

# City of Vernon Center – Council Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## Attendance

**Council Present:** Dana Ziegler, Wendy Bennett, Emily Edwards, Adam Finney, Lisa Peterson

**Staff Present:** Clerk Kara Hansen, Public Works Supervisor Mark Willette

**Others Present:** Engineer Chris Knutson, Tamara Dicks, Auditor Greg Burkhardt, Nick Sorenson, Chief Jesse Kietzer, Monte Raske

## Call to Order

Mayor Ziegler opened the regular council meeting at 6:00 PM.

## Approve Agenda

Mayor Ziegler asked to move Fidium-Consolidated to item 3 and Infrastructure project to item 4.

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to approve the agenda with the corrections; seconded by Councilor Bennett. All approved. Motion carried.

## 2025 Audit Presentation

The 2025 audit opinion was given an unmodified “Clean” audit. Regarding internal control over financial reporting, the City showed material audit adjustments classified as material weaknesses and significant deficiencies as “material weaknesses” and significant deficiencies showing as preparation of financial statements and limited segregation of duties. These findings are a result of the city only having one employee in the office and are common in small cities. Auditor Burkhardt recommended the city accept the risk. There were no Minnesota statute legal compliance findings. The unassigned fund balance was at 81% of expenditures in 2025. The year-end cash and investment balances were \$476,608 for water and \$415,989 for sewer. It was recommended the city watch their enterprise funds and research raising the rates in the future.

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to accept the 2025 audit findings; 2nd by Councilor Finney. All approved. Motion carried.

Greg Burkhardt said there were extra steps the city needed to take for the new Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave law. As the city elected to pay for their employee’s portions, they’ve essentially created a taxable income. Greg Burkhardt recommended they let his firm do the adjustments in Banyon and run a supplemental income to fix the employees W2s before the quarterly reports were run.

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to approve the CarlsonSV proposal for advisory services for the Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave; 2nd by Councilor Finney. All approved. Motion carried.

## **Fidium - Consolidated**

Nick Sorenson from Fidium said the alley that received work has had fresh gravel placed on it. PW Supervisor Willette asked about the work to be done behind St. Peter's Lutheran Church and St. Matthews Catholic Church. Nick Sorenson said the work will not be done on the grass. PW Supervisor Willette said that on Hilltop Street by the old meat locker, the two lines there and Fidium is cutting their own line and affecting the internet at the WWTP. Nick Sorenson said they will watch that area.

## **Infrastructure Project**

### **Engineer Update**

Engineer Knutson said there will be a resolution needed for the next meeting. There will also be a reconciliation change order. He spoke to Ed Gilmore of USDA-RD about the five-year period which would be up in the end of March, he will be working on a six-month extension at the engineer's recommendation. Engineer Knutson said he spoke to Ed Gilmore of USDA-RD about the previous issue with insurance. Ed Gilmore said he would accept the insurance as is, as long as the City attorney signed off on it. Schaffer Well Drilling, the sub-contractor for Rubin Construction did a test drill of the well. They drilled down to 215ft where the Minnesota Department of Health had them stop. Since the well work was postponed, MDH has required extra well casing added, and the sub-contractor will forward extra costs to Rubin Construction. The well samples are being sent off for analysis. Results will be sent to MDH for their opinion if the well is okay to establish or more drilling needs to be done. Engineer Chris Knutson asked Rubin Construction for a schedule of construction times, and the dates materials will be delivered. Rubin Construction said they won't have those times for another four to six weeks. Engineer Chris Knutson said he suspects this project should be wrapped up by August of this year. PW Supervisor Willette reminded Engineer Chris Knutson that the UV lights will be operating at the end of March, and the contractor will need to provide power for the blowers and UV lights per permit requirements. PW Supervisor Willette also asked that the floor of the WWTP be completed ASAP so he can move his office and lab back to the WWTP.

## **Consent Agenda**

The consent agenda included the 2/12/2026 meeting minutes, bank reconciliations, savings and loan balances, checks for the month showing \$26,246.67 in deposits and \$39,763.12 in checks, February expenditure and revenue guidelines, 20-23 Project Excel Spreadsheet, March & April calendar of events.

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to approve the consent agenda; 2nd by Councilor Finney. All approved. Motion carried.

## **Additional Bills**

### **Additional Bills**

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to approve the additional bills; seconded by Councilor Edwards. All approved. Motion carried.

## **Cash Balance Investment Review**

Clerk Hansen said she did some research into the negative balance of \$25,100.00 in the Balance NO Investments in the 403 Public Works Cap Reserves fund, and discovered it was due to a journal entry made in March of 2025. The Journal Entry was from the auditors. She reached out to the auditing firm and they said the balance would be fixed when they send out the journal entries for last year's audit this month.

