

Street/Sidewalks/Yard Waste Committee Meeting Minutes
 Government Services Center
 March 31st, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

2026	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bruce Albright, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P/P									
Paul Pinke, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P/P									
Mike DuFrane, Utilities Superintendent	N/A	N/A	A/A									
Julie Lammers, Clerk Treasurer	N/A	N/A	P/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 31st, 2026 at 4:00 PM at the Vergas Government Services Center and Zoom.

Lammers called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Agenda Additions or Deletions

Albright requested adding the extension of Dianne Avenue to the agenda.

Minutes

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the minutes from March 17, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

West Lake Street

Lammers reported that the city applied for a Local Road Improvement Program grant but did not receive it. Out of 233 applications, only 42 grants were awarded. This was the city's second attempt at securing this funding. Lammers noted she has a meeting scheduled with the county regarding the trail project, as they sometimes receive more detailed information about grant decisions. Committee members discussed alternative approaches for West Lake Street improvements. Albright suggested consulting with local contractors about what could be accomplished with a budget of \$15,000-\$20,000, such as lowering hills, removing trees, and general safety improvements. The main issues identified were trees encroaching on the right-of-way and creating a closed canopy that makes passage difficult, especially during heavy snow conditions. The committee agreed that the primary problems are the encroaching trees and the need for brush removal. Some tree work was completed last fall, but more extensive work would be needed. The discussion included consideration of the 50/50 cost-sharing structure for gravel road improvements versus the 80/20 split for paved roads. The committee decided to approach contractors first for cost estimates before consulting with the city engineer, as contractor consultations would be free. The goal would be to identify what improvements could be made within a reasonable budget to enhance safety and accessibility, particularly as more homes are built around Lawrence Lake.

Alley Graveling 110 W Elm St

Lammers provided background on this issue, explaining that the property owners had previously been told by the council to apply for vacation of the alley if they wanted it improved, but they declined to do so. Lammers contacted the county to clarify whether this was an alley or an easement and learned that the city maintains an easement for storm drainage, which Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane maintains with gravel around the storm drain, but the city does not maintain the alley itself - it exists only on paper. Albright visited the site and took photographs, observing that the area has challenging topography with steep slopes that would cause any gravel to wash out during rain. Albright noted that proper gravel installation would require excavation and proper preparation, turning it into a much more expensive project estimated at \$20,000. The discussion revealed that neighboring property owner appears to have already encroached approximately four feet into the alley with his fence. The committee also noted a wet spot near the fire hydrant on West Elm Street that needs attention with a small amount of gravel. Lammers explained that vacating the alley would require a public hearing, which would cost the city approximately \$400. However, if conducted as part of a regular meeting rather than a special hearing, the only cost would be for mailing notices. The committee discussed the practical challenges of maintaining this paper alley, noting the steep terrain and drainage issues. They concluded that vacation would be the most sensible solution, with the property being returned 50/50 to the respective landowners (10 feet each).

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend to council to vacate the alley at city expense, with the right-of-way to return 50/50 to the respective landowners. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend to council that the city add gravel near the fire hydrant on West Elm Street, though this work cannot be completed until road restrictions are lifted. The motion passed unanimously.

Yard Waste

This agenda item generated extensive discussion as the committee reviewed three main options for the yard waste facility going forward.

Financial Overview: Lammers reported that the yard waste operation took in \$18,971 in permits last year and cost \$13,933 to operate, resulting in a profit of \$5,038. The city sets aside \$7,000 annually for loader replacement, and the costs include 2% of Lammers' wages and 5% of Deputy Clerk Rachel Nustad's wages to cover permit issuance.

Option 1: Keep Current System Open This option would maintain the current system allowing both residents and non-resident permit holders to use the facility. Benefits include providing a valued community service, addressing regional dumping problems, and meeting public demand. Recent feedback from residents, emphasized strong community support and willingness to pay increased fees if necessary. Concerns with this option include managing large volumes of material, ongoing violations, fire and smoke complaints during burning, and potential fire hazards if burns spread to neighboring properties. Committee members discussed the need for stricter burning policies, including more frequent burns of smaller piles and mandatory start times before 10 AM.

Option 2: Close Woody Debris Disposal This option would eliminate brush and tree waste acceptance while maintaining leaf and grass composting. Benefits would include eliminating fire hazards, smoke complaints, and creating more space for composting operations. However, this would disappoint many users who specifically value the woody debris disposal service.

Option 3: Residents Only This option would restrict the facility to city residents only, similar to Perham's site. Perham operates their facility with gates, specific hours (Tuesdays and Saturdays, 10 AM to 7 PM, April through October).

Gate and Staffing Considerations: The committee discussed gating options, with Dakota Fence providing a quote of \$28,565 for 310 feet of 6-foot high fencing with a gate. However, committee members suggested a simpler gate covering just the driveway might be sufficient. Staffing costs were calculated at approximately \$5,000 annually based on Perham's operating schedule, though the committee noted that city maintenance staff already work weekend hours and could potentially open/close gates as part of their existing duties.

Seasonal Operations: The committee discussed limiting operations to April through October, noting that this would align with when most yard waste is generated and avoid winter burning.

Enforcement and Violations: Discussion included ongoing challenges with permit compliance, illegal dumping, and inappropriate materials. The committee noted improvements in contractor compliance and the effectiveness of requiring license plate numbers on permits for enforcement purposes. Members shared experiences with polite enforcement approaches that generally resulted in compliance. The committee expressed particular concern about one recent violation involving tree stumps, noting that while violations occur, they don't want to penalize the majority of compliant users for the actions of a few violators.

Committee Preference: After extensive discussion, the committee leaned toward maintaining the current system (Option 1) with modifications including seasonal operation from April through October, more frequent burning of smaller piles, and clear communication to users that continued violations could result in further restrictions or closure. The committee agreed to present all three options to the full council for discussion and decision, emphasizing that they would recommend a one-year trial period with reevaluation in November 2026. They also suggested posting clear warnings that continued violations could result in restrictions or closure of the facility.

Budget- goal setting

5-Year Budget

The committee discussed the need for comprehensive budget planning in the near future. Priority topics include reviewing seal

coating plans, examining long-term funds and potential transfers between funds, and assessing remaining bond obligations. Lammers reported that the streets survey is nearly complete, with all streets documented except for some newer sections where she is still researching construction dates and details. The committee identified several streets needing attention, particularly the area near Crossroads where the pavement is "alligatoring" and breaking into chunks. Lammers explained that this indicates base problems that would require reclaiming or complete reconstruction rather than simple resurfacing. Discussion included emerging asphalt technologies, with one member noting that some contractors now incorporate recycled shingles into asphalt mixes, which reportedly improves durability and provides an environmentally beneficial use for waste shingles. The committee also discussed the beneficial timing for potential tax increases, noting that significant new construction will be added to the tax rolls in 2027. This growth in the tax base would allow for modest increases (3-4%) without noticeable impact on individual taxpayers while building necessary reserves for infrastructure improvements.

Extension of Dianne Avenue

Albright reported that a property owner who purchased a lot is finding his excavated area insufficient for house construction and needs to remove additional material from the back hill. He inquired about using this fill material to extend Dianne Avenue past the current barricades. Albright took photographs of the area and identified several conditions that would need to be met: the existing stormwater outlet rocks cannot be disturbed; any mature tree removal would be at the property owner's expense; he would be responsible for relocating and replacing signage; and any fill must be properly graded to avoid creating dangerous slopes. Lammers suggested running the proposal by city engineer Blaine Green of Widseth before proceeding, particularly given previous water drainage issues in the area that required significant work to resolve. The committee agreed this would require a graded fill permit and council approval, but felt the conditions mentioned would address their primary concerns.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting at 5:04 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer

Council Recommendations

- Recommend to City Council to vacate the alley at city expense, with the right-of-way to return 50/50 to the respective landowners.
- Recommend to City Council that the city add gravel near the fire hydrant on West Elm Street, though this work cannot be completed until road restrictions are lifted.
- Recommend to Council that City place a small amount of gravel by the fire hydrant on West Elm Street (after road restrictions are lifted).
- Committee: Present yard waste site options to Council at the next meeting for decision, including recommendation to limit site operation to April 1–October 31, and to re-evaluate in November.

Follow Up Actions

- Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane and Maintenance Operator Matt Engebretson: Burn smaller piles at the yard waste site, with burns to be started by 10 AM, especially on Mondays, to reduce smoke and fire hazards.
- Lammers: Post notice on city website regarding possible future restrictions on yard waste site use if violations continue.
- Lammers: Schedule meeting with Superintendent Mike DuFrane to review seal coating plans, budget, long-term funds, and bond status.
- Lammers: Send proposed Diane Avenue fill/extension plan and conditions to Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth for review before Council decision.
- Committee: Make recommendation to Council by April 21 regarding allowing fill on Diane Avenue, pending engineer review.