**Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board**

**Minutes of the regular meeting of the Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board held on August 14, 2025, at 6:00 P.M.**

**at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood, Gerlach, NV 89412**

1. **CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM –**Present – Kristy Evans, Russell Bierle, Schatzi Gambrell, Brandy Wilbur (Zoom), Luis Garcia

Absent -

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**The pledge of allegiance was recited.
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**\*\*Item number 3 came after item number 4.
Carl Copek thanked the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office for assisting with weed removal and landscaping around the Royal Ambulance House and other areas in town, noting the community’s appreciation. He also extended a warm welcome to Royal Ambulance and wished them success during the upcoming event. Additionally, he encouraged support for local businesses during the holiday season and offered well wishes to all as the community prepares for Burning Man.

Taylor Hubler, a Gerlach resident and school bus driver, thanked the Sheriff’s Office and Highway Patrol for their efforts managing traffic around Burning Man, noting it felt significantly safer last year. Taylor welcomed new community members and raised a concern about water trucks parking at Diablo and Cottonwood, which block the school bus route during morning and evening runs. Taylor asked if a solution could be coordinated and expressed appreciation for the ongoing positive relationship with local agencies.

Russell Bierle introduced the two new CAB members for the Gerlach CAB: Luis Garcia as an At-Large member and Carl Copek as an Alternative member.
3. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF** July 10, 2025

Kristy Evans motioned to approve the minutes of the July 10, 2025, Gerlach/Empire CAB meeting. Schatzi Gambrell seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.
4. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

**Washoe County Sheriff’s Office**
Deputy Jackson Crews reported that conditions in town have been smooth so far and noted appreciation expressed by residents for his presence monitoring traffic. He acknowledged the challenge of covering all areas at once but stated more personnel will be arriving in the coming days, particularly by Wednesday. He added that he is available to answer questions at any time.
Captain Andy Venn reported that significant planning and preparation for Burning Man is underway, much of it coordinated from Reno. He noted that Sergeant Miller and his team of six are prepared and eager to support the event. Venn emphasized that Gerlach residents are not forgotten and encouraged communication through local deputies. He also shared that he will retire in January after more than 20 years of service and expressed gratitude for the strong, positive relationship between deputies and the Gerlach community, highlighting it as an example of successful community policing. He offered to respond to questions about Burning Man or the Sheriff’s Office through deputies or email.

Kristy Evans raised concerns about unsafe driving through Gerlach during Burning Man, citing speeding semis and heavy traffic as the primary issue, along with occasional minor thefts such as water. She emphasized traffic safety as the community’s biggest concern. In response, Captain Venn outlined the Sheriff’s Office deployment plan: a team arriving August 20, working daily noon–midnight with on-call coverage overnight through September 2. The team will include two canines, four motorcycle units, and a sergeant, in addition to resident deputies. Their mission is to ensure smooth traffic flow and community safety in Gerlach, Empire, and surrounding areas. He noted that Sergeant Miller, an experienced motor sergeant focused on traffic enforcement, will lead the team, and assured that traffic safety will be a top priority.

**Royal Ambulance**
Johnrey Hassan provided a six-week update on Royal Ambulance’s Gerlach operations. In July, crews were in service 27 out of 31 days despite only 17 days’ notice before launch, and in August they have maintained 100% service. Staffing now includes three full-time paramedics, two full-time EMTs, and two part-time EMTs, ensuring consistent coverage. Over six weeks, the team responded to 20 incidents: eight treated and released on scene, six ground transports, two air transports, one call with no patient found, and three canceled calls. Hassan introduced the full-time paramedics and EMTs now serving the community. He emphasized that Burning Man operations are separate from Gerlach EMS, with priority on maintaining 24/7 advanced life support locally. Royal is coordinating with Pyramid Lake Fire Rescue and the Sheriff’s Office to prepare for increased call volume. Both Gerlach ambulances have been overhauled with new equipment and monitors and will undergo state inspection, after which they will replace the purple ambulances currently in use. The vehicles will retain their current look but display the Royal Ambulance Nevada logo. Hassan closed by inviting the community to greet the new team members.

Russell asked whether there would be additional staffing at the Gerlach EMS station during Burning Man, noting past years when staffing was increased. Hassan confirmed there are no current plans to upstaff locally, but coordination with Pyramid Lake Fire may allow for mid-route patient transfers along Highway 447 to return Gerlach ambulances more quickly. Russell also asked about the separation of event and community operations, and whether Royal would be responsible for transporting patients from Burning Man. Hassan clarified that Burning Man patients will be transported directly to Reno or another destination by the event team, and unlike past years, Royal will not be handing patients off at the pavement. He added that while psychiatric transports were previously assisted by Pyramid Lake Fire, this year Royal has the resources to manage them directly.

Kristy Evans asked for clarification on Royal Ambulance’s role during Burning Man, noting that while playa operations are separate, there is a significant uptick in calls on highways and in surrounding areas. She asked whether Gerlach EMS would be staffed to handle those. Hassan confirmed the Gerlach crew will not respond to incidents on the playa but will respond to calls in town and nearby areas. He noted that the station will not be upstaffed during Burning Man, with an expected call volume of about one per day based on last years’ experience. Patient transfer agreements, such as at mile marker 44, will help reduce response times. Evans also asked about local fire response capabilities, clarifying whether Gerlach has 24/7 fire service. It was confirmed that Gerlach relies on its volunteer fire department and mutual aid from Pyramid Lake, Lyon County, or Truckee Meadows for fire and rescue needs.

Schatzi Gambrell asked whether an emergency plan is in place to handle a potential mass casualty incident given the high traffic and activity in town. In response, it was explained that coordination is underway with the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office and Burning Man organizers. While Gerlach and Burning Man EMS assets are dedicated separately, in the event of a true large-scale emergency, additional regional resources would be called upon, and some operational flexibility would be expected. Washoe County Sheriff reported that a tabletop exercise was recently conducted at the Reno Emergency Operations Center with all regional law enforcement and Burning Man security forces. The exercise simulated a mass casualty or active shooter incident and included participation from highly experienced personnel, such as former military and veteran police officers. The Sheriff’s Office expressed confidence in the level of planning and preparedness demonstrated during the exercise.

Luis Garcia thanked the EMS team for their service and noted his appreciation for the paramedics and EMTs stationed in Gerlach. He then asked about the designated landing site for the Burning Man medical helicopter. In response, it was explained that Burning Man has taken operational control of the aircraft contract this year. While the helicopter is expected to land just outside of town, it will not be in the same location as last year, though specific details were not available at this time.

Kristy Evans reported that at the recent GID meeting, Burning Man announced the medical helicopter landing site will be located just outside of town on county property near BLM land.

Pete Dronkers confirmed the medical helicopter landing zone will be located about a half mile northwest of Gerlach, on the west side of Highway 34, on county-owned property.

1. **LICENSE PLATE READER PROGRAM IN GERLACH**
Lieutenant Joshua Jenkins presented on *FUSUS*, a real-time public safety platform that integrates data such as active calls, unit locations, traffic patterns, private/government cameras, gunshot detection, license plate readers (LPRs), and weather. He explained how this tool improves situational awareness for remote areas like Gerlach, where response times can be long. He noted that three cameras are planned for Gerlach: two LPRs southeast of town and one at the substation for officer safety and infrastructure protection. He apologized for a prior installation error, confirming the system is inactive until local input is received. Jenkins highlighted LPR benefits for search and rescue (e.g., overdue hunters), burglary investigations, and officer safety, referencing past incidents where lack of information delayed response. He stressed that the technology does **not** use facial recognition and only captures vehicles/plates. Data retention is limited to 30 days unless tied to a criminal case, after which it is purged. He emphasized the Sheriff’s Office goal to balance privacy concerns with community safety and crime prevention.

Russell Bierle asked whether license plate reader (LPR) data is shared with other agencies. Lieutenant Jenkins confirmed that it is shared selectively with certain law enforcement partners, but not with agencies such as the DMV, and it will not be used for administrative functions like registration enforcement. Russell also asked about public transparency. Lieutenant Jenkins responded that a transparency portal for the program is in final development and will provide details on data sharing, retention, and limitations (e.g., no facial recognition). He emphasized the Sheriff’s Office commitment to openness and community trust, noting community members will be able to view the system. It was further clarified that installation of a camera at the Water Tower Park requires approval from the GID Board, not the CAB. The CAB acknowledged they do not have authority to approve the placement.

Kristy Evans thanked the Sheriff’s Office for the presentation and asked for clarification on how license plate readers differ from standard cameras. Lieutenant Jenkins explained that LPRs are cameras with AI software that identifies plates and vehicle details but are not capable of facial recognition. Evans asked whether LPRs could capture activity around incidents. Jenkins confirmed they can capture still images of vehicles and surrounding context if present in the frame. She also asked about coverage areas; Jenkins noted three units are allocated for Gerlach, positioned to monitor north/south traffic through town, but coverage is limited by cellular service. Areas like Fish Springs cannot currently be covered. Finally, Evans asked why the unit would be placed at the park instead of the substation. Jenkins explained the substation is set too far back from the road, and the technology requires specific angles to capture plates effectively, making the park a more viable location.

Schatzi Gambrell asked why proposed license plate readers (LPRs) would be placed at the park and substation instead of at the north and south entrances of Gerlach, noting that vehicles could bypass detection by taking alternate routes through town. Lieutenant Jenkins explained that the initial park location was chosen because Washoe County Parks had granted permission, though it was later clarified the property belongs to the GID. He acknowledged concerns about placement and noted limitations such as avoiding private property to prevent community conflict. Gambrell suggested the GID-owned properties north and south of town, which cover the two main entrances, as better alternatives. Lieutenant Jenkins agreed those could be considered as possible locations.

Russell Bierle Russell Bierle cautioned that the GID may hesitate to authorize license plate reader (LPR) installations due to recent legal challenges over its authority under NRS 318. He also asked about the technology’s advertised ability to identify vehicles by features such as damage, bumper stickers, or modifications. Lieutenant Jenkins explained that while the system can search for vehicles by general descriptors (e.g., make, model, color, presence of a bumper sticker), it cannot read the content of bumper stickers. Modifications such as camper shells, ladder racks, or sunroofs are searchable, though options are limited. He shared a past example where AI-assisted searches helped identify a burglary suspect’s truck by combining modification details with LPR data.

Schatzi Gambrell asked whether Amber Alerts are included in the license plate reader system. Lieutenant Jenkins confirmed that Amber Alerts, along with NCMEC alerts, are integrated and function similarly to alerts deputies receive in patrol vehicles. Schatzi also requested a copy of a slide from the presentation regarding recognition software. Lieutenant Jenkins explained that the slide referred to the use of the real-time crime center platform during public demonstrations, not LPRs specifically. He described how the technology was used during the “No Kings Day” protest in Reno to monitor safety without a heavy police presence. The platform allowed law enforcement to track activity, guide medical responses, and protect First Amendment rights while avoiding escalation. The event was ultimately peaceful, with no arrests or confrontations.

Margie Reynolds suggested placing a license plate reader at the Highway 447/34 split to help determine travel direction of lost individuals. Lieutenant Jenkins responded that cellular limitations prevent reliable placement that far out of Gerlach, as service drops within a few hundred yards of town. Reynolds also asked about data privacy, specifically whether DMV or federal agencies like ICE could access records. Lieutenant Jenkins explained that federal agencies operate their own networks and are not part of the Flock system. The Sheriff’s Office has declined DMV requests, as policy restricts use to criminal—not administrative—functions. He clarified that the system is not used for minor infractions like expired registration. Regarding immigration enforcement, he said no decision has been made locally, and that would be determined by the Sheriff and legal counsel. He added that obscured plates, such as those on bicycles during Burning Man, are not a concern for the system.

1. Top of Form
2. Bottom of Form
3. **COMMUNITY INPUT ON MICROGRID FUNDRAISING**Brian Beffort provided an update on efforts to fund a microgrid and energy upgrades in Gerlach. He noted that setting up a charitable fund with the Community Foundation of Northern Nevada would take too long, so the Gerlach GID and Gerlach Seniors launched a GoFundMe campaign to raise money. Signs and banners with QR codes and donation links are being prepared for display around town and at local businesses to encourage contributions. Beffort emphasized that if each Burning Man participant donated just $1, the community could fund the microgrid. He plans to visit Gerlach on August 22 but offered to provide printed signs sooner if others can transport them. He also shared that nearly $24,000 from a Department of Energy rural communities grant had been authorized to transfer to the Community Foundation for this purpose, but since GID and Gerlach Seniors are moving ahead independently, those funds may remain available for future decisions. He closed by inviting input on communication preferences and volunteers to help finalize and distribute fundraising signs.

Kristy Evans asked about the format of fundraising signs for the Gerlach microgrid project, noting that something large and eye-catching would be most effective given the volume of Burning Man traffic. Beffort responded that options include corrugated plastic or foam-core signs similar to campaign yard signs, and potentially banners, though he has not yet confirmed costs with FedEx. Evans emphasized the need to act quickly since early arrivals for Burning Man begin the following week. Beffort agreed and said he would coordinate printing as soon as possible. He suggested that volunteers could also engage with people waiting in long entry lines outside Black Rock City to encourage donations. Evans added that strategically placing signs at key local stops such as businesses, the Empire store, or the gas station would likely be the most effective approach.

Luis Garcia agreed with Kristy Evans’ suggestion on sign placement and emphasized that point-of-sale locations are the most effective for encouraging donations. He supported placing flyers or signs with QR codes at registers, gas pumps, the post office, and other local businesses where people are already making purchases. Garcia noted that smaller, strategically placed signs would likely be more cost-effective and impactful than larger banners.

Schatzi Gambrell supported Kristy Evans’ idea of using a banner, suggesting it would capture attention when people are waiting in long lines at the local pizza place. She noted that a simple flyer at a register may not be as effective in that setting. Schatzi also offered to help by driving to pick up materials early next week, before traffic conditions worsen with Burning Man arrivals.

Tina Walters suggested mailing or shipping the fundraising signs to Gerlach to ensure quick delivery if no one is available to drive and pick them up. Brian Beffort agreed this was a workable option and said he would follow that approach if needed.

Margie Reynolds offered to pick up fundraising signs in Reno on Monday and help distribute them. She suggested printing at least a dozen 11x17 posters for placement at the gas station, Empire store, and other windows around town, and recommended using yard-style signs on Main Street properties to reinforce visibility. She also supported the idea of a banner and confirmed she would be passing through Reno around 11 a.m. to coordinate pickup.

Carl Copek suggested expanding fundraising efforts beyond physical signs by using online platforms such as Reddit, Facebook, and Burning Man-related groups, recommending a professionally composed message to share. Brian Beffort agreed and noted that GoFundMe offers tools to help generate and share posts across social media platforms. He added that building a presence on platforms like Instagram for Gerlach Seniors or the GID could help attract additional donations.
4. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**Candee Ramos demonstrated how to access the Neighborhood Development Hub on WashoeCounty.gov by using the search bar to find “Neighborhood Developer Meetings.” She explained that the hub provides schedules, project details, developer contacts, parcel information, and meeting links. While there are currently no upcoming projects in Gerlach, past meetings (such as BlackRock Rentals on April 22) remain available for review and public feedback. Ramos highlighted the option to subscribe to email updates by district or countywide to stay informed about future meetings. No questions were raised following the presentation**.**
5. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS –**Candee Ramos provided clarification on hotel and entertainment tax revenues in Gerlach. She explained that the Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA) is responsible for collecting and distributing these revenues, and Washoe County has no oversight of the program. Information obtained from RSCVA was limited, and residents with specific questions were advised to contact RSCVA directly. Ramos also addressed concerns about the Gerlach area of responsibility map. After review on the WRMS site, staff confirmed that the map appears to be working correctly. She invited follow-up if additional issues arise.

Kristy Evans asked whether hotel and occupancy tax revenues collected by the Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA) are remitted to Washoe County. Candee Ramos responded that she was unsure; the County does not oversee the program and could not confirm whether the County receives those funds. She explained her understanding that revenues are generally used for regional tourism promotion but emphasized that detailed information must be obtained directly from RSCVA.

Margie Reynolds shared her understanding that Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA) funds also known as the tourism tax are generally reinvested into marketing. She recalled being told at a Travel Nevada conference that Gerlach is eligible for RSCVA funding, provided projects demonstrate a connection to generating tourism and filling hotel rooms. Reynolds noted that under past leadership (about 10–12 years ago), Washoe County communities, including Gerlach, were included in eligibility, and she believes this likely remains the case.

1. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS**
Russell Bierle announced that this summer marks the 50th anniversary of the GID purchasing Gerlach from the railroad. While it is too late to organize an event this year, he suggested planning a celebratory festival or series of events in spring 2026. He invited anyone interested in helping with planning to coordinate with him.

Carl Copek suggested rebranding the community chili cook-off as part of the celebration for the 50th anniversary of Gerlach’s purchase from the railroad, turning it into a themed event marking the milestone.

Luis Garcia reported that after months of discussion with the U.S. Department of State, the Gerlach Post Office’s application to provide full passport services was denied, as the agency determined there was not sufficient need in the area. However, Garcia confirmed that the post office will still provide passport photo services and assistance with applications, though they cannot officially process or sign applications without an agent ID.
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**
There was no public comment.

**ADJOURNMENT**The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 PM.