****  **Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board**

**Minutes of the regular meeting of the Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board held on**

 **April 10, 2025, at 6:00 P.M. at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood,**

**Gerlach, NV 89412**

1. **CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM –**Present – Tina Walters, Kristy Evans, Schatzi Gambrell, Brandy Wilbur, Russell Bierle
Absent -
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**The pledge of allegiance was recited.
3. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**Pat Davison, a North Valleys resident and regular attendee of the North Valleys CAB, shared comments on the CAB reorganization process and offered three suggestions for improvement. First, she recommended including the “Current Projects” page on CAB agendas in addition to the HUB, as it shows formally submitted applications and provides more complete project information for residents. Second, she encouraged more promotion of CAB meetings through HOAs or social media, noting that CABs are a valuable resource but often go unnoticed by the community. Lastly, she suggested considering the Dignity Index for inclusion in the CAB handbook. This index, which was presented to the County Commission in October 2023, promotes respectful dialogue and encourages participation from all viewpoints. She emphasized that the index is not about limiting opinion but about ensuring respectful engagement. She concluded by encouraging ongoing CAB participation in the reorganization discussion.
4. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF** February 13, 2025

Schatzi Gambrell motioned to approve the minutes of the February 13th, 2025, CAB meeting. Russell Bierle second the motion and the minutes were passed unanimously.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

Washoe County Sherrif’s Office Deputy Cruz from the Washoe County Sheriff's Office reported that just before the last scheduled CAB meeting, he arrested two individuals between Gerlach and Fish Springs for residential burglary. Although a public information post mentioned the incident occurred "in or near Gerlach," he noted that the term is relative for those unfamiliar with the area. He said the arrests have significantly reduced burglary-related calls in the Fish Springs and Sand Pass areas. He credited a local rancher for reporting the suspicious activity and helping monitor the suspects.

1. **DARK SKIES LIGHTING ORDINANCE, PROCLAIM DARK SKIES WEEK –**Dave Cooper, a Gerlach resident, shared an extensive update on efforts to revive and advance the Dark Sky Initiative in the community. Picking up where a previous advocate left off in 2021, he emphasized the broad benefits of reducing light pollution—including improving human and wildlife health, saving energy, and boosting astrotourism. He outlined the importance of Gerlach’s position as a gateway to the Massacre Rim International Dark Sky Sanctuary and the Black Rock Desert, both known for exceptionally dark skies. He asked the CAB to support two specific actions: first, to request that Washoe County issue a proclamation recognizing International Dark Skies Week (April 21–28); and second, to endorse Gerlach's pursuit of certification as a Nevada Starry Skies Community through the state's new dark sky program. He explained that achieving certification would require developing a lighting ordinance, conducting a lighting inventory, creating a management plan, and implementing lighting retrofits. He also noted potential partnerships with NV Energy, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and other organizations, and encouraged volunteers to join a local committee to move the process forward. Ultimately, Cooper framed the initiative as a meaningful community effort to protect Gerlach’s natural heritage while promoting tourism and sustainability.

Kristy Evans asked whether the proposed dark sky ordinance would need to be approved by the County Commissioners and whether the community would have input on what it includes. Dave Cooper confirmed that the ordinance would go through the County Commission but emphasized that it would be written specifically for Gerlach, with local input shaping its content. She also asked how the ordinance would affect private property owners and whether funding might be available to help them comply. Cooper responded that the plan is still flexible, but his intent is to make compliance voluntary and to seek funding so that residents and businesses wouldn’t bear costs. He added that implementation would likely prioritize streetlights, businesses, and then residences, and encouraged early voluntary participation.

Candee Ramos read the proposal for the Dark Sky Week Proclamation to the Gerlach/ Empire CAB. Candee informed the CAB that they would be voting on whether they want to support this request for a Proclamation to the BCC.

Margie Reynolds expressed their support stating that it is a good idea.

Pete Dronkers expressed strong support from Burning Man for the dark sky efforts. He said they back both the immediate request and Dave Cooper’s broader initiative, and they look forward to connecting with Dave soon to explore how they can assist.

Russell Bierle motioned to approve the CAB’s support of the Dark Sky Week Proclamation and the further development of a starry sky ordinance for the Gerlach area. Kristy Evans seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

1. **BLACK ROCK RENTALS SPECIAL USE PERMIT –**

David Snelgrove, representing Bowman Consulting, gave an overview of a proposed special use permit application for a 5.37-acre property in Empire owned by Keith Deforest. The property has been cited for a code violation related to the unpermitted storage of operable vehicles belonging to others. While Keith is allowed to store his own equipment, renting space to others requires a special use permit under the site's General Commercial zoning. