

Vergas State of the City Address 2025

Past annual addresses have had a focus on planning, vision for the future, and partnerships. Those themes remain important to the work of the city, but this year resilience was introduced as important to the future of Vergas. Resilience is the capacity to anticipate, adapt, and respond to disruptions while maintaining essential functions that ensure long-term survival and growth. Through collaborations with ESMC (Empowering Small Minnesota Communities), RSDP (Regional Sustainable Development Partnership), and WCI (West Central Initiative), Vergas has advanced efforts to strengthen city resilience.

The 2022 City Comprehensive Plan remains the overarching road map for the future of Vergas to the year 2036. Currently, 86% of the identified strategies have been either completed or progress made. Parking, housing and businesses were identified as top focus areas, which have received ongoing attention since 2022. Of note in 2025 was the completion of the city center parking lot. Additionally, 2 Handicap parking designations were added to downtown parking. With the 3 new housing developments, 48(94%) of the 51 housing lots have been sold. The EDA/HRA (Economic Development Administration/Housing Redevelopment Authority) and VCC (Vergas Community Club) provide strong support to the business community. The EDA/HRA continues to offer the Business Façade Improvement program and is maintaining the CEDA (Community & Economic Development Associates) contract for 2026. CEDA has been invaluable in providing services and expertise in identifying improvement opportunities and funding resources. The EDA/HRA made it a priority this past year to secure a daycare in Vergas. A purchase agreement has been made that secures a daycare location at 303 Altona Avenue. The EDA/HRA is visiting other community daycares, researching grant opportunities and established a daycare committee to lay out the operational framework. It should also be noted the VCC maintains a high visibility through the hosting of community events to bring people to Vergas and its expansion of Looney and Holiday dollars to direct spending to our local businesses.

Within the Comprehensive Plan the importance of our Parks and Open Space was also identified. This was further validated by the Resilience and Energy Survey conducted in April this year. The protection of lakes and natural environment scored as the highest area of concern in the survey. In 2023 a Parks Improvement plan had been devised. The Long Lake park is very important to the City of Vergas recreationally, environmentally and economically. Funding has been the barrier to executing the plan. In November the City Council approved a sales tax resolution to request permission from the State Legislature for a ½ cent sales tax increase on City of Vergas retail sales. If approved this would be placed on the November 2026 elections ballot. Based on historical data of city sales, it's anticipated it would take approximately 5 years to raise the 1.2 million dollar estimated project cost. Priority is being given to upgrade the park restroom facility and park accessibility features. Additionally in 2023 a City of Vergas Trail feasibility study had been conducted and this year Vergas was connected to the Heart of Lakes Trail. Next step would be to connect to the Heartland Regional Trail targeted for the year 2031.

In May 2024 the City of Vergas was awarded grants from ESMC and RSDP. The grants focused on engaging in an energy initiative with direct benefits to the community fiscally and

environmentally. It entailed baseline assessment of municipal building energy use, energy audits of the municipal buildings and building enclosure evaluations. The City received another grant from MPCA (Minnesota Pollution Control Agency) to make the identified weatherization improvements for the Event Center, Fire Hall, and Liquor Store Municipal Building. These grants positioned the City of Vergas to receive further funding through West Central Initiative for installation of solar panels at the event center; along with installation of a battery bank that will support decreasing energy costs and providing energy back up capabilities for the community in the event of power failure.

In 2024 Vergas became the 149th Minnesota community to become a GreenStep City and this year a level 2 of 5 was achieved. GreenSteps is a recognition program that helps cities achieve resilience, sustainability and quality of life goals. To guide the city in achieving identified best practices, an Energy and Resilience Advisory Board was established this past year. Energy grant data, results of the community energy & resilience survey, and best practices outlined in the GreenStep program is guiding the work toward achievements in the following priority areas; energy and building infrastructure, natural environment and green infrastructure, water/lake system, and emergency preparedness and management.

In summary, Vergas has moved forward and experienced significant momentum in 2025 and demonstrated what is truly possible even if you're a small community. The 2025 story would be defined as what is possible. What is possible when a small community uses data, partnerships, commitment, and community engagement to achieve advancement, resilience and quality of life, while keeping the small-town charm and the heart of the community.