CITY OF VERGAS
PUBLIC HEARING
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, September 8, 2026

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:00 PM, on Tuesday, September 8, 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, Dean Haarstick, and James Stenger. Absent: Paul Pinke. Also present: Clerk-Treasurer Julie Lammers and Utilities Superintendent Michael DuFrane.

Present via Zoom: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum.

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Lin Peterson with the North Stars Water Ski Show Team, and Citizen, Paul Haarstick.

Public Hearing
Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the public hearing to order at 6:00 PM. Bruhn explained that this hearing was primarily administrative in nature, addressing an error in the abatement agreement in which an adjacent, unbuilt parcel had been listed instead of the correct parcel on which construction had occurred. The correction was necessary to satisfy county requirements for an exact parcel number. The Clerk confirmed that no written comments had been received, and no members of the public present wished to comment.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to approve the correction to the tax abatement parcel. The motion passed unanimously.

Hearing no further questions or comments, Bruhn closed the Public Hearing at 6:03 PM.

CITY OF VERGAS
PUBLIC HEARING
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, September 8, 2026

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:15 PM, on Tuesday, September 8, 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: Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum.

Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Lin Peterson and Dennis Bartunek with the North Stars Water Ski Show Team, and Citizen, Paul Haarstick.

Public Hearing
Call to Order

Mayor Julie Bruhn called the public hearing to order at 6:15 PM. The public hearing regarding the nuisance property at 130 East Elm Street was held. Lammers noted that the property owner had been given a deadline of September 1st to bring the property into compliance. Lammers reported that upon inspection on September 2nd, the yard had been fully mowed, cleaned, and cleared of all items, with only a lawnmower and gas can remaining on the property. Lammers noted a second drive-by inspection the evening of the meeting confirmed the property remained in compliance. Lammers noted that two residents had expressed appreciation to the City for having the matter resolved.

The Council then turned to the matter of fees associated with the nuisance proceedings. Lammers clarified that letters had been hand-delivered rather than certified, so there were no certified letter fees in the traditional sense. However, costs had been incurred for process serving and attorney fees. Costs discussed included approximately $312.50 in attorney fees, $117.20 and $90.00 in process service fees, though it was noted that the fee for service to the Fargo address—which had required three attempts—had not yet been received. The Council expressed consensus that all fees should be billed to the responsible parties, noting that the protracted nature of the situation, requiring repeated notices, justified full cost recovery by the City.

Given that the complete total of fees was not yet available, the Council agreed to table the final billing determination until the October meeting so that a precise invoice could be prepared and sent to both the landowner and the tenant.

Hearing no further questions or comments, Bruhn closed the Public Hearing at 6:17 PM.

CITY OF VERGAS

COUNCIL MINUTES

VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM

Tuesday, September 8, 2026

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:39 PM, on Tuesday, September 8, 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	P			
Bruce Albright, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	A	P/A	A	P			
Paul Pinke, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	A/P	P	P			
Dean Haarstick, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/A	P	P			
James Stenger, Member	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P	P	P			
Julie Lammers, Clerk-Treasurer	P	P	P	P/P	P	P	P/P	P	P			
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P	A	A	A/A	P	A	P/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 and Tasha Rohlfs of Otter Tail Lakes Country.
Present in person: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Lin Peterson and Dennis Bartunek with the North Stars Water Ski Show Team, and Citizen, Paul Haarstick.

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

Citizens' Concerns
P. Haarstick addressed the Council regarding the Personnel Committee's recommendation related to establishing a full-time employee position at the liquor store. He urged the Council not to accept the recommendation as written, raising two primary concerns. First, he argued that the reported negative balance of $65,000 reflects only a change in cash position, not actual insolvency, and that under accrual accounting the liquor store remains profitable. Second, he expressed concern that the recommendation, as written, would remove accountability from the liquor store manager and affected employee in determining appropriate staffing levels, particularly given that the employee in question had only expressed an interest in retirement or reduced hours—not a firm commitment. He encouraged the Council to empower the store's professionals to make staffing decisions in the best interest of the community.

Agenda Additions and Deletions
Lammers noted the following additions to the agenda: the 130 East Elm Street nuisance property hearing (already conducted earlier in the evening) would be formally inserted after the Tax Abatement; a presentation from Tasha Rohlfs regarding Otter Tail Lakes Country Magazine would be added; and the CDH Vergas Fire Gaming would be added to the consent agenda. No further additions or deletions were proposed.

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.

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

Tax Abatement
The Council confirmed that the tax abatement correction, addressed during the 6:00 PM public hearing, had received no public comment and was purely administrative in correcting the parcel numbers.

