

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, July 21, 2026**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 PM, on Tuesday, July 21, 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	P/P	P	P	P/P					
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	A	P/A					
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	A/P					
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/A					
James Stenger, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P					
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P					
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A	A/A	P	A	P/P					
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P	A	A	A/A	A	A						

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

Present via Zoom: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum, Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth, and citizens Marcia Huddleston and Michael Miller.

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles

Call to Order

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

Citizens' Concerns

None.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

None.

Approval of Consent Agenda

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

Committee Reports

Park Board

Lammers reported on two items brought forward by the Park Board.

North Star Ski Team Dock Storage Request: The Park Board recommended permitting the North Star Ski Team to store their dock on the Long Lake Beach during the winter months, positioned near where the City's own dock is stored. DuFrane indicated the team would arrange for a local business to remove the dock from the lake and confirmed it would not obstruct the parking lot or walking trail. The Council expressed concern about consistency, with Lammers noting that another property owner had previously been denied permission to store personal property on City land. Members acknowledged that while the ski team serves a community function, allowing one outside party to store equipment on City property could open the door to additional similar requests. The suggestion was made to table the request, explore whether alternative storage locations might be available to the ski team, and allow more time for community input before making a decision.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to table the dock storage request was made and seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Bathhouse Demolition Request: The Park Board recommended that the existing bathhouse be demolished and replaced with porta-potties until a new bathhouse can be constructed, with the intent to pursue fundraising and grant writing in the interim. Lammers presented cost estimates that had not been available to the Park Board at the time of their recommendation. Demolition of the existing structure was estimated at approximately \$7,000, and porta-potty rental for four units would cost approximately \$1,360 per week, or roughly \$16,320 per summer season. With no defined timeline for new bathhouse construction—potentially two to three years—the cumulative cost could reach \$40,000 or more in addition to demolition expenses. Stenger noted the ongoing financial exposure given the absence of a construction timeline.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to deny approval at this time and to notify the Park Board of the associated costs. The motion passed unanimously.

CDH-Vergas Fire Board

Bruhn reported that the CDH Vergas Fire Board accepted a proposal from West Central Initiative and Holsen Solar to proceed with the installation of solar panels on the fire hall. All townships and the City approved the plan. Three resolutions were presented for Council action.

Resolution – City of Vergas as Fiscal Agent for Solar Project:

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve resolution 2026-009 regarding the resolution authorizing the City of Vergas to act as fiscal agent for the CDH-Vergas Fire Board solar project (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution – Acceptance of Solar Proposal:

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to approve resolution 2026-010 regarding the resolution to accept solar proposal from Holsen Solar (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution – Solar Project Financing through West Central Initiative:

Mayor Bruhn noted that financing through the West Central Initiative carries a zero-percent interest rate, consistent with how the City financed its own solar project. The initiative covers upfront loan costs and expenses.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve resolution 2026-011 regarding the resolution to support seeking solar project financing from West Central Initiative (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Engineering

Green reported that the primary noteworthy update was the completion of the lead service line investigation. City staff, led by DuFrane, were able to confirm and document the remaining unknowns in the system. The updated information is expected to be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Health within the week, effectively closing out the investigative phase of the lead service line compliance effort.

Utilities Superintendent

Water Tower Fence: DuFrane presented four quotes from Eastman Fence for fencing around the water tower site. He recommended proposal number 4 and proposed extending the fence to the wood line, adding approximately 75 linear feet beyond the originally quoted scope. The additional fencing would cost \$2000, bringing the total project cost to \$15,990. Lammers confirmed that the grant covering this project was for \$15,000, with the remaining \$2000 to be funded from the water fund. Council concurred that the full perimeter should be enclosed provided all specifications and requirements were met.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve proposal number 4 for the well site fence at a total cost of \$15,990. The motion passed unanimously.

Lift Station Failure: DuFrane reported that Lift Station No. 4 experienced a failure the previous Thursday, taking out both pumps, starters, and capacitors simultaneously. The cause was attributed in part to a foreign object—a stuffed animal—that had damaged one pump, while the second pump was an older unit. Additionally, a nearby household had been consuming an abnormally high volume of water—approximately 250 gallons per hour—from June 12 through July 18, contributing to the circumstances surrounding the failure. A water audit was conducted on that property. The station was restored to full operation by the morning of the meeting. Total repair cost was \$10,806.09, with additional pumping fees also to be invoiced. All costs will be charged to the sewer fund.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to authorize payment of the lift station No. 4 repair costs of \$10,806.09. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Bruhn expressed concern about the sewer fund's financial position, noting the recent audit had already indicated challenges, and asked that the Water and Sewer Committee prioritize a budget review. Lammers confirmed the Water and Sewer Committee would be meeting in early August and a report would be available for the next council meeting.

Resolution – Acceptance of Traffic Cones from the State: DuFrane reported that 50 traffic cones, surplus items the state had intended to discard, were obtained at no cost through a contact at the state prison. The cones, valued at approximately \$18 each, had already been delivered.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the resolution 2026-008 regarding the resolution accepting the donation of fifty (50) traffic cones from the State of Minnesota (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Clerk-Treasurer

Deputy Clerk Training – League of Minnesota Cities Clerk's Academy: Lammers requested authorization for the Deputy Clerk to attend the League of Minnesota Cities Clerk's Academy in Staples on September 10–11, 2026. Lammers noted this coincides with her own attendance at the MCFOA Advanced Academy, which would necessitate closing the City Office on September 10th. She indicated that urgent matters could be handled through the Liquor Store and that she would remain accessible by email.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the Deputy Clerk's attendance at the LMC Clerk's Academy. The motion passed unanimously.

Website Refresh Project: Lammers presented options for updating the City's website, driven by two needs: transitioning from a .com to a .gov domain, and achieving ADA compliance as now required by the federal government for smaller cities. The current vendor, PaulNet, quoted \$1,450 for a refresh of the existing site, with a .gov domain migration available for \$200. Lammers noted that outside vendors capable of building an entirely new website had quoted \$5,000–\$10,000. Bruhn noted that website usability had been identified as a concern in the City's Comprehensive Plan and expressed a preference for a more substantive redesign rather than a minimal refresh. Council agreed it would be preferable to gather additional quotes and develop a clearer vision for the new site before committing to any option.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to table the website refresh project pending additional quotes and input on desired features. The motion passed unanimously.

Budget Report: Lammers distributed revised budget documents showing expenditures against the full annual budget rather than the mid-year estimate format previously provided through the City's CTAS accounting system. She noted these figures run through July 21st and include partial July expenses. The Water and Sewer Committee will meet ahead of the August council meeting to begin the budget process. Lammers also noted she had begun preliminary discussions with all committees regarding their needs for the coming year.

Event Center Coordinator

Lammers reported that rental revenue is approximately \$3,000 ahead of the same period last year. Social media advertising by Event Center Coordinator Rachel Nustad has been credited with increased visibility and bookings, including events already booked into 2027. On the capital side, two furnaces (approximately 30 years old) and two air conditioners at the Event Center required replacement, along with a refrigerator previously approved by the Council. The total cost for HVAC replacement was \$31,328, which will be recorded as a capital outlay expense. Lammers noted that the city had historically spent \$25,000–\$30,000 annually subsidizing the Event Center, and the new, more efficient equipment is expected to reduce operating costs. Utility rebates from the gas company were also anticipated. Additionally, the Event Center's solar installation came online in the second week of July.

Liquor Store Manager

Lammers reported that liquor store sales are up 22.3 percent through the first six months of 2026. However, overall spending is running approximately \$50,000 behind budget. The store's new manager has been on board for two weeks and is progressing well in training. The city budgeted a \$30,000 transfer from the liquor store to the general fund; no transfer has been made to date in 2026.

LMC Conference Review by Mayor and Council Members

Bruhn provided a written review of the League of Minnesota Cities Annual Conference. Bruhn highlighted several sessions she attended, including presentations on visual storytelling for public communications, navigating infrastructure funding (featuring the City of Floodwood's success in securing significant housing funding), and a panel on energy efficiency in which she participated on behalf of Vergas. She also attended the Small Minnesota Cities network and Minnesota Energy Coalition sessions. Legislatively, Bruhn noted this was a bonding year rather than a budget year, making it a relatively quiet session. One item of note passing was a new requirement for massage therapists to obtain licensure and criminal background checks. Proposed zoning legislation did not advance. Looking ahead, the League indicated priorities for the next legislative session would include data centers, LGA tied to inflation, local sales tax reform, transportation funding, housing and zoning, and challenges surrounding the availability of municipal auditors. Bruhn highlighted the value of the vendor fair, where Vergas made useful contacts. Stenger also noted that the conference's increased focus on sessions tailored to small cities was a welcome improvement, and echoed the Floodwood session's message about the importance of proactive planning and readiness to act when funding opportunities arise.

Information & Announcements

Mayor Bruhn announced that the Vergas Energy and Resiliency Plan has been published and is available on the City website. The plan was announced at the LMC Conference and generated significant interest from other municipalities. Local office filings are open July 14–28 for the positions of Mayor and two Council Members, with a \$2.00 filing fee.

Employee 2026 Trainings:

- A. 16th Annual Operator Expo (MN Rural Water) – August 25, 2026, for the Utilities Superintendent and Maintenance Operator.
- B. Clerk's Advanced Academy – September 10–11, 2026, in Otsego, MN, for the Clerk-Treasurer.
- C. Clerks Academy – September 10-11, 2026, in Staples, MN, for the Deputy Clerk.

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 7:11 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer