

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

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 PM, on Tuesday, March 17, 2026 at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid regular public hearing.

2026	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Julie Bruhn, Mayor	P	P	P									
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P	P									
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P	P									
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P	P									
James Stenger, Member	P	P	P									
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P									
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A									
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P	A	A									

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

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

Present in person: Attorney Dylan Ramstad Skoyles, and Citizens, Jeremy Brenning, Laura Osborn, and Cynthia McDonough with Mahube Ottowa.

Call to Order

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

Citizens' Concerns

Jeremy Brenning and Laura Osborn appeared before the council regarding an alley issue at 110 West Elm Street. Brenning explained that the alley is in disrepair, with gravel that has settled below grade level, making it impassable during winter months due to ice and during spring months due to mud. He stated they cannot use their garage for 5-8 months out of the year and have been pulled out of the alley twice in recent years. The couple showed the council a plat map indicating where gravel should be located and requested approximately 9 yards of class 5 gravel to be bladed back to restore the alley surface. Brenning noted that about 5 years ago, one scoop of gravel was added to address a raised manhole cover that causes vehicles to bottom out. Osborn mentioned they had previously inquired about annexing the alley but were advised by the city attorney that the manhole cover location would create issues. The residents explained they currently have to mow the grassed-over area in summer and cannot access their garage during muddy spring conditions. They also noted a large mud puddle near the fire hydrant on West Elm Street that needs attention.

Albright, representing the street committee with Pinke, acknowledged their concerns and committed to meeting with them before the April council meeting to evaluate the situation and return with recommendations. The committee will schedule a site visit to address all concerns and ensure proper solutions are implemented.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

The agenda was modified to add the Lion's raffle to the consent agenda and to include West Central Initiative Food Council's "Growing Local Together" presentation by Patrick Hollister via Zoom as agenda item 5. The Event Center Advisory Board item was removed from the consent agenda since it appears in committee reports. The remaining items were renumbered accordingly.

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

Approval of Consent Agenda

The consent agenda included council minutes from February 17, 2026, bills paid between meetings, liquor store bills, late water/sewer bills, investment and bond schedules, money market account information, statement of receipts and disbursements, and various committee reports. The Lion's raffle was added to the consent agenda, and the Event Center Advisory Board item was removed as it appears in committee reports.

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

West Central Initiative Food Council - Growing Local Together

Hollister from West Central Initiative presented via Zoom about the expanding food council program. He explained that Partnership for Health has operated a 4-county local food council (Becker, Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin) for four years and received a Minnesota Department of Health grant to expand to 16 counties. Hollister invited council members to a meeting on Tuesday, April 7th from 4-6 PM, available either online or at five in-person locations including Fergus Falls and Moorhead (with dinner provided for in-person attendees). The meeting serves as both recruitment for new food council members and an opportunity for those interested in food-related projects without joining the council itself. The food council focuses on strengthening local food systems by promoting farmers markets, farm-to-school programs, farm-to-institution initiatives (hospitals, nursing homes, senior living facilities), and supporting local farmers and agriculture. Registration is available through a QR code on the provided flyer or by contacting Hollister directly.

Bruhn noted the connection to the city's Green Step Cities program and energy resilience advisory board work. Hollister confirmed familiarity with Green Step Cities, having worked with Fergus Falls, Becker County, and Moorhead, and encouraged bringing Green Step ideas to the food council meeting for potential synergy and collaboration.

Vergas Community Club - Looney Days

Lammers presented the Looney Days committee's request for the same street closures used in the past two years for 2026 events. The request includes street fair on Saturday, street dance Saturday night, and car show and parade on Sunday using the same routes and streets as the previous year. The committee also requested permission for a beer garden and to waive associated fees.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the Looney Days street closures and beer garden permission with fee waiver. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

Event Center

Stay Active and Independent for Life (SAIL) - Cynthia McDonough

Stenger introduced Cynthia McDonough from Mahube Ottawa in Detroit Lakes, who presented the Stay Active and Independent for Life (SAIL) program. McDonough explained that SAIL is a balance and strength class designed for fall prevention, typically recommended for ages 60 and over, though she has accommodated people in their fifties. The program runs twice weekly for one hour over 12 weeks (24 classes total), with McDonough providing all equipment through a mini-grant that covers weights and supplies but not all costs. She offers the class free to communities and has never been charged facility fees at other locations like town halls and community centers. McDonough outlined her tentative schedule for Monday and Wednesday mornings from 10-11 AM, requiring setup time starting at 9:30 AM. The program accommodates various ability levels, from seated exercises for wheelchair users to standing exercises. She noted the potential for training local volunteers to continue the program after her 12-week instruction period, as she currently has 26 trained volunteers maintaining classes in other communities.

The discussion centered on the city's building use policy that charges \$15 per session for exercise classes. McDonough requested fee waiver or reduction given the free community service nature of the program. Council members debated consistency with other programs, noting that Zumba classes now collect donations to cover the \$15 fee after the policy change. Bruhn raised concerns about setting precedents for fee waivers, while other council members noted the distinction that this program charges no participant fees unlike other exercise programs. The discussion revealed that under previous policies, exercise classes were free, but recent changes implemented fees to cover building operating costs like electricity and maintenance.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to allow SAIL to use the building at no cost, acknowledging potential policy ramifications to be addressed with future similar organizations. The motion passed unanimously.

Streets/Sidewalks/Yard Waste Committee

Albright reported on the 1 PM committee meeting's recommendation to eliminate brush disposal at the yard waste facility while continuing to sell \$65 permits for lawn clippings, leaves, and garden materials. The committee cited multiple violations, unauthorized fires set by users, constant smoke complaints from neighbors, liability concerns, and enforcement difficulties as reasons for the recommendation. Albright detailed ongoing problems including people lighting brush piles independently, violations during burning

bans when debris accumulates, a December fire that cost \$1,200 with mutual aid response, and regular dumping of oversized materials like stumps and large logs. He noted the site's proximity to buildings and wooded areas creates fire hazards, and the county operates several alternative brush disposal sites. The committee explored limiting access to residents only but determined policing would be difficult and costly. Approximately one-third of users lack permits despite over 300 permits being sold, with debris coming from as far as east of Dent. Current permits generate about \$19,000 annually, with \$7,000 allocated for equipment costs plus wages. Council members expressed concerns about eliminating services for residents who maintain well-kept yards as expected by the city. Stenger noted that communities typically provide yard waste services and questioned directing residents to drive to Frazee for brush disposal. Haarstick suggested more frequent burning and better management could address issues. Discussion included liability concerns, the visual impact of large brush piles as visitors enter town, and the December incident where employees thought a fire hadn't started but it ignited hours later, leading to emergency response. The committee considered various alternatives including scheduled staffed hours, better camera systems, and resident-only policies.

Attorney Dylan Ramstad Skoyles emphasized that rule violations would continue regardless of rule changes, suggesting the core issue is enforcement rather than rule content. He recommended better surveillance systems and prosecution of violators as deterrents, noting that catching and prosecuting violators typically reduces repeat offenses. After extensive debate about balancing community service provision with operational challenges, the committee agreed to table the decision until a special meeting following the April 8th Board of Review meeting. In the interim, permits will be sold for yard waste only (no brush), allowing more time for community input and alternative solution development.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to hold a special council meeting on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 1:30 PM immediately following the Board of Review to discuss Yard Waste facility. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Meeting

Form

Bruhn reported that the personnel committee met and conducted maintenance personnel evaluations, finding performance fully successful based on established standards. The committee developed a recommendation based on their previous policy approval requiring a handover process for employee absences of two weeks or more. The committee proposed a handover work duties checklist format for all single-person positions to ensure continuity when employees are absent, whether expectedly or unexpectedly. The checklist requires employees to document work tasks, frequency, and basic instructions, such as daily garbage collection with notes on garbage can locations. The format aims to provide whoever covers the position with essential information about duties and locations rather than detailed procedures. This applies to key positions including the two maintenance/utilities staff, City Clerk/Treasurer Julie Lammers, Deputy Clerk Rachel Nustad, and Liquor Store Manager Kyle Theisen, but not to supervised positions like liquor store clerks who perform similar duties under management oversight.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve use of the handover work duties checklist. The motion passed unanimously.

The council established a completion deadline of end of April for all applicable employees to submit their checklists, with Lammers responsible for distributing forms and communicating the timeline.

Staff Reports

Engineering Report

No update.

Clerk Treasurer Report

Lammers presented two items. First, she requested approval for Deputy Clerk Rachel Nustad to attend the loss control workshop on March 31st in Mahanomen, complementing the previously approved attendance of Maintenance Operator Matt and herself at the April 1st Alexandria workshop. This arrangement ensures office coverage while maximizing training opportunities through their League of Minnesota Cities membership at no additional class costs beyond mileage.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to approve Deputy Clerk Rachel Nustad's attendance at the loss control workshop. The motion passed unanimously.

Second, Lammers requested approval to hire Alyssa Hartmann as a part-time clerk at the liquor store based on management recommendation.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve hiring Alyssa Hartmann as part-time liquor store clerk. The motion passed unanimously.

Information & Announcements

The council reviewed upcoming meetings and events. The Board of Review is scheduled for Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 1:00 PM at the Vergas Event Center with equalization specialists present. The Trail Masterplan meeting with Hobart Township was corrected to Thursday, April 16, 2026, at 6:30 PM (not 7:00 PM as initially stated) at the Hobart Township building. Patrick and Kevin will present analysis previously provided to Hobart Township, with a preparatory meeting scheduled for the first week of April to finalize the presentation addressing township questions.

Employee training schedules were noted including various professional development opportunities for city staff throughout 2026.

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 7:45 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer