

## Annual City of Vergas Address 2023

This past year has been focused on the future. The future of the city of Vergas.

A major accomplishment was the completion of a City Comprehensive Plan. Though this is not required of us by Minnesota Statute, there was clear value in this rigorous endeavor and speaks volumes to our investment in this community.

The plan reflects a shared vision moving forward to the year 2036 and serves as the core document in guiding the priorities, planning and budget for the City of Vergas. It also positions Vergas for further grant opportunities where information is required to demonstrate community gaps and needs that supports requested funding. Special thanks to the steering committee and West Central Initiative who led this effort.

The component of land use, entailing the physical development of the city, was a re-occurring theme intertwined in several sections of the plan.

Major needs identified in the plan included parking, housing, and business development and support.

- **Parking** was the most expressed need, citing lack of parking has discouraged business activity, it impacts those with limited mobility and presents safety risks. There has been some progress in addressing parking with new diagonal parking along 1<sup>st</sup> street and a planned parking lot at the site of the OTC highway building that the city acquires this year.
- The comprehensive plan notes the need for single family **housing**, affordable housing, housing for the aging to remain in Vergas, as well as more available rental. Two housing developments were reviewed and approved by the Council this past year and more rental became available with the new commercial space, Altona Square. Vergas has continued to experience a demand for housing in the community.
- In terms of **Business Development and Support**, there is the desire to keep the unique downtown charm and character of Vergas. Namely noted was not having chain box stores. Also deemed important was the availability of commercial rental, versus purchasing, to attract new businesses and physical space growth options. The Council worked with and approved new commercial building that opened this year. This included Summers Construction and Design Center and Altona Square home to a much-desired Grocery Store in the community, a pastry bakery and fitness center. Vergas has had success in keeping its downtown occupied.

Also identified in the Comprehensive plan as important to the future of Vergas was support for active living for all age groups, specifically highlighted were parks, recreation, and the arts.

The Parks Committee has been working with NDSU Landscape Architecture Department to develop concepts for a future vision of Long Lake park. Next steps is a masterplan incorporating the identified key elements. Vergas was also recently awarded a grant with the Partnership-4Health to put together a Trail plan looking at future multi-use paths between Vergas and the Heartland of the Lakes Trail and the Heartland Trail. In addition, a community group has been formed to plan and expand the future presence of the arts in the community and additionally this year Vergas welcomed a fitness center and pickleball courts.

An important component for the future is continuing to leverage technology in advancing City Operations and communications.

One important tool was the purchase of GIS (Geographic Information System). This database supports our ability to make decisions with accurate street and utility maps and lay out of city land space. Good decisions starts with good data.

Streets are a critical component of our public space and infrastructure. A Complete Streets Plan was approved this year, providing a framework for current and future development to include early consideration of streets and transportation and the factors that should be considered and given priority.

A component of the Complete Streets plan was a conducting a comprehensive inventory of city streets. The City Engineering firm, completed a comprehensive street condition survey to evaluate each street with an overall summary of the total city streets by length, condition and cost. The data entry into GIS provides the City a valuable repository of all streets to guide future street improvement plans and projects.

In conclusion, this is just a partial summary of city activities in 2022. The intent of this address was to highlight the important work that has been accomplished to position Vergas for the future by creating a future oriented vision that will align for continued success.

Special thanks to city staff, city council, city committees, city engineer and attorney for your support in shaping Vergas for the future.