

Street/Sidewalks/Yard Waste Committee Meeting Minutes
Government Services Center
August 13th, 2026 at 10:30 AM.

2026	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bruce Albright, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P	N/A	P	P	N/A	P				
Paul Pinke, Council Liaison	N/A	N/A	P	N/A	P	P	N/A	P				
Mike DuFrane, Utilities Superintendent	N/A	N/A	A	N/A	P	P	N/A	P				
Julie Lammers, Clerk Treasurer	N/A	N/A	P	N/A	P	P	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 Thursday, August 13th, 2026 at 10:30 AM at the Vergas Government Services Center and Zoom.

Present via Zoom: Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth and citizen James Stenger.

Lammers called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM.

Agenda Additions or Deletions

Albright moved to add Scharf Avenue under Streets to review its current status.

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

Minutes

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the minutes from May 14, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

The June 11, 2026, minutes were not yet available and were not acted upon.

Municipal Road Agreement

Lammers had spoken with Christie Field, Highway Maintenance Coordinator Otter Tail County highway Department regarding the Municipal Road Agreement, and it was agreed that she would meet directly with Lammers and DuFrane. A copy of the agreement is to be distributed to committee members by September 1. No changes to the agreement have been proposed, and no concerns were raised from the City's operational perspective.

Yard Waste

Permits

Lammers reported that 253 yard waste permits have been sold to date, which is slightly below the prior year's pace at this point in the season. An additional spike of approximately 20–30 permits is anticipated in October, typically driven by seasonal cabin closures. Albright commended Superintendent DuFrane and Maintenance Operator Matt Engebretson for keeping the yard waste site neat, well-managed, and complaint-free. The committee noted that operating two burn piles this year has been more effective, and that compliance from permit holders has been notably better than in past years. The improved communication and coordination with the Vergas CDH Fire Department and the DNR were credited as contributing factors. The DNR has not received complaints, and burns have been efficient and complete.

Easement

The committee discussed a request from a resident for a 16-foot driveway easement across City-owned yard waste property to allow direct access from his parcel to County Road 17. The resident currently has an easement to West Lake Street through adjacent property, but is seeking a more direct route.

The committee reviewed the property configuration via GIS and acknowledged the significant topographic challenges, including a steep hillside, that would make construction of such an access difficult. DuFrane expressed concern that a driveway easement could ultimately be used to pursue a road, which the committee agreed would be inappropriate given the property's function as a DNR-permitted burn site. The committee further discussed requiring that the easement be explicitly limited to a personal-use driveway and that the easement holder be responsible for all legal costs associated with drafting the document, as well as any erosion remediation that may result from construction activity.

The committee agreed to recommend approval in concept to the City Council, with the understanding that the City Attorney would draft the easement with appropriate restrictive language, and that the resident would be informed of the attorney fees he would be required to cover before the process moves forward.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend to the City Council approval of a personal-use driveway easement for the resident, subject to the applicant bearing all legal costs and the easement language restricting use to a personal driveway. The motion passed unanimously.

Streets

West Lake Street

Improvement Project

A. LRIP Grant

Lammers informed the committee that the Minnesota Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP) has identified unspent funds from 2023 projects and will reopen the grant application period from September 1 through November 25. All applications must be submitted fresh; prior applications cannot simply be carried forward.

The committee discussed whether to re-engage the City's grant consultant at an estimated cost of \$2,500, or to prepare the application in-house. It was agreed that Lammers would prepare the application, drawing on the previously submitted materials and incorporating feedback regarding regional significance scoring, which had been identified as a weakness in the prior application. Albright moved that the committee review the completed application before submission.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to authorize Lammers to prepare and submit a new LRIP grant application, with the application to be reviewed by the committee prior to submission. The motion passed unanimously.

A committee meeting will be scheduled in November to review the application before the November 25 deadline.

Tree Trimming

The committee discussed the previously solicited bids for tree trimming and removal along the City road right-of-way. Three bids were received: Three Pines submitted an hourly rate of \$350/hour (estimated at approximately \$2,100 for 6–7 hours of work focused on dead, dying, and diseased trees); Heartwood Tree Experts submitted a bid of approximately \$16,000 for full removal of all trees; and Carrs Tree Service submitted bids of \$11,475 for full removal and \$3,900 for removal of dead trees and overhanging branches only.

The committee concurred that hiring Three Pines on an hourly basis to address dead, dying, and diseased trees represents the most cost-effective and appropriate approach, particularly given the liability exposure associated with dead trees in the right-of-way. Funding would come from the Streets Repair and Maintenance budget, which has approximately \$6,000 remaining of the \$8,000 appropriated for 2026. DuFrane agreed to contact Three Pines to confirm that their quote remains valid. The committee also noted the need to coordinate with adjacent property owners regarding an old fence line attached to trees targeted for removal.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend to the City Council to hire Three Pines for dead tree removal along the road right-of-way for a maximum of \$2,500, with funds drawn from the Streets Repair and Maintenance budget. The motion passed unanimously.

Additionally, DuFrane noted for the record that a section of right-of-way on Glenn Street had been inadvertently left unmowed, as staff had assumed it was the adjacent property owner's responsibility. Upon review, it was confirmed as City responsibility, and the area was mowed. No formal action was required.

Graveling

[Discussed as part of the Budget – Goal Setting item; see section below under 2027 Budget.]

Scharf Avenue / Sheriff's 3rd Addition Development

Lammers reported that two property owners in the Scharf 3rd Addition development have requested water and sewer

connections, with at least one intending to begin construction imminently. Lammers indicated that connections cannot be authorized until the development's road and stormwater infrastructure is formally accepted by the City.

Lammers relayed that the City engineer, Green, had received a report from the developer's engineer regarding the storm pond and has recommended that the City continue to withhold acceptance of the development. The pond was found to be approximately 40 percent short of required capacity, even after modifications made by the developer earlier in the season. Blaine indicated he would be providing the developer with three or four options for bringing the pond into compliance. Lammers confirmed the item was removed from the upcoming council agenda pending resolution of the stormwater issue.

The committee discussed the ongoing nature of the issue and expressed frustration that repeated attempts by the developer to modify the pond have not achieved compliance. Albright emphasized that the City must hold firm on its engineering standards, noting that if the pond handles only 60 percent of the designed storm event, the overflow would ultimately reach the lake. DuFrane raised an additional concern about future maintenance accessibility of the pond given its current configuration, drawing a comparison to similar issues encountered at the beach trail area. The committee agreed the matter remains squarely in the developer's court and that no acceptance of the development should occur until the pond meets specifications.

Budget – Goal Setting

2026 Budget Comparison

Lammers provided a summary of current 2026 budget performance. The Streets Repair and Maintenance budget of \$8,000 has seen approximately \$1,375 in expenditures to date. The street improvements budget of \$15,000 has seen minimal spending, and staff expressed optimism that unspent improvement funds may be recommended for transfer to the City's designated savings/money market account later in the year. The City's money market account currently holds \$620,457.23, of which \$378,000 is designated for the 2019 Street Project bond payments. Other designated fund balances include \$42,305 for street improvements and equipment, \$13,246 for seal coating, \$8,728 for the City shop, and \$7,959 for sidewalks.

Lammers explained that year-end unspent budget funds, upon Council approval, are transferred to designated accounts within the money market, and that the City's fiscal guidelines require maintaining a minimum reserve of \$170,000 while not exceeding \$290,000 in undesignated funds. Current undesignated reserves stand at approximately \$241,000, within the required range.

2027 Budget

Lammers presented proposed 2027 budget figures across several areas, with the committee discussing and refining the proposals as follows:

City Shop: The proposed 2027 budget increases from \$10,632 to approximately \$47,396, with the primary change being \$31,000 for capital improvements. The committee acknowledged the shop, built around the year 2000, is overcrowded and that equipment is being stored outdoors. Discussion centered on the feasibility of constructing additional cold storage on the current site, constrained by the fact that the land was acquired through state tax forfeiture specifically for water tower infrastructure. Lammers noted the state conducted a compliance review approximately ten years ago and that any expansion of structures on that property would require state authorization. The committee agreed that Albright and DuFrane would walk the property to assess feasibility before any formal request is made to the state. The \$31,000 line item was recommended to remain in the proposed budget.

The committee also discussed the possibility of purchasing adjacent property for a new facility but acknowledged that suitable City-owned or available parcels are limited. A special assessment line of \$5,000 for Glenn Street was discussed; given that paving is not anticipated until 2028 at the earliest, the committee agreed this line item could be removed.

Recycling Center: The proposed 2027 budget increases from \$17,316 to \$24,464. The principal change is an increase in the improvements line from \$3,000 to \$10,000 to account for anticipated loader maintenance or replacement costs, including potential acquisition of a grapple attachment. DuFrane noted the existing loader is aging and that a significant breakdown would likely cost at minimum \$10,000. The committee approved the increase to \$10,000 for the improvements line.

Street Lighting: The current 2026 budget is \$12,000, with year-to-date spending of approximately \$9,000. Recent additions at Lawrence Lake, Scharf Avenue, and Sunny Oaks are complete and incorporated into the monthly Otter Tail Power billing. Proposed Main Street decorative lighting was discussed but is tied to the anticipated Otter Tail County road resurfacing project, currently expected in 2028. The committee agreed to leave the street lighting budget at \$12,000 for 2027 rather than increase it, as no additional lights are planned in the near term.

Streets: The proposed 2027 streets budget increases from \$152,350 to \$223,513. Key changes include:

- *Graveling:* DuFrane obtained a quote of \$42,000 to gravel all City gravel roads in a single year. The committee discussed phasing this over four years at approximately \$10,500–\$15,000 per year to make it more financially manageable, similar to the approach taken with water and sewer infrastructure. Lammers noted that Small Cities Assistance funds received through the vehicle surcharge tax may also be applicable to street graveling and should be researched further.
- *Improvements:* Increased from \$15,000 to \$50,000 to account for potential West Lake Street project costs (including City share of engineering and assessments if the LRIP grant is awarded) and other street improvement needs. The committee discussed the condition of Scharf Street, which was part of the 2019 project but is already showing significant cracking, potentially due to heavy truck traffic. A no-trucks sign has been posted. The committee also discussed the long-term cost comparison between graveling and paving certain roads, noting that while paving carries a high initial cost, ongoing maintenance savings should be weighed when planning future projects.
- *Engineering:* Increased from \$28,000 to \$37,500 to account for potential grant-related engineering work.
- *Insurance:* Noted as subject to continued significant annual increases.

The committee also addressed an immediate equipment need raised by DuFrane: the tractor forks are no longer serviceable after repeated welding repairs, and replacement forks are available from a hardware supplier at \$1,329. The committee moved to recommend Council approval of the purchase.

Motion Albright, seconded by Pinke, to recommend to the City Council the purchase of replacement tractor forks at a cost not to exceed \$1,329. The motion passed unanimously.

Regarding longer-range equipment planning, DuFrane raised the future need to replace the aging tractor (approximately 24 years old) and potentially acquire a skid steer with tracks and attachments, estimated at just under \$100,000. The committee agreed this should be planned over a multi-year budget horizon, with Albright suggesting a 5-year planning window. No formal action was taken, but staff was encouraged to begin researching options and pricing and to report back. The committee also discussed the ongoing challenge of locating a suitable used single-axle snowplow truck, noting the narrow window between availability and the need for Council authorization to purchase. The committee agreed staff should continue monitoring the market and bring promising opportunities forward promptly.

Sidewalks: A minor \$500 increase was noted, attributable to prior-year repair work in front of the post office. The budget was accepted as proposed.

Sand and Salt / Snow Removal: Budgets left unchanged. The \$500 snow removal contractor contingency line was retained as a precautionary measure.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the 2027 budget approval. The motion passed unanimously.

5-Year Budget

Discussion of the five-year budget was incorporated into the 2027 budget conversation, particularly regarding long-term equipment replacement planning for the tractor, skid steer, and snowplow truck. No separate formal action was taken.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting at 12:30 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Recommendations

- Recommend to the City Council approval of a personal-use driveway easement for the resident, subject to the applicant bearing all legal costs and the easement language restricting use to a personal driveway.
- Recommend to the City Council to hire Three Pines for dead tree removal along the road right-of-way for a maximum of \$2,500, with funds drawn from the Streets Repair and Maintenance budget.
- Recommend to the City Council the purchase of replacement tractor forks at a cost not to exceed \$1,329.

Follow Up Actions

- Lammers: Email the Municipal Road Agreement to the committee once received.
- Lammers: Update the LRIP grant application for resubmission in September, incorporating additional points for regional significance, and schedule a committee meeting in November to review the application before submission.
- DuFrane: Research the cost and feasibility of paving versus graveling roads, and report back to the committee.
- DuFrane: Contact Three Pines to confirm if they will honor the bid for tree removal (dead/dying/diseased trees) at a maximum of \$2,500, and report back to Council.
- DuFrane: Walk the city shop property with Albright to assess potential locations for a new building or addition.
- DuFrane: Start looking for a used single-axle snowplow and keep the committee informed of any potential deals.