

**CITY OF VERGAS
COUNCIL MINUTES
VERGAS EVENTS CENTER & ZOOM
Tuesday, October 21, 2025**

The City Council of Vergas met at 6:30 pm, on Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at the Vergas Event Center and on a Zoom for a hybrid regular public hearing.

2025	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dwight Lundgren, Mayor	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P ⁷¹²					
Julie Bruhn, Mayor								P	P/P	P		
Bruce Albright, Member	P/P	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/A/A	P	P/P	P		
Paul Pinke, Member	P/P	P	P/P	A	P	A	P/P/P	P	P/P	P		
Dean Haarstick, Member	P/A	P	P/P	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P/P	P		
James Stenger, Member	P/P	P	P/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	P	P/P	P		
Mike Dufrane, Utilities Superintendent	P/A	P	P/A	P	P	P	P/P/P	P	P/P	P		
Kyle Theisen, Liquor Store Manager	P/A	P	P/P	P	P	P	A/P/A	A	A/A	P		

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

Also present: Attorney Karen Skoyles, Engineer Blaine Green of Widseth, Patrick Hollister of Partnership for Health, Editor Bob Williams of the Frazee-Vergas Forum; and Citizens, Marcia Huddleston, Brian Lende, Paul Bruhn and Cal Miller.

Call to Order

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

Citizen's Concerns

None.

Agenda Additions and Deletions

Mayor Bruhn noted that the 2025 Council Portfolio would be removed from the consent agenda as it would be addressed with the new year. Additionally, a gaming resolution for the T.I.P. was added to the consent agenda.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to amend the agenda as noted. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

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

Transportation Alternatives Grant

Patrick Hollister presented information about the Transportation Alternatives grant opportunity. He had previously worked with the city in 2023 when Partnership Health funded a trail plan for Vergas. Hollister brought three boards from the original trail plan and explained that there was an upcoming grant opportunity that Vergas could use to build a portion of the planned trail.

Hollister discussed two primary connections that were examined in the original plan:

1. Connecting Vergas to Frazee (and by extension to the Heartland Trail)
2. Connecting Vergas to Maplewood State Park

He noted that for the Maplewood connection, Ottertail County had already completed work on County Road 35 this summer, widening shoulders on both sides of the road to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, though it was too soon to evaluate usage as the project had just been completed.

Hollister explained the Transportation Alternatives grant details:

- Federal money distributed by MnDOT
- Two funding pools available in MnDOT District 4:
- \$620,000 available in 2029
- \$800,000 available in 2030
- 20% local match required
- Projects must be completed by the funding year or earlier
- Letter of intent deadline: November 7, 2025
- Full application deadline: January 9, 2026

He noted that MnDOT District 4 typically prefers to split each year's funding between two communities, meaning a successful application might receive approximately \$310,000 (from 2029 funding) or \$400,000 (from 2030 funding). Hollister recommended that the city authorize submission of a letter of intent, which would not commit the city to a full application but would provide time to consider options and receive feedback from MnDOT.

City Clerk Lammers noted that before moving ahead with an application, the city would want to coordinate with Ottertail County, Becker County, and Frazee, and would use Ottertail County's engineering services.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to authorize the Lammers to submit a letter of intent for the Transportation Alternatives grant by the November 7th deadline. The motion passed unanimously.

Utility Bill - 123 Main Street

Paul Bruhn addressed the council regarding a utility bill he had received for water service to his storage building located behind the Post Office. The bill reflected a three-year lookback charge plus the current month's service. P. Bruhn explained that the water service was installed in 1993 but had never been used, and he had never received a water bill since acquiring the building in 2015.

P. Bruhn provided a timeline of his attempts to get the water service disconnected during the recent parking lot construction:

- September 11: First notified about forthcoming water bill by Lammers.
- September 16: Council apparently approved the lookback charge (P. Bruhn was not present).
- September 17: Met with Albright to discuss disconnection.
- September 19: Curb stops were installed and water reconnected during construction.
- September 28: Further communication with Albright about disconnection.

P. Bruhn expressed frustration that despite multiple attempts to request disconnection, the water service was maintained during construction. He argued that since the water had never been used or metered, he should not be charged a lookback fee or monthly service fee.

City Attorney Karen Skoyles noted that communication appeared to break down and that proper formal communication with the city as a whole, rather than individual officials, would have been appropriate. Utilities Superintendent Mike DuFrane explained that proper abandonment requires disconnection at the corporation valve at the main, not just at the curb stop.

It was also revealed that the water line to P. Bruhn's building may be connected to the same service line that feeds the city offices, complicating disconnection.

Stenger raised the question about city policy, noting that residents who temporarily shut off their water are still charged the base rate.

P. Bruhn further raised concerns about an easement agreement, as the water line and curb stops were placed on his property during construction.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pink, to table the issue until the November meeting, with the Water and Sewer Committee to meet in the interim and bring a recommendation to the full council. The motion was amended to include waiving any late fees on the bill during this period of review. The motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

EDA/HRA

Albright reported on two items from the EDA/HRA:

1. A lot on Dianne Street that someone has expressed interest in purchasing, but the road ends before the lot begins. Albright and DuFrane examined the site and determined that extending the road would be complicated, requiring removal of approximately 30 trees and significant earthwork. They recommended withdrawing the EDA's proposal to extend the road and instead suggesting that any potential buyer take responsibility for access to the lot. The matter will be returned to the EDA for further discussion.
2. Resignation of DuWayne Ditterich from the EDA, effective December 31, 2025.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to accept the resignation of DuWayne Ditterich from the EDA effective December 31, 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

Lammers mentioned that the EDA has been working with a private party interested in building a daycare facility near a church. The party has requested waiving water and sewer hookup fees as well as the \$400 conditional use permit fee for having a daycare in a residential area. The council requested to have this request in writing with specific dollar amounts for consideration at the November meeting.

Streets/Sidewalk/Yard Waste Committee

Albright reported that the Streets Committee recommended applying for a Local Road Improvement Project program grant for Glenn Street and West Lake Street. The application deadline is December 1, 2025. The city had previously applied for this grant a couple of years ago and narrowly missed being funded.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to authorize Widseth and Lammers to resubmit an application for the Local Road Improvement Project program for Glenn Street and West Lake Street, in conjunction with approval from Ottertail County Highway Department, at a cost not to exceed \$2,500. The motion passed unanimously.

Liquor Store Committee

Stenger reported that the Liquor Store Committee discussed new regulations regarding low-potency THC drinks. According to new rules, if the liquor store sells THC products, no one under the age of 21 is allowed in the store. The committee weighed the financial benefit of continuing to sell THC products against the inconvenience of barring underage customers who might accompany parents.

Motion by Stenger, seconded by Pinke, to prohibit anyone under age 21 from entering the liquor store and to continue selling THC products. The motion passed unanimously.

It was noted that this policy would take effect on October 31, 2025.

Additionally, the committee discussed the requirement to register THC sales under an individual's name. Since the current liquor store manager is already affiliated with the dispensary in town, the committee recommended using the City Clerk-Treasurer's name for the THC permit application.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Haarstick, to authorize the City Clerk-Treasurer position to be used for the THC permit application. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports

Utilities Superintendent Report

DuFrane submitted a written report. Stenger asked if the water usage data provided was comparable to previous years. DuFrane stated that the wastewater numbers were comparable to previous years, with variations depending on rainfall and runoff.

Liquor Store Manager Report

Liquor Store Manager Theisen reported that:

- The final coat of sealer had been applied to the new concrete.
- He was waiting to hear back regarding gutter installation and signage.
- THC sales were increasing, while alcohol sales were of concern.
- Five or six product samplings were scheduled for the next month and a half.
- He was exploring potential advertising collaborations with a local business.
- Employee Shawna Jones had submitted her resignation effective October 29, 2025.
- The position would not be replaced during the winter season when staffing is typically reduced.
- Wine sales during the wine walk had been strong, consistent with it being the biggest wine sales week of the year.

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to accept the resignation of Shawn Jones. The motion passed unanimously.

Clerk-Treasurer Report

Lammers provided a written report with no additional updates.

2026 General Fund Budget

Lammers discussed the 2026 budget, noting that the 2025 income may be less than anticipated because the liquor store might not be able to transfer the full \$30,000 that was budgeted. She estimated they might be able to transfer \$10,000-\$15,000 instead, creating a potential \$15,000 shortfall.

She suggested the council consider whether to reduce the planned transfers to savings for either the parks or streets departments. She noted that streets were facing expensive projects and equipment needs, while parks might benefit from a potential sales tax if approved. The council was asked to consider these options before the November/December meetings when the final budget would be approved. She also mentioned that the Fire Department Board had not yet met, so their funding request for 2026 was still unknown.

Information & Announcements

Small Town Christmas event scheduled for November 29, 2025.

Adjournment

Motion by Albright, seconded by Pinke, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The business for which the meeting called was completed and adjourned at 8:02 PM.

Recorded by
Deputy Clerk
Rachel Nustad (assisted by ClerkMinutes)

Julie Lammers, CMC
Vergas City Clerk-Treasurer