- Motion: Councilor Peterson made a motion to accept the January and February Cash Balance Investment Report; seconded by Councilor Finney. All approved. Motion carried.

## **Public Comment**

None

## **Public Works**

### **Supervisor Notes**

PW Supervisor Willette said the bacteria samples came back good. On Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, the WWTP would be calibrated. He spoke with the homeowner of 200 Centre St S as the line leader to their meter froze up. He provided pictures that shows the meter was not in an insulated area. Mayor Ziegler asked the council to research Ordinance #93 Water & Sewer Rules to see if the city should keep paying to repair the frozen meter, or if it was the homeowner's responsibility.

### **Summer Help**

PW Supervisor Willette said he would like to have the Seasonal Hire hired for June 1<sup>st</sup>. Clerk Hansen said she pulled up a notice she put out last year, and would like to know when the council would like her to post it, or if it can wait for the April Meeting. Councilor Edwards directed Clerk Hansen to post notices about the seasonal help position.

### **Wellhead Protection Extension**

Clerk Hansen said she's been in contact with Amanda Strommer of the Minnesota Department of Health to extend the current wellhead protection for the wells. She said there will likely need to be changes made after the new well is dug and the old well is decommissioned, and she'll be in contact with the Minnesota Department of Health when that occurs.

### **409 First St E Sewer Lateral**

Clerk Hansen said she was contacted by the property owners of 409 First St E to see if their sewer lateral was compliant or not. PW Supervisor Willette said this was a council decision. Mayor Ziegler reviewed the ordinance and said the sewer lateral to 409 First St E will need to be updated to the cleanout of the house as the house has only had their sewer lateral updated to the foundation of the house.

### **100 First St E Water Shut Off Inquiry**

Clerk Hansen said she was contacted by a real estate agent who has a buyer interested in the

property. They want to do an inspection of the home, and want the water turned on. Clerk Hansen wanted to know if they should be charged the turn on and turn off fee. Mayor Ziegler said the water shut off and turn on fee must be paid beforehand before the City can turn the water to the residence on. He also said, PW Supervisor Willette should be there on hand in case a pipe is malfunctioning and there is damage done to the house. PW Supervisor Willette said when he reads water meters, it reads that the water meter in the house is not registering. He doesn't know whether the water meter isn't there or if the battery is dead. Mayor Ziegler said when the inspection is done, they should verify that the meter is or isn't there and provide pictures if PW Supervisor Willette isn't present.

## **Follow-up From Previous Meeting**

### **SSS Participants**

Clerk Hansen said went through the SSS Participants spreadsheet and updated all the dates.

### **Council Meeting Dates for 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter**

Clerk Hansen said the meeting dates for April, May and June need to be set so she could post them. The council decided April 14<sup>th</sup> 2026, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2026, and June 4<sup>th</sup> 2026 would work.

### **City Owned Properties**

Clerk Hansen said she was in contact with the city attorney and they provided her with a questionnaire that needs to be filled out for each property the city wishes to sell. She said it looks like the forms are filled out when the city has a buyer for the properties. Mayor Ziegler asked what it would look like if the City went through a realtor to sell the properties. Property R191726111022 and R191726111023 had water and sewer stubbed out to it and needed to be developed and whoever purchases property R191726111020 should own one of the lots around it or else they'd have to get an easement with the other property owners to access the property. The council was in agreement that the land should be developed within a year. The council directed Clerk Hansen to reach out to a realtor and see what it would look like to have them sell the properties.

### **Fire Debris Statute**

Clerk Hansen said she reached out to the City attorney about the fire debris statute. Mayor Ziegler said there hasn't been many structure fires in the City, and whenever there was one the damage was cleaned up in good time and he didn't think there was a need to set up an escrow fund for this service.

## **Fire Department Hire**

Monte Raske said he and Chief Jesse Kietzer interviewed John Smith who lives in town. He has been an EMT on an ambulance service before. He is currently an LPN. His EMT is expired, but he is willing to earn his EMT certification or become an EMR. Mayor Ziegler asked when John Smith's greatest asset to the community would be. Monte Raske said the medical aspect of Vernon Center Fire and Rescue.

Councilor Bennett made a motion to hire John Smith to the Vernon Center Fire Department; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Councilor Peterson. All approved. Motion carried. Councilor Finney abstained.

## **Next Meeting**

Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## **Adjourn**

- Motion: Councilor Bennett motioned to adjourn; seconded by Councilor Peterson. All approved. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.

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Kara Hansen, Clerk-Treasurer

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Dana Ziegler, Mayor

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Date approved