Resolution – Approving Property Tax Abatements
Motion by Albright, seconded by Stenger, to approve resolution 2026-015 regarding the Tax Abatement Agreements on behalf of the City of Vergas (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Hairy Man - Liquor License
The Council addressed the liquor license for the Hairy Man festival, including the associated fee for Liquor License.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the Hairy Man liquor license waving the fee. The motion passed unanimously.

Long Lake Beach Dock Storage Policy
Lammers presented a draft dock and lift storage policy developed in response to a request from the North Stars Water Ski Show Team to store their equipment on City property at Long Lake Beach during the off-season. Lammers noted that the City Attorney had reviewed the draft and identified additional provisions needed, particularly around insurance requirements—including the City being named as an additional insured and the storage party carrying liability coverage for potential incidents involving their stored property.

Representatives of the ski team were present and indicated they are a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit and that they had recently purchased their own dock and lift equipment after their previous arrangement with a donor ended. They described the proposed storage location as being on the sloped, undeveloped bank area below the plateau, away from the parking lot, playground, skating rink, and the landmark loon sculpture—and noted that snowmobiles do not typically travel in that area.

The Council discussed several concerns at length. Members raised the question of precedent, noting that a private landowner had previously been denied a similar request, and that a general policy could open the door to future requests the City may not wish to accommodate. The Council and City Attorney's guidance indicated that a specific agreement or policy tailored to the ski team, supported by documented findings of fact distinguishing them from private landowners—such as their nonprofit status, their community benefit (drawing visitors, providing programming for youth), and the public nature of their activities—would be the appropriate approach, though it was acknowledged such findings could still be challenged.

Discussion also addressed the physical parameters of the proposed storage area. The ski team noted their dock is approximately 88 feet in length and that they would be willing to compromise to a 50-linear-foot limitation to accommodate their equipment; they indicated it would need to be all-or-nothing in terms of usable space. The Council also noted that the 50-foot setback language in the policy lacked a clear point of measurement. Members emphasized that reflectors and orange snow fencing should be required to ensure visibility from the lake and from approaching snowmobiles. The Council's general sentiment was supportive of the ski team's presence and contribution to Vergas, while insisting that liability, insurance, and marking requirements must be clearly resolved.

Given that the policy language requires further refinement and insurance specifics need to be defined, the Council voted to proceed with developing the agreement for consideration at the October 20th meeting. The ski team was advised to prepare a contingency plan for dock removal in the event the policy is not finalized in time, as lake freeze-up could occur around that date.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to proceed with developing the dock storage agreement/policy for the ski team, to be addressed at the October 20th meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Otter Tail Lakes Country Magazine Presentation
Tasha Rohlfs, representing Otter Tail Lakes Country Magazine, presented via Zoom to update the Council on the partnership and discuss renewal options. She outlined the three partnership tiers—Platinum Otter ($5,000), Gold Otter, and Silver Otter—and reviewed the benefits Vergas had received at the Platinum level in 2026, including professional photography rights, two mascot appearances (Looney Days and the upcoming Hairy Man festival), visitor analytics reports, a robust magazine feature, and event promotion on the Explore Minnesota tourism calendar.

Rohlfs shared regional metrics, noting that Otter Tail Lakes Country had achieved 30 million social media impressions in the prior year and was already at 17 million year-to-date in 2026. Engagement had reached 1 million the prior year and was tracking at 672,000 so far in 2026. Vergas-specific content across 15 social media posts had generated 250,000 views. The magazine distributes 30,000 printed copies, fulfills approximately 1,700 by mail, and receives about 2,500 online views, available at 430 distribution locations. She also highlighted the successful "Giants of Otter Tail County" campaign, which had garnered regional and Twin Cities media attention and featured the Vergas loon sculpture prominently.

Rohlfs noted she would also present to the Vergas Community Club, which has historically split the Platinum membership cost equally with the City ($2,500 each). She requested renewal decisions by approximately October 1st to accommodate magazine layout planning.

The Council expressed appreciation for the partnership and the visibility it has brought to Vergas.

Motion by Haarstick, seconded by Pinke, to approve $2,500 for the Platinum Otter membership with Otter Tail Lakes Country Magazine. The motion passed unanimously.

Otter Tail County/Pelican Rapids EMS
Bruhn provided an update regarding collaborative discussions involving Otter Tail County and the Pelican Rapids EMS service area. General information was shared regarding regional emergency medical service operations and ongoing efforts to address EMS needs within the county. The Council received the information and no formal action was taken.

