

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, August 18, 2026**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 PM, on Tuesday, August 18, 2026 at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid regular public meeting.

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	P				
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	A	P/A	A				
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	A/P	P				
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/A	P				
James Stenger, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P	P				
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P	P				
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A	A/A	P	A	P/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, Lin Peterson and Dennis Bartunek with the North Stars Water Ski Show Team, and citizen Loren Menz.

Call to Order

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

Citizens' Concerns

Resident Loren Menz raised three concerns regarding his property, which is adjacent to a recently accepted road (Glenn St) in a new development.

Steep Embankment / Mowing Hazard: Menz explained that when the road was constructed, the grading created an extremely steep embankment along his property line that is, in his view, virtually impossible and dangerous to mow with a power mower. He asked the Council for suggestions on how to maintain it safely.

Thistle Infestation: Menz stated that prior to the development, there were no thistles on or near his property. He attributed the spread of thistles to the construction activity in the new development, noting that two neighboring lots had thousands of thistles left unaddressed for nearly two years. Despite spraying his own property five times last year and three times in the current season, he stated he was not gaining ground on the problem, and expressed that it was difficult for him to manage the issue while neighboring and City lots remained uncontrolled.

Notice of Violation Letter: Menz described receiving a letter declaring him a "public nuisance" for high grass and thistles, which he and his wife found deeply upsetting due to its confrontational tone and demands. He objected to the requirement to mow 100% of his property, noting that a substantial portion is naturally wooded, rocky, and steep land that has never been mowed in the 30+ years he has lived there. He emphasized that he is 80 years old and that maintaining the area at the standard described in the letter is physically impossible and potentially dangerous. He noted that at least 20 to 30 other properties within City limits are in similar situations, and he stated that if the City intended to enforce such a standard on him, it should be enforced equally across all such properties. He also expressed frustration that he was contacted by letter rather than in person, noting that when he served on the Council, a more personal approach was used.

Bruhn acknowledged Menz' concerns and agreed that the existing violation letter came across as threatening and overly legalistic. She explained that the City had been working on a revised notice format and a clearer process — including an appeal or exemption mechanism — for situations where mowing is physically impossible. City Attorney Karen Skoyles recommended that any exemption be documented in writing, with the applicant providing a written explanation and, if possible, photographs, and that the City maintain a corresponding file with its own notes and observations.

The Council discussed whether to grant Menz a formal exemption at the current meeting or to defer until a formal application process was in place. It was agreed that the City would begin maintaining a spreadsheet of exempt properties, and that Menz' parcel

would be noted with the relevant circumstances. Menz requested that in the future, the City communicate with him directly rather than by written notice.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

The Planning Commission committee report (included in the consent agenda) and would be addressed under Committee Reports. The rescheduling of the September meeting was added as item 7 on the agenda.

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

Approval of Consent Agenda

The consent agenda was presented with the Planning Commission committee report item noted as addressed separately under Committee Reports.

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

Committee Reports

Water/Sewer

Lammers reported that the Water and Sewer Committee met on August 10, 2026, and brought forward recommendations regarding aging lift station pumps and utility rate adjustments.

Lift Station Pump Replacement: The two main lift station pumps are over 30 years old and require replacement. Each pump is priced at \$16,686. The Committee recommended purchasing one pump in 2026 and one in 2027. For 2026, \$12,000 previously budgeted for riser replacement — which will no longer be needed given the pump replacements — will offset the cost, resulting in an additional expenditure of \$4,686 beyond the existing budget. The 2027 budget will include the full \$16,686 for the second pump.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the purchase of one lift station pump in 2026 and one in 2027 per the above terms, and to raise the sewage usage rate by \$0.50 effective September 1, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

Rate Increases Effective January 1, 2027: The Committee also recommended raising the sewer base rate by \$2.50 per thousand gallons raising the water base rate at \$32.00 per month with a usage rate of \$5.00 per thousand gallons, both effective January 1, 2027. Albright was noted as intending to write an article for the City Newsletter explaining the need for these increases to residents.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the 2027 water and sewer rate increases as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Haarstick joined the meeting.

Park Board

Lammers discussed a request from the North Stars Water Ski Show Team to store their docks and boat lifts on City park property over the winter months. Representatives Lin Peterson and Dennis Bartunek presented the request, explaining that hauling and storing the equipment off-site costs approximately \$1,500 per year. They indicated the organization holds insurance on the equipment through USA Water Ski and SafeSport, and expressed full flexibility regarding placement and timing of removal and reinstallation.

The Council acknowledged the value the Water Ski Show brings to the community and the City but raised concerns about setting a precedent, given that previous requests from private property owners to store docks on City land had been denied. City Attorney Skoyles noted potential liability concerns — particularly regarding unmarked equipment in winter creating hazards for snowmobilers — and cautioned that the City should have a clear policy before granting such approval in order to legally distinguish between a community-benefit nonprofit organization and a private property owner.

Following discussion, the Council agreed to table the item to allow DuFrane to meet with Peterson and Bartunek to identify a suitable storage location, and for staff to prepare a storage policy for Council consideration at the September meeting.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to table the Park Board dock and lift storage request and direct staff to develop a policy and site recommendation for the September meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Streets/Sidewalks/Yard Waste

Keilley Shores 3rd Edition: Lammers reported that the Keilley Shores 3rd Edition development has met all requirements for approval except for the stormwater basin, which remains deficient. The property owner indicated that excavation would occur by the following Friday or Monday and that a certificate from the MPCA would be obtained. City Engineer Blaine Green, confirmed that he

would recommend the City to accept the project upon completion and certification of the stormwater basin. No action was taken; the item will return at the September meeting.

Driveway Easement Request — Yard Waste Parcel: A property owner requested a 16-foot driveway easement across the far end of the City's yard waste parcel. The Streets Committee recommended allowing the easement to proceed, subject to conditions that the applicant pay all legal costs including a survey and written legal description, and that the easement be restricted strictly to personal driveway use and may not be used as a street, alley, or access for future development.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the driveway easement in principle, subject to the applicant providing a survey with written legal description, bearing all associated costs at no expense to the City, and only to be used for a driveway. The motion passed unanimously.

Dead Tree Removal — West Lake Street: Three quotes were obtained for removal of dead trees along the West Lake Street right-of-way. The lowest quote, from Three Pines, was recommended for approval at a maximum cost of \$2,500, to be funded from Streets Repair and Maintenance.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the dead tree removal contract with Three Pines at a cost not to exceed \$2,500. The motion passed unanimously,

Tractor Fork Replacement: The existing tractor forks, obtained originally as scrap metal and subsequently repaired multiple times, have become unusable. Replacement forks were recommended at a cost not to exceed \$1,329.

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

Planning Commission — Nuisance Abatement, 130 East Elm Street: Lammers reported that the Planning Commission has issued both first and second nuisance violation notices to the property at 130 East Elm Street and recommends the matter be referred to the City Attorney for abatement proceedings. City Attorney Skoyles outlined the process, which requires personal service of a formal notice of violation and hearing upon the property manager and the principal listed with the Secretary of State. The property is not owner-occupied; the property manager previously refused certified mail. Attorney Skoyles noted the manager's address is in Fargo and the principal's address is in Walker, and that personal service via process server or county sheriff would be required.

The Council discussed a compliance deadline of September 1, 2026, with a public hearing to be held prior to the September Council meeting at 6:15 PM.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to proceed with abatement of the nuisance at 130 East Elm Street, with a compliance deadline of September 1, 2026, and a public hearing to be held at 6:15 PM prior to the September Council meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Engineering

Green reported that the lead service line inventory for the City is substantially complete. No lead lines were identified in the City's water system, which he noted is a positive outcome. The Keilley Shores update was covered under Committee Reports.

Utilities Superintendent

DuFrane reported that installation of the fence around the water treatment plant commenced that day. One section of the fence cannot yet be set due to an uncertain property line at the rear of the treatment plant near Third Street, where the City's backwash holding tank appears to be located close to or on the property line. DuFrane recommended obtaining a survey of the treatment plant property to establish the legal boundary. Green indicated the survey cost would be approximately \$1,500 to \$2,000.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to authorize a property survey of the water treatment plant parcel, with costs to be drawn from the water project fund. The motion passed unanimously.

DuFrane also reported that the third phase of a multi-year water system project is scheduled to begin the following day, and that he and Maintenance Operator Matt Engebretson plan to attend the 2026 Northern Operator Expo in Grand Rapids on September 23, 2026 — a location change from the previously approved Waconia site.

Clerk-Treasurer

Otter Tail County EMS Meeting: The Otter Tail County EMS meeting was moved to Monday, August 24, 2026. As Lammers has a planning commission meeting that evening, Bruhn offered to attend on the City's behalf and Council approval was sought.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to authorize Mayor Julie Bruhn to represent the City at the Otter Tail County EMS meeting on August 24, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

Event Center — Pergola: The Event Center's pergola is showing wear since it was last built in 2020. A quote of \$560 was received to pressure wash and re-stain the building, to be funded from the event center budget.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the pressure washing and staining of the Event Center exterior at a cost of \$560 was made and seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Event Center — Cooler Replacement: The three-door cooler behind the bar at the Event Center is no longer functional. A quote from Lammers for two locking, two-door replacement coolers at \$1,699 each was provided and reviewed at the meeting. The quote had been obtained by Event Center Coordinator Rachel Nustad. Two units are proposed, for a total of approximately \$3,398, to be funded from the Event Center budget. A locking mechanism was noted as particularly important given alcohol storage and the high volume of children's birthday party rentals the facility has been experiencing.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to approve the purchase of two locking two-door coolers at \$1,699 each. The motion passed unanimously.

Tax Abatement Amendment — Two Parcels: Lammers reported that Otter Tail County identified an error in the abatement agreements approved in December 2025, noting that the parcels were recorded incorrectly relative to where the homes are located. A public hearing is required to amend the agreements. The County's public hearing is scheduled for September 8, 2026. The Council agreed to hold a City public hearing at 6:00 PM prior to the September Council meeting.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to schedule a public hearing at 6:00 PM on September 8, 2026, to amend the tax abatement agreements for two parcels. The motion passed unanimously.

City Website Refresh: Lammers presented two quotes for a website redesign. Go Pilot quoted \$6,400 for the first year and \$3,400 per year thereafter, with a three-year commitment. PaulNet quoted approximately \$1,450 annually with no multi-year commitment, consistent with the City's prior arrangement. Both vendors confirmed the updated website would be ADA compliant, which the federal government now requires by 2028. The Council noted the importance of including an accessible ordinance section on the site.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to proceed with PaulNet for the City website refresh. The motion passed unanimously.

Grass Violation Notice — New Format: Lammers presented a revised notice of violation form for high weeds, noxious weeds, and high grass, adapted from a form used by the City of Detroit Lakes and recommended by City Attorney Skoyles. The new form was described as less threatening and more clearly written than the current notice, which had been criticized — including earlier in the meeting — for its confrontational language. The revised form includes a formal process for recipients to submit written objections or appeal for exemptions within 48 business hours of receiving the notice.

The Council discussed the proposal to also amend practice so that properties receiving a first notice within a 12-month period would be subject to City mowing without a second letter if the violation recurs. Stenger expressed concern that this approach could result in residents being billed without adequate warning in situations where circumstances delay compliance. Following discussion, the Council agreed to retain the current practice of issuing subsequent notices rather than proceeding directly to City-performed mowing, and that provision was removed from the proposal. The new notice form was approved as a policy change, not an ordinance amendment.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to adopt the revised grass and noxious weed violation notice form. The motion passed unanimously.

Liquor Store Manager

Part-Time Cashier Hire: The liquor store manager requested approval to hire Robert Marynik as a part-time cashier.

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the hire of Roger Marynik as a part-time cashier at the liquor store. The motion passed unanimously.

Point-of-Sale System Replacement: Lammers reported that a POS system was brought in on June 1, 2026, at no cost by the prior liquor store manager after the previously used system was discontinued by its vendor. The new system has experienced persistent problems since installation. The current manager has been evaluating alternatives and received a quote for a system used by the liquor stores in Hawley, Barnesville, and Battle Lake, which would cost approximately \$1,650 per year — comparable to the existing

monthly expense. As the cost exceeds the \$2,500 threshold requiring multiple quotes, staff will obtain a second quote before bringing the matter back for Council approval at the September meeting.

September Meeting Date Change

Lammers has a conflict with the regular September 15, 2026, Council meeting date. Given that budget discussions and related financial materials require her participation, the Council considered moving the meeting to September 8, 2026 — the day after Labor Day. Council members and City Attorney Skoyles confirmed availability. The September 8 meeting will include two public hearings prior to the regular meeting: the tax abatement amendment hearing at 6:00 PM and the nuisance abatement hearing for 130 East Elm Street at 6:15 PM, with the regular Council meeting to follow.

Motion by Haarstick, seconded by Pinke, to reschedule the September Council meeting to Tuesday, September 8, 2026, at 6:30 PM, with public hearings at 6:00 PM and 6:15 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Information & Announcements

The following employee training events were noted for informational purposes:

- A. LMC Clerk's Academy, September 10–11, 2026, Staples, MN — Deputy Clerk
- B. Clerk's Advanced Academy, September 10–11, 2026, Otsego, MN — Clerk-Treasurer
- C. 2026 Northern Operator Expo, September 23, 2026, Grand Rapids, MN — DuFrane and Engebretson

Adjournment

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting was called was completed and adjourned at 7:56 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer