

Street/Sidewalks/Yard Waste Committee Meeting Minutes

Government Services Center

March 17th, 2026 at 1:00 PM.

2025	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bruce Albright, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P									
Paul Pinke, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P									
Mike DuFrane, Utilities Superintendent	N/A	N/A	A									
Julie Lammers, Clerk Treasurer	N/A	N/A	P									

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

A Yard Waste meeting of the Vergas Streets/Sidewalks/Yard Waste (SSYW) Committee was held on Tuesday, March 17th, 2026 at 1:00 PM at the Vergas Government Services Center and Zoom.

Present via Zoom: Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth.

Lammers called the meeting to order at 1:09 PM.

Agenda Additions or Deletions

Albright suggested adding an update on the extension of Sharp Avenue to the agenda to discuss where the project currently stands.

Minutes

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the minutes from October 14, 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

Extension of Scharf Avenue

The committee discussed the status of the Scharf Avenue extension project. Albright inquired about the current situation with the project. Green reported that he had not received any information from the project engineer and that the ball was entirely in the developer's court. He had reached out to them requesting information but had not received a response, nor had he heard from Bunkowski regarding what they knew about the project. Albright expressed satisfaction that the responsibility was with the developers, noting that the city had asked for information regarding the stormwater pond and was waiting for their response. He recalled that Bunkowski had previously attended a council meeting requesting road plowing for fishing access, and while snow removal didn't become an issue due to the mild winter, concerns had been raised about the size of the stormwater pond. Bunkowski had indicated they redirected some water to a different location, but the requested documentation had not been provided.

Extension of Dianne Ave

The committee then shifted focus to a related issue involving the EDA's eight lots, with two lots remaining to be sold. One lot was problematic because it lacked connection to a public street, which violated subdivision control requirements that mandate lots must be situated with principal frontage on a public street. The city had right-of-way for the public street, but when the Dianne street project was completed in 2019, the road construction stopped at the steep hill rather than continuing as originally planned. This decision appeared to have been made during the project without returning to council for approval. Lammers explained that multiple people were interested in purchasing the problematic lot and presented options for extending the road either 65 feet or 100 feet, with costs that would typically be assessed 100 percent to property owners for new road construction. The two affected property owners would be the EDA and Otter Tail County, though the county had previously requested assessment forgiveness.

Albright visited the site and expressed concerns about spending significant money on a road extension that would literally go nowhere, ending at a 20-foot vertical drop-off. He suggested that instead of the city building the road extension, the lot sale could include a contingency requiring the buyer to extend their driveway to connect with the existing road. He noted that the lot would require substantial reshaping and dirt work to make it buildable anyway, so the driveway extension could be completed as part of the overall site preparation. Albright mentioned that the neighboring landowner had expressed interest in

acquiring the lot to add to his property but noted that other potential buyers were also interested in purchasing it for home construction.

The discussion centered on whether to make an exception to city rules given the unique circumstances. Albright advocated for using common sense, suggesting the lot could be sold with buyer awareness that they would be responsible for connecting to Dianne Avenue. He proposed this approach would be more cost-effective than the city investing \$25,000-\$29,000 in a lot that might not sell. Green confirmed that contractors could likely balance the dirt on-site without hauling material in or out, though his estimate assumed bringing in about 600 yards of fill. He noted that the actual cost could be much lower with the right contractor.

The committee discussed that with the lot's challenging topography, buyers would need to bring in significant fill regardless, making the driveway connection a logical part of the overall site work. Albright suggested the buyer could extend their driveway across the corner of the city's right-of-way to reach Dianne Avenue without major grading. Green confirmed that this approach wouldn't preclude future road development if the city ever acquired adjacent property, as any future road construction could accommodate the existing driveway with proper planning for elevations and drainage. The committee agreed to recommend that the EDA maintain the road right-of-way while allowing the lot sale to proceed with a contingency requiring the buyer to provide road access. Albright suggested selling the lot at a break-even price of approximately \$18,000 and making the buyer responsible for road connection, including installation of required culverts.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend that the EDA sell the lot at a break-even price with a contingency requiring the new buyer to be responsible for connecting the driveway to Dianne Avenue, including installation of required culverts. The motion passed unanimously.

Yard Waste

The committee addressed yard waste operations following a recent fire at the disposal site. The fire had cost the city approximately \$1,200 from the Vergas fire department, while other departments provided mutual aid at no charge. The waste container company replaced damaged equipment at no cost to the city. The discussion revealed ongoing challenges with the brush disposal portion of the yard waste program. Albright noted that the city regularly received complaints about smoke from burning operations regardless of wind direction and expressed concern about liability risks. He observed that people could follow trucks carrying brush loads directly from Highway 108 to the city's site, indicating the program was attracting users from well beyond the city limits. The committee discussed that people had been misusing the site by bringing prohibited materials like stumps, despite clear signage. Some users had been observed dragging stumps off their trailers one by one, clearly ignoring the restrictions.

Pinke noted that while some customers believed the yard waste site brought people to town, those visitors weren't likely to make purchases while dumping waste, though they might return later. The committee considered several alternatives, including restricting brush disposal to city residents only, but recognized enforcement challenges without staffing the site. They noted that other communities like Frazee, Detroit Lakes, New York Mills, and Pelican Rapids continued to accept brush but at higher prices than Vergas charged.

Albright reported that he had contacted MPCA regarding regulations and learned that ash is not currently classified as a pollutant, though the city needed to obtain a general permit for their yard waste compost facility. This would involve registering the site online at no cost to maintain MPCA records of yard waste facilities. The discussion also covered safety and liability concerns, including instances where people had started unauthorized fires, either from hot ashes dumped from burning barrels or, in one case captured on camera, someone on a four-wheeler starting fires around midnight.

Neighbors north of town had reportedly expressed support for closing the brush disposal operation and called to thank the city when burning was temporarily suspended.

After extensive discussion about the challenges and risks associated with brush disposal, the committee concluded that continuing to accept grass clippings and other non-woody yard waste would provide valuable service while eliminating fire risks. This would give city employees more space and ability to properly manage and turn compost piles.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, for the 2026 season, no woody debris would be allowed to be deposited at the yard waste site. Permit fees would remain the same, and permits would be updated to reflect that no brush or woody debris is allowed. The motion passed unanimously.

Budget- goal setting

5-Year Budget

Lammers indicated that no materials had been prepared for five-year budget discussions, as they were waiting to learn whether the city would receive a grant for street improvements. The outcome of the grant application would significantly affect budget planning priorities.

Albright noted that if the grant is received, the budget would need to be adjusted accordingly, but if not received, street projects would remain on the back burner for next year.

Albright noted that in the spring, the committee would need to assess the street maintenance plan and determine if any crack sealing or other maintenance was needed for the year, beyond the ongoing issue with the alligator cracking on the hill on 1st Avenue.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting at 1:45 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Recommendations

- Recommend to City Council for the 2026 season, no woody debris would be allowed to be deposited at the yard waste site. Permit fees would remain the same, and permits would be updated to reflect that no brush or woody debris is allowed and to accept grass clippings and other non-woody yard waste would provide valuable service while eliminating fire risks. This would give city employees more space and ability to properly manage and turn compost piles.

Follow Up Actions

- Lammers: Inform interested buyer of Dianne Avenue lot that purchase will be contingent on buyer extending driveway to connect with Dianne Avenue and installing required 12-inch culvert and communicate committee's decision to EDA/HRA.
- Lammers: Bring committee's recommendation to EDA/HRA to sell the lot at a break-even price with the condition that the new owner is responsible for connecting the driveway to Dianne Avenue.
- Lammers: Register the yard waste compost facility with MPCA by completing the required online general permit form.
- Committee: Recommend to Council that for the 2024 season, no woody debris (brush) be deposited at the yard waste site, permit fees remain the same, and update permits to note the brush restriction.