completed by the end of the month, but others might be more difficult to access. DuFrane mentioned that he had already inspected some properties and could provide the information without needing to take additional photos. Green from Widseth offered to create documentation for properties DuFrane had already inspected. Green also discussed the possibility of adding the televising information to the city's GIS system, estimating it would cost approximately \$1,000 per year as the city televises one-third of the system annually.

Projects

A. Sewer Projects

1. Pumps

DuFrane presented a quote from Minnesota Pump Works for replacing the mounting systems in the main lift station. He explained that the metal components have deteriorated over time, reducing pumping capacity from 130 gallons per minute to around 70 gallons per minute, resulting in increased electrical costs and reduced efficiency. The committee reviewed utility cost data showing that expenses had increased significantly from previous years, with Lammers noting that costs had risen by approximately \$1,000 from 2024 to 2025.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to recommend to the City Council that they replace both mounting systems in the main lift station for approximately \$12,000, with the work to be done in 2026 from the new budget. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Smoke Testing

DuFrane suggested conducting smoke testing to identify illegal connections to the sewer system. He explained that during work on a lift station, they observed water flowing into the system when no water service was being used, suggesting possible improper connections from sump pumps or other sources. He described how smoke testing works by blowing smoke into manholes, which then reveals leaks or illegal connections where the smoke emerges.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to recommend investigating smoke testing due to acknowledged problems with water entering the system improperly, and to bring cost information to a future meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Water Projects

The committee briefly discussed water projects, including three properties with curb stops that need attention. Lammers noted that letters would be sent to these property owners, as repairs would be at their expense.

2026 Budgets

A. Sewer Budget

The committee discussed the need to increase sewer rates to address the current deficit. Lammers reported that the sewer fund is currently \$50,000 in the hole, while the water fund has an approximately \$12,000 of surplus. After discussion of various options, the committee agreed that both the base rate and the usage rate needed to be increased to adequately fund the system.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to recommend increasing the sewer monthly base fee from \$28.50 to \$33.50 and the usage rate from \$3.00 to \$4.00 per thousand gallons. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee discussed the rationale for the increase, noting the aging infrastructure (over 30 years old), increasing maintenance costs, and the need to prepare for future upgrades. They agreed to prepare information for the January newsletter to explain the rate increases to residents.

Water Budget

No changes were recommended to the water rates at this time, as the water fund is currently stable.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 AM.

Council Recommendations

- Recommend to the City Council that they replace both mounting systems in the main lift station for approximately \$12,000, with the work to be done in 2026 from the new budget.
- Recommend to the City Council the adoption of the Sewer Line Jetting and Televising Policy.
- Recommend to the City Council to forgive the last 3 years of charges for the property at 123 Main Street, charge going forward from August 2025 and not require an easement.
- Recommend to the City Council to raise the reconnection fee to \$40.
- Recommend to the City Council to change sewer monthly base fee to \$33.50.
- Recommend to the City Council to change the sewer monthly usage rates to \$4.00.

Follow Up Actions

- Investigate smoke testing due to acknowledged problems with water entering the system improperly, and bring cost information to a future meeting.

Employee Recommendation regarding property at 123 E Main Street:
Recommend denying all of the following requests.

1. Owner has requested easement:
 - A. Owner knew about connections when selling the city, the property and did not mention.

Attorney stated: Assuming that the deed to the city used the language of the "standard" deed regarding the hereditaments and appurtenants thereto, the Bruhn's conveyed the easement when they signed the deed. The city has an easement, and Mr. Bruhn is not entitled to any additional compensation for that which his mother conveyed.

2. Owner would like to remove three years of back service.
 - A. Owner knowledge knows he should have been charged for water and questioned staff on why this was not done in 2014.
 - B. State law allows the city to back charge for 6 years, Council has only charged for 3.
- C. Owner has requested not to have a water bill.

MN Statutes 444.075 Waterwork Systems, Storms, Sanitary Sewer Systems

Subd. 3. **Charges; net revenues.** (a) To pay for the construction, reconstruction, repair, enlargement, improvement, or other obtainment, the maintenance, operation and use of the facilities, and of obtaining and complying with permits required by law, the governing body of a municipality or county may impose just and equitable charges for the use and for the availability of the facilities and for connections with them and make contracts for the charges as provided in this section. The charges may be imposed with respect to facilities made available by agreement with other municipalities, counties or private corporations or individuals, as well as those owned and operated by the municipality or county itself.

Subd. 3c. **Minimum charges.** (a) Minimum charges for the availability of water or sewer service may be imposed for all premises abutting on streets or other places where municipal or county water mains or sewers are located, whether or not connected to them.

§ 52.06 CONNECTION TO SYSTEM REQUIRED; USE OF PRIVATE WELLS.

(A) Connection Mandatory. Except where municipal water is not available, it shall be unlawful to construct, reconstruct, or repair any private water system which is designed or intended to provide water for human consumption. Private wells, to provide water for other than human consumption, may be constructed, maintained and continued in use after connection is made to the water system; provided, there is no means of cross-connection between the private well and municipal water supply at any time. Hose bibbs that will enable the cross-connection of the two systems are prohibited on internal piping of the well system supply. Where both private and city systems are in use, outside hose bibbs shall not be installed on both systems.

(B) Existing Dwelling Unit or Buildings. Each lot, piece or parcel of property in the City of Vergas, abutting on any street, avenue or alley in which a municipal water main is laid, and having an existing dwelling unit or any other buildings thereon, is required to be connected with the municipal water system of the City not later than November 1, 2010, or within three (3) months after a municipal water main is constructed provided the dwelling unit or building is served is within 200 feet of the edge of the street closest to the dwelling unit or building.