

City of Vergas Planning Commission Minutes

Monday, June 22, 2026 at 6:00 PM

Government Services Building and Zoom

The City of Vergas Planning Commission held a regular hybrid meeting on Monday, June 22, 2026, on Zoom and at the Vergas Government Services Building.

2026	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alex Ohman, Chair	A	P	P	P	P	A						
Bruce Albright, Liaison	P	P	P	P	P	P						
Dave Johnston, Member	P	P	P	P	P	P						
Rebecca Hasse, Member	P	P	P	A	A	P						
Jim Courneya, Member	P	A	P	P	P	P						
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P	P	P						
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A	A	P	P						

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

Present in person: Citizens Julie Bruhn, Marcia Huddleston and Dean Haarstick.

Present via zoom: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum; and Citizen, James Stenger.

Call to Order

Vice Chair Albright called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Agenda Additions or Deletions

An addition was made to include a discussion of the noxious weeds ordinance (§ 92.38).

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

Minutes

Motion by Courneya, seconded by Johnston, to approve the minutes from May 18, 2026. The motion passed unanimously.

Status of Council Recommendations

None.

Construction Permits

Active Construction Permits

Did not review.

Construction Permit Applications

Approved by email

Lammers reported that the following permits had been administratively approved:

250 1st Ave N — Parking lot and curbing for Vergas Auto. The City's loan program was utilized for the repairs.

110 S Railway Ave — A 10×16 pre-built building to be placed approximately 5 feet from the property line on the railroad side of the property.

Needing Approval

306 E Frazee Ave — 8×24 Garage Addition and 218' Privacy Fence

Lammers presented this application, noting that the property is adjacent to the ball diamonds and had previously received a nuisance letter. The applicant intends to enclose vehicles and equipment behind a privacy fence just under 6 feet in height, placed 12 inches from the property line as required by ordinance—placing it approximately 96 feet back from the front of the 100×250-foot lot. The applicant had located and flagged his property pins. Commission members noted the fence would come close to the road accessing the park but confirmed it would remain within the applicant's property. Lammers confirmed that the applicant's existing and proposed structures total approximately 2,512 square feet, well within the permitted 25% lot coverage of 6,250 square feet. The applicant also submitted a letter clarifying the purpose and use of items on the property.

Motion by Johnston, seconded by Courneya, to approve the construction permit for 306 E Frazee Ave. The motion passed unanimously.

230 E Frazee Ave — Vergas Veterans Memorial Park — Signs

Lammers advised that the Veterans Memorial Park project involves the installation of several 2×3-foot signs. Work had already commenced, with post holes dug in the areas previously used for the park's ongoing development. Signs include one describing the painted rock, one honoring Henry Ditterich, and others recognizing veterans.

Motion by Haase, seconded by Johnston, to approve the construction permit for 230 E Frazee Ave — Vergas Veterans Memorial Park. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

Nuisance Properties

Lammers provided an update on properties that had received nuisance letters following the May inspection. City staff had photographed properties that day. Lammers summarized responses received from several property owners:

- **840 E Sharf Ave** — The owner contested the zoning designation, believing their lakeshore property was in an R-2 district; Lammers clarified it is zoned R-1. The owner indicated lumber on-site was intended for a future permitted structure and offered to have it moved if required prior to permit approval.
- **390 S Pelican** — The owner stated that vehicles have collector plates and that tabs were being obtained for the other vehicle.
- **161 3rd Ave S** — The fish house was removed prior to the letter being sent.
- **431 Lake St** — The owner called to say a pickup had been moved, and that campers on the property are stored, not occupied.
- **306 E Frazee Ave** — The owner submitted a letter clarifying that his orange structure is a permitted fish house, the wood pile has been removed, and that his trailers are work equipment essential to his livelihood. He noted the privacy fence, if approved, would screen the remaining items.
- **201 Hill St** — The owner expressed frustration at repeated notices, stating all vehicles are licensed and drivable and that no more than four are outside at a time unless being worked on. He inquired about the possibility of a conditional use permit for demolition derby vehicles.

The commission discussed the demolition derby car situation at length. It was noted that the City Attorney had advised that all vehicles must be treated equally within city limits. Huddleston noted the practical difficulty of licensing demo cars, as the DMV typically does not register them given they are transported by trailer. The commission recognized a tension between enforcing the ordinance's requirement that vehicles be licensed and operable, and the reality that demo cars are generally not considered road-operable by their nature. Albright noted that placing a demo car on a trailer technically satisfies the ordinance, but acknowledged it presents no visual improvement over leaving it on the ground.

Haarstick spoke regarding his commercial property, explaining that he operates a specialist tractor repair business and that customers travel from as far as Montana and Plymouth to have equipment serviced. He noted that some tree removal and tidying had begun. The commission acknowledged that his property is zoned commercial, and that a different set of ordinances applies, including to his residence which remains commercially zoned.

Regarding **130 E Elm**, Lammers stated that neighboring residents had been calling the office as frequently as every day to report excessive garbage accumulation at the property—both inside and outside structures. Two neighboring properties reported an increase in rodent activity they attributed to the situation. The commission agreed this property warranted advancement to the next enforcement step.

Following further discussion, the motion to table all properties was withdrawn. The commission took the following actions:

Motion by Courneya, seconded by Johnston, to advance **130 E Elm** to the certified letter phase (Phase 2) of the nuisance enforcement process. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Hasse, to table further action on the remainder of the nuisance property list pending additional review. The motion passed unanimously.

The commission also took up two additional properties involving vehicles without current license plates:

- A vehicle parked behind a building at 146 Main St E was noted to have a valid license but four completely flat tires, prompting questions from complaining residents about operability.
- An unlicensed vehicle for sale in the 110 Railway Ave N parking lot was identified as lacking plates.

Motion by Courneya, seconded by Johnston, to send first-notice nuisance letters to the owners of both the 146 Main St E property and the 110 Railway Ave N parking lot property. The motion passed unanimously.

City Ordinance Update

§ 91.06 KENNELS

Lammers brought this item forward after receiving an inquiry from a resident wishing to own a fourth dog, and after learning of at least two households in town currently keeping four dogs. Under the current ordinance, keeping three or more dogs constitutes a kennel, which is further declared a nuisance and prohibited within City limits. The Commission noted that the City has historically licensed households with up to three dogs without apparent issue, which may constitute an inconsistency.

Discussion centered on whether the definition of "kennel" was ever intended to apply to private households with multiple pets, or whether it was meant to address commercial boarding operations. Several members felt the term "kennel" more naturally describes a commercial boarding enterprise, and that the current language is a poor fit for a small City like Vergas. The Commission agreed that a commercial-style kennel with numerous dogs would be inappropriate in town due to noise and odor concerns, but recognized that simply increasing the permitted number of dogs for private ownership may be a more sensible approach.

It was agreed that staff would research how other municipalities—including Perham, Detroit Lakes, and Ottertail County—address dog ownership limits, and also review applicable state statutes and county ordinances, before any amendment is considered.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Hasse, to table § 91.06 for further research. The motion passed unanimously.

§ 92.38 OWNERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRIMMING, REMOVAL AND THE LIKE

Bruhn presented this item, noting particular concern about the Lawrence Acres addition, where approximately eight homes have been built but many vacant lots remain unmowed and are heavily infested with thistles and other noxious weeds. She shared photographs showing widespread weed growth along roadways throughout the addition, and noted that letters had been sent approximately three weeks prior without any observable response. Several landowners had indicated they do not intend to mow because they are not yet building, and at least one stated the City should mow first.

The Commission discussed the practical and physical challenges involved, including terrain that is too steep for riding equipment in some areas, low or soggy ground in others, and a large lot where a farmer is expected to cut hay. Albright emphasized a distinction between noxious weeds—which are regulated by state law and must be controlled regardless of terrain—and general vegetation height, which may be impractical to enforce uniformly on large or difficult parcels. He noted that the ordinance itself acknowledges that mowing may sometimes be "unreasonable or impractical under certain circumstances."

Courneya noted he holds 17 acres within City limits and could not realistically manicure that entire area, pointing out that a single standard does not fit the diversity of properties within the City. Members agreed, however, that thistles are an urgent matter given their imminent bloom and rapid seed spread, and that noxious weed control is both an ordinance and a state law obligation that must be acted upon immediately regardless of construction status.

The consensus was that the ordinance adequately distinguishes between noxious weeds and general vegetation, and that the City's immediate priority should be ensuring noxious weed control in the Lawrence Acres addition. Bruhn confirmed she would follow up with affected landowners as the City's designated Weed Inspector under state law. The Commission also noted that road right-of-way maintenance is the responsibility of the adjacent property owner, including mowing and weed control up to the edge of the road, consistent with practice throughout the rest of the City.

The commission also discussed thistle growth along the county road between the nursing home and the swimming beach, noting that a member could contact Otter Tail County directly to request spraying and mowing of that corridor.

Motion by Courneya, seconded by Johnston, that noxious weeds must be addressed as a priority and that no further action be taken regarding the general vegetation/height provisions at this time. The motion passed unanimously.

Camping Ordinance

Lammers introduced this item, explaining that the current camping ordinance was adopted in February 2016 at the initiative of the EDA, which had hoped to encourage development of a formal campground in Vergas. The ordinance defines a Recreational Camping Area (RCA) as any area with three or more tents or recreational camping vehicles, and no licensed RCA currently exists in the City. Lammers noted a growing number of residents are keeping campers on their properties for extended periods—sometimes the entire summer—with family members residing in them, without registering as required.

The Commission discussed challenges with enforcement, as owners often deny occupancy when contacted. Sanitary waste disposal was identified as a primary concern, with Albright recalling a prior situation where a camper's waste was being discharged into a hand-dug pit. It was noted that the City's fee schedule does not currently include a camping registration fee, making it difficult to collect one this year.

Members also discussed the potential community benefit of a formal campground and the popularity of similar facilities in nearby communities such as Barnesville and near Pelican Lake. The Commission agreed the ordinance, as written, is focused on the development of formal camping areas and does not adequately address the reality of private residential camper use.

It was agreed to table action on this item to allow members time to review the full ordinance text (available on the city website) and the applicable Otter Tail County Shoreline Management provisions, which allow camping for up to 14 days within 1,000 feet of designated lakes—a buffer that covers nearly all of Vergas.

No formal motion was taken; the item was carried forward to the July agenda.

New Business

None.

Adjournment

Motion by Hasse, seconded by Johnston, to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Recorded by Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Secretary,

Julie Lammers, CMC

Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer

Council Recommendations

None.

Follow Up Actions

- Deputy Clerk: Send certified letters (Phase 2) to the property owner and tenant at 130 East Elm regarding nuisance property cleanup.
- Deputy Clerk: Send first letters regarding unlicensed/flat-tired vehicles to the property owners at 146 Main St E and 110 Railway Ave N
- Deputy Clerk: Research state statute, county ordinance, and other cities' ordinances regarding kennels and number of dogs allowed, and report back at the next meeting.
- DuFrane: Contact Otter Tail County regarding noxious weeds along the county road from the nursing home to the southern beach.