

CITY OF VERGAS
PUBLIC HEARING
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, February 17, 2026

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:00 PM, on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid public hearing, with the following members present: Mayor Julie Bruhn, Council Members Bruce Albright, Paul Pinke, Dean Haarstick, and James Stenger. Absent:

None. Also present: Clerk-Treasurer Julie Lammers.

Present via Zoom: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum; and Citizens, Michael (no last name provided)

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth, and Citizens, Marchia Huddleston and Cal Miller.

Public Hearing

Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM regarding proposed property tax assessments related to the City Center Parking Lot improvement. She noted that the assessment terms, as proposed at the previous meeting, were a 10-year period at 6.2 percent interest, then turned the floor over to Blaine Green of Widseth Engineering, the city's project engineer and project manager for the parking lot project.

Green provided an overview of the project and the Minnesota Chapter 429 special assessment process. He explained that a preliminary public hearing had been held in August 2024, and that this final assessment hearing was the concluding step in that process. The parking lot had been in poor condition, with failing pavement and drainage issues exacerbated by prior utility work, and the project restored it to substantially better shape. He noted that the assessed portion of the overall project was specifically the alleyway running through the area, per the city's assessment policy. Some private work was also included in the overall project scope, with the cooperation of adjacent landowners, to produce a cohesive final result.

Green explained the city's alley assessment policy assigns 50 percent of alleyway project costs to benefiting, abutting property owners. The total alleyway cost came to just under \$37,000, making the assessable portion \$18,498.85. Divided by 560 linear feet, the rate would have exceeded the \$26.88 per linear foot that had been presented and locked in at the preliminary hearing. Green emphasized that exceeding that figure would require restarting the hearing process, which was not considered worthwhile given the small dollar difference. Therefore, the assessment rate was set at \$26.88 per linear foot. With interest at 6.2 percent over 10 years, affected property owners have 30 days from the hearing — until March 19 — to pay their assessment without accruing interest. Assessments not paid by that date would be submitted to the county assessor by November 15 and would appear on property taxes beginning January 1, 2027.

Bruhn noted that besides the city, five other private or community properties were subject to assessment and asked whether any had been in contact. City Clerk-Treasurer Julie Lammers confirmed that one party had indicated they would pay within 30 days, while the others had not yet responded.

Haarstick asked whether the 10-year term was fixed or could be extended to 15 years. Lammers confirmed the 10-year term had been set by council the prior month.

Citizen Huddleston raised a question regarding the benefit to one particular property owner, Haarstick, whose connection to the improvement was less obvious than others. Bruhn clarified that the assessment applied to all properties adjacent to the improved alleyway. This was the third time that particular property had been assessed for alley improvements, prompting a brief exchange about the nature of adjacent-property assessments. No changes to the proposed assessment schedule were requested.

Hearing no further questions or comments, Bruhn closed the Public Hearing at 6:09 PM.

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, February 17, 2026**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 PM, on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 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
Julie Bruhn, Mayor	P	P										
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P										
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P										
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P										
James Stenger, Member	P	P										
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P										
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A										
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P	A										

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

Present via Zoom: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum; and Citizens, Michael (no last name provided)

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth, and Citizens, Marchia Huddleston and Cal Miller.

Call to Order

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

Citizens' Concerns

Stray cats in Vergas

City Clerk/Treasurer Julie Lammers reported that the city had received multiple complaints regarding feral and stray cats running at large in Vergas, with reports of cats living in culverts near the railroad tracks and appearing in residents' yards and on their decks in large numbers. Lammers noted she had reviewed the city's existing ordinances on the matter and consulted with staff to identify potential solutions. Several options were discussed. Lammers suggested raising the licensing fee for non-spayed or neutered animals as an incentive for owners to alter their pets, increasing the allowable number of animals per household for fully altered animals, and using the city newsletter and Facebook page to better publicize the ordinances and the benefits of spaying and neutering. However, it was acknowledged that the majority of the problematic cats were unowned and therefore would not be reached by licensing incentives. Citizen Cal Miller acknowledged that approximately 10 to 12 cats were present near his property and admitted to feeding them during the winter out of concern for their welfare, while expressing openness to trapping as a solution. Stenger noted that unaltered, unowned cats were the source of population growth, not owned pets. Albright noted that the city's ordinance classifies any cat or dog without a collar, tag, or leash as a nuisance, and that city staff had already undertaken trapping efforts. He pointed out the significant cost associated with each trapped cat. Approximately two hours of staff time and use of a city vehicle to transport animals to the shelter in Fergus Falls — potentially amounting to a couple hundred dollars per cat.

Bruhn recalled that an organization had previously come to Vergas to conduct trap-neuter-release services, which had been effective. Lammers confirmed she believed the group was called "Friends of the Feral Cat" and indicated she would follow up with contacts Attorney Karen Skoyles had provided to determine whether such services were still available. Albright also recalled that an article had been placed in the newsletter at the time ordinance amendments were made, encouraging residents not to feed feral cats given the difficult life such animals face.

The Council agreed that while no immediate solution was available, the city would pursue a follow-up with the trap-neuter-release organization, reinforce the existing ordinances through the newsletter, and continue trapping efforts as staff time permitted.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

Bruhn outlined the following changes to the agenda: a new item 7, Committee Reports, was added to address the EDA/HRA and Personnel Committee, including resolutions and policy documents. The Energy and Resiliency item was removed as no meeting had taken place since the last council meeting. The CDH-Vergas Fire Board report was deferred to the next meeting as no report had been provided.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Bruhn noted one correction to the consent agenda: the Liquor Store bills had been labeled January 2025 and should read January 2026, as the store had ended the month in the positive rather than at a loss as the mislabeled document implied. The correction was to be made before filing.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the consent agenda as corrected. The motion passed unanimously.

City Center Parking Lot

Engineer Update

This item was addressed as part of the Assessment Hearing under Item 1.

Assessment Hearing

Following the close of the public hearing and the council meeting being called to order, the Council proceeded to formal action on the assessment schedule and resolution as presented by Green.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adopt the proposed assessment schedule as presented by Blaine Green. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to adopt the resolution formalizing the assessments at a 10-year term and 6.2 percent interest rate. Voting yes: Pinke, Stenger and Albright. Voting no: none. Abstained: Haarstick. Motion carried.

The Council then considered whether the city's General Fund and Liquor Store funds share of the assessment should be paid off immediately or carried over the 10-year term. Lammers confirmed the city had sufficient funds available and noted that the city's bond payment was at 5.2 percent interest, making the 6.2 percent assessment rate more expensive to carry. Albright noted the city's investment returns were also not likely at 6.2 percent, making immediate payoff the fiscally prudent choice. The one percent spread above the bond rate was explained as a statutory buffer to account for early payments or defaults.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to use existing city funds to pay off the city's share of the assessment. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

EDA/HRA

Albright reported that the EDA/HRA had been actively working on a potential new home-based day care facility for Vergas, branded as the **"Growing Up Vergas"** project. The committee had toured comparable home-based day care facilities in Perham and the City of Otter Tail and had been applying for available grants. Albright emphasized the distinction between a "home-based day care" and a licensed "day care facility," noting that the latter triggers a significantly more complex set of state regulations, plumbing codes, and staffing requirements. The home-based designation was intentional and informed by the toured facilities. Albright noted the project would require substantial fundraising on the order of a couple hundred thousand dollars. The EDA viewed the facility as an economic asset, citing that young families considering relocation to the area consider day care availability a key factor, and that residents currently travel considerable distances for such services. A key state grant application was due around March 15 or 16, with results expected in early June. Otter Tail County had also committed to contributing 5 percent of project costs if state funds are awarded.

Lammers added that the council had already passed one related resolution the prior month, and a new resolution was now needed to formally authorize the EDA to apply for any and all grants for this project, and to inform the county of that authority. She noted that a future resolution would also be needed to designate Otter Tail County as the fiscal agent, as required for cities under 5,000 in population.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to approve Resolution 2026-00 authorizing the EDA to apply for any and all grants related to the **"Growing Up Vergas"** home-based day care project. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Committee

Bruhn presented two recommendations from the Personnel Committee.

The first was a new policy addressing operational continuity during extended employee absences of two weeks or more. The policy establishes a handoff process requiring staff to provide task documentation, and requires employees to notify the city office as soon as possible when an absence is anticipated. Bruhn noted the intent was not to change leave types or the existing personnel policy, but to ensure the city is not caught unprepared given that many positions are single-person roles. She explained that going forward, performance appraisals would include a request for each employee to maintain an up-to-date handover task list reflecting seasonal duties, so that coverage could be coordinated effectively whether an absence is planned or sudden. Albright noted the policy would need to account for both foreseeable and unexpected absences.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to approve the new over 2 weeks of continual leave policy. The motion passed unanimously.

The second recommendation was a minor amendment to the existing personnel policy on page 6 to add a reference to the new handover policy by its correct title, ensuring the two documents are linked and the new policy is not lost within the larger personnel manual.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the amendment to the personnel policy referencing the new continuity policy. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Engineering Report

Albright introduced a new monthly engineering update report, prepared by outgoing engineer Green, as a tool for the Street Committee to track ongoing engineering activities, upcoming deadlines, and project statuses in one place. Albright highlighted items such as the annual gravel pit review and lead service line compliance as examples of matters that had previously been difficult to track. He expressed appreciation for Green's work in establishing the format and noted it would benefit both the committee and the engineer going forward.

Clerk Treasurer Report

Lammers provided updates on several active grants:

The **OSHA grant** was nearly complete, with security cameras and a system installed in the city office, and remaining shop upgrades expected to be finished that week, after which a final reimbursement filing would be submitted.

The **solar grant** had seen no recent progress.

The **MDH implement grant** for a fence around the water plant had been released with available funds, and Lammers was awaiting the formal contract. Installation was planned for spring once the ground thawed.

Lammers also shared that she had met with a company called Text My Gov, which offered a text message notification program allowing residents to sign up via the city's website to receive city updates by text. The first-year cost would be \$2,250 (including a \$750 setup fee), with an annual fee of \$1,500 thereafter. The Council discussed whether the service offered sufficient value given budget constraints. Albright noted Vergas is a small community of approximately 350 people where residents can readily contact council members directly and questioned whether the expenditure was justified. Bruhn agreed, noting the county's existing emergency notification system — which allows residents to choose text, email, or phone alerts — already covered the most critical use case. The Council did not move to approve the service but noted it remained an option for the future if a clear need emerged.

Information & Announcements

Provided on agenda.

Adjournment

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting was called was completed and adjourned at 7:00 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer