

CITY OF VERGAS
PUBLIC HEARING
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, May 19, 2026

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:15 PM, on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid public hearing, with the following members present: Mayor Julie Bruhn, Council Members Bruce Albright, Paul Pinke, Dean Haarstick, and James Stenger. Absent: None.

Also present: Clerk-Treasurer Julie Lammers and Utilities Superintendent Michael DuFrane.

Present via Zoom: Engineer Blaine Green of the Widseth; and Citizens, Michael (no last name provided)

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, and Citizens, Shawn Day, DeRae Day, Jeremy Brenning, Laura Osborn, Debra Jacoby and Carl Hoffman.

Public Hearing

Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the public hearing to order at 6:15 PM, noting that the proposed vacation had been initiated by City Council resolution to avoid spending public funds on property no longer serving a public purpose. The recommendation originated from the Streets Committee, and Albright provided context, explaining that the alley in question leads into a swamp and has never functioned as a thoroughfare. He outlined the legal process: the council holds a public hearing, receives testimony from adjoining landowners, and then takes action during the regular council meeting.

Three adjoining landowners were present and addressed the Council.

Jeremy Brenning and Laura Osborn (110 West Elm Street) spoke first. They stated that while they had previously filed a statement of support for the vacation, they wished to withdraw that support, citing their neighbors' opposition. They explained the dispute originated from a desire to establish a graveled driveway to access their garage, which faces the alley. They had offered quit claim deeds to both neighboring property owners as one avenue toward resolution. Their central position was that the alley already carries what amounts to a de facto driveway easement — pointing to a 2008 survey showing an existing gravel footprint — and that they simply wished to restore gravel to that original imprint at their own expense. They noted that had they known they could resurface an existing driveway without a permit, they would have done so without initiating any of this process. In all outcomes, they stated they sought either an easement in writing or permission to maintain the gravel access to their garage.

Shawn Day (251 First Avenue) stated clearly that he did not want the alley vacated, noting that if it were vacated, he would move his fence to the precise boundary of his half of the alley. He expressed concern about the adverse possession statute, asking for assurance that the City retains ownership of the alley even though neighbors have been maintaining it. He also noted that the alley provides the only access to several lots behind his home.

Carl Hoffman also stated he did not want the alley vacated, noting he uses it occasionally for leaf removal and has mowed it many times himself.

The City Attorney Skoyles clarified that the scope of the hearing was limited to the question of vacation or non-vacation, and that all other matters — including easements and the right to gravel the alley — were beyond the scope of the hearing. She further noted that a dedicated public alley cannot be privately occupied, and that an individual easement cannot be granted over a public dedication.

Hearing no further questions or comments, Bruhn closed the Public Hearing at 6:38 PM.

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, May 19, 2026**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:39 PM, on Tuesday, May 19, 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							
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P							
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P							
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P							
James Stenger, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P							
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P/P	P							
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A	A/A	P							
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P	A	A	A/A	A							

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

Present via Zoom: Engineer Blaine Green of the Widseth; and Citizens, Michael (no last name provided)

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, and Citizens, Shawn Day, DeRae Day, Jeremy Brenning, Laura Osborn, Debra Jacoby and Carl Hoffman.

Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the meeting to order at 6:39 PM.

Citizens' Concerns

None.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

Bruhn noted the following modifications: the Fire Board Committee Report was added as a new item, the Planning Commission Committee Report was moved from the Consent Agenda to be addressed separately; and a railroad update was added as item 10 prior to adjournment.

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

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Vacation of Alley

Following the public hearing, Bruhn summarized that all three property owners present had expressed opposition to vacating the alley. The Council proceeded to a vote.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to not vacate the alley, as noticed in the hearing notice. The motion passed unanimously.

Albright subsequently raised the question of whether the Council could pass a separate motion granting Brenning and Osborn permission to place and maintain gravel on the alley at their own expense, specifically in front of their garage. Considerable discussion followed. Council members debated whether this action would set a precedent for others to gravel City alleys; Bruhn and City Attorney Skoyles raised concerns about oversight, proper drainage, erosion, and the fact that the alley remains public property. Utilities Superintendent DuFrane expressed concern about gravel washing off the slope into neighboring yards or the slough below, noting similar problems with other graveled areas in the City.

Brenning clarified that he intended only to gravel where gravel was previously shown on the 2008 survey plat — no more than the original footprint — and that they would bear all costs and liability. Albright argued that the motion addressed a specific, practical need for access to the property and was not a blanket authorization for anyone in the City to improve alleys.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to grant permission for Jeremy Brenning and Laura Osborn to place and maintain gravel on the city alley adjacent to their garage at their own expense, limited to the area in front of their property at 110 West Elm Street. Voting yes: Albright, Pinke and Haarstick. Voting no: Bruhn and Stenger. The motion carried.

Otter Tail County Giants

Haarstick distributed informational cards from Otter Tail Lakes Country regarding the promotion of local events and the "Giants of Otter Tail County" program, which aggregates and publicizes community events across the county. He noted that organizers have been impressed by event attendance in the area.

Committee Reports

Park Advisory Board

Haarstick reported on behalf of the Park Advisory Board. The board's primary recommendation was approval of funds to repaint the Loon, with an estimated cost of \$2,250, to be drawn from existing park board budget funds.

Motion by Haarstick, seconded by Stenger, to approve the painting of the Loon at a cost of \$2,250 from park board funds. The motion passed unanimously.

Fire Board Committee Report

Bruhn reported that the Fire Board had met the previous evening and recommended that the City of Vergas and each participating township contribute funding for the reconstruction of the retaining wall adjacent to the fire station, near Hanson's on the corner. The wall is crumbling and deemed in imminent need of replacement. The lowest bid received was \$48,871.02 from an unnamed contractor. Based on Vergas's 11% share of the fire board budget, the City's portion would be \$5,375.81. As part of the project, the parking lot will be lowered to street level, eliminating the current elevation difference. The item was not a budgeted expenditure, but Lammers noted the City is currently well within its overall budget.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the City of Vergas's contribution of \$5,375.81 toward the fire station wall reconstruction project. The motion passed unanimously.

Planning Committee Report

Albright reported that the Planning and Zoning Committee had been addressing a long-standing code violation at 350 Pelican Avenue involving a garage subject to a court-ordered removal decree. The property owner had voluntarily signed an agreement allowing him until May 15 to remove personal belongings, after which the City or its designated contractor would proceed with demolition at the owner's expense. The council voted to abate the violation and proceed.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the abatement resolution (a complete text of resolution can be reviewed at the City Office) and proceed with demolition of the garage at 350 Pelican Avenue. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Engineering Report

Engineer Blaine Green reported that he had substantially completed the gravel pit report and expected to transmit a digital copy to the City the following day. He noted he had met with Utilities Superintendent DuFrane the previous Friday to review winter conditions and punch list items for the parking lot project, including topsoiling.

Albright raised a question regarding apparent modifications to a storm water retention on Scharf Avenue, noting that work appeared to have been done. Engineer Green confirmed that the pond still does not meet required specifications. The property owner's engineer independently reached the same conclusion — that storage capacity is insufficient due to an inlet set too low and walls that are too narrow. Green noted that the property owner is reportedly working on a remediation plan, though no timeline has been provided.

Clerk Treasurer Report

Lammers reported that a bid from Sonnenberg Excavating for the demolition had been received in the amount of \$5,500. A cost comparison using City staff labor was estimated at approximately \$4,566 assuming 16 hours. Council members and Utilities Superintendent DuFrane expressed strong preference for using the professional contractor, citing liability concerns, equipment risk, and the height of the structure.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to award the demolition of the garage at 350 Pelican Avenue to Sonnenberg Excavating for \$5,500. The motion passed unanimously.

Ringdahl Subsidy

Lammers reported on an Otter Tail County meeting regarding ambulance service financial sustainability. Ringdahl Ambulance (serving the Pelican Rapids area) is over \$100,000 in the negative and continuing to worsen. The County presented information about ambulance services statewide facing financial difficulties, including an example of another county that absorbed ambulance costs into the property tax levy. That approach would not be implementable in Otter Tail County until approximately 2028 at the earliest, and no formal movement in that direction has been made. Ringdahl is again requesting voluntary financial contributions from cities and townships, with a suggested amount of \$7,117 from Vergas based on population calculations, though they indicated flexibility. Bruhn noted the Fire Board had also discussed the request and expressed concerns that

Ringdahl's financial position may be overstated, particularly in contrast to another local service that has provided full financial transparency. The Council raised concerns about triple taxation — with state, county, and municipal funds potentially all flowing to the same service — and the fact that contribution or non-contribution does not legally affect service response obligations. No action was taken.

Insurance Deductible

Lammers presented information on the upcoming insurance renewal (effective September 1) and the potential for cost savings by increasing certain deductibles. The City's current property deductible was raised to \$5,000 last year in response to a 14% premium increase, with equipment breakdown at \$2,500 and other coverages at \$1,000. Another rate increase is anticipated but the amount is not yet known. Council directed Lammers to present several deductible interval options alongside the actual premium figures prior to the September 1 renewal date. No action was taken; the item will remain on a future agenda.

Election Judges

Lammers presented Resolution 2026-006 to hire election judges for the August 11 and November 3, 2026 elections. Pay rates would be \$17/hour for the head judge and \$15/hour for other judges, including training time (2 hours for regular judges, 3 hours for the head judge). Lammers also noted that the candidate filing period would run July 14–28 (copy of resolution can be reviewed at the City Office)

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to approve Resolution 2026-006 hiring election judges for the 2026 elections. The motion passed unanimously.

Utilities Report

DuFrane reported that the annual inspection of the boardwalk revealed that the pipe bracket holders are pulling out of the boardwalk in approximately 8 to 12 locations. He confirmed this is a warranty issue and that the manufacturer, Minnesota Boardwalks, has been contacted and acknowledged the issue but could not provide a timeline for repair due to their current workload. No City expense is anticipated for this repair.

Information & Announcements

Bruhn provided an update on ongoing coordination with Canadian Pacific Railway regarding two available grants, with a focus on crossing safety and impacts to the community when rail crossings are blocked. Letters of support were submitted by the City of Vergas, the school, Fire, and EMS, representing entities affected by railroad crossing delays. Grant applications are due in June, and Canadian Pacific is proceeding based on the submitted letters of support.

Meetings and Events

- Household Hazardous Waste Day — Thursday, June 25, 2026, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM, Vergas Event Center Parking Lot
- Employee 2026 Trainings:
- League of MN Cities Annual Conference — June 24–26, 2026, Rochester (Mayor Bruhn, Council Member Albright, and Council Appointment James Stenger)
 - 16th Annual Operator Expo (MN Rural Water) — August 25, 2026 (Utilities Superintendent and Maintenance Operator)
 - Clerk's Advanced Academy — September 10–11, 2026, Otsego, MN (Clerk-Treasurer Lammers)

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting was called was completed and adjourned at 7:17 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City-Clerk Treasurer