Committee Reports
Personnel
The Council discussed the Personnel Committee's recommendation regarding staffing at the liquor store, referencing the citizen concerns raised earlier in the meeting. The Council noted the direction to have Lammers gather further information, including what insurance-related costs might be involved, before taking action. No formal action was taken on the personnel recommendation at this meeting.

Budget
The Council briefly discussed budget-related matters and upcoming planning considerations for the 2027 budget. No formal budget amendments or actions were presented for consideration. The Council received the information and continued budget discussions will occur during future meetings.

Resolution -Adopting Tax Levy, Collectable in 2027

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve resolution 2026-014 regarding the resolution to adopt the tax levy which is collectable in 2027 (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

EDA/HRA
Fiscal Agent for Navigator Grant

Lammers reported on the potential opportunity for the City to serve as fiscal agent for the Navigator Grant. Discussion included the administrative responsibilities associated with acting as fiscal agent and the benefits of facilitating the grant project.

Resolution -Authorizing Application for Grant Navigator Support for the City

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve resolution 2026-013 regarding the resolution to authorize the application for Grant Navigator Support for the City (complete copy of the resolution is located at the City Office). The motion passed unanimously.

Energy
Charging Smart Cohort
Lammers provided information regarding participation in the Charging Smart Cohort program. The program offers technical assistance and resources related to electric vehicle readiness and planning. Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to authorize staff to move forward with participation in the Charging Smart Cohort program. The motion passed unanimously.

Prairie Planting Project
The Council discussed the proposed Prairie Planting Project and reviewed opportunities to enhance native prairie plantings within the community. Members discussed potential locations and the benefits of native plantings for appearance, pollinator habitat, and sustainability efforts. Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to move forward with the Prairie Planting Project. The motion passed unanimously

Staff Reports
Engineering
Engineer Blaine Green provided a written report.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to approve the final payment to Sonnenberg Excavating on the parking lot project. The motion passed unanimously.

Utilities Superintendent
DuFrane provided a brief update on ongoing utility operations and maintenance activities. Routine work within the water and wastewater systems continues, and no significant operational concerns were reported. The Council received the written report.

Clerk-Treasurer

Lammers acknowledged that a written report had not been submitted for this meeting due to a high volume of meetings attended during the prior month and committed to providing a comprehensive report the following month. Lammers noted a meeting with Otter Tail County, which now meets individually with each City rather than collectively, to review City projects and identify areas where the county could provide support. Topics discussed with the county included the park improvement project, the "Growing Up Vergas" state care project, the trail project, and West Lake Street improvements. Lammers noted that county representatives had commented during their visit that the restroom on their bus was better than existing City facilities, and that the county would notify the City if infrastructure funding opportunities become available.

Lammers also noted that the City office would be closed that Thursday, with staff coverage arrangements made through the liquor store. Lammers would be attending a conference Wednesday afternoon through Friday, and Deputy Clerk Rachel Nustad would also be absent Thursday and Friday for Clerks Academy.

Liquor Store Manager

Lammers reported that the liquor store's current Point of Sale (POS) system is not providing the information and reporting capabilities needed to effectively operate a municipal liquor store. Staff had researched replacement options and obtained quotes from multiple vendors. A quote from Jamie's Service and Repair for the L-BOSS POS system was presented in the amount of $7,090. Lammers noted that several neighboring municipal liquor stores utilize the L-BOSS system and have had positive experiences with the software. It was further reported that replacement equipment would be needed, as the current equipment is privately owned and would not remain with the store. Discussion was held regarding the costs, functionality, and long-term benefits of upgrading the system. Council consensus was that the purchase would improve inventory tracking, reporting capabilities, and overall store operations.

Motion by Haarstick, seconded by Albright, to purchase the L-BOSS POS system from Jamie's Service and Repair, with funding to come from the Certificate of Deposit. The motion passed unanimously.

Lammers reported that the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT) had notified members of upcoming changes regarding coverage for THC-infused beverages and edible cannabinoid products due to federal law changes. Discussion was held regarding the City's current THC product sales at the liquor store and the need to explore alternative liability coverage options if the City chooses to continue selling those products. Lammers stated that the Vergas Insurance Agency is researching available coverage options and will provide additional information to the Council as it becomes available. No action was taken.

Lammers reported that part-time employee Alyssa Hartmann had submitted her resignation, and the Council was asked to formally accept it. Motion by Pinke, seconded by Stenger, to accept the resignation. The motion passed unanimously.

Information & Announcements

Events: A. Solar Fair — Vergas Event Center, Saturday, October 10, from 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM.
Employee 2026 Trainings: A. 2026 Northern Operator Expo — September 23, 2026, in Grand Rapids, MN (DuFrane and Engebretson).

Adjournment

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting was called was completed and adjourned at 7:57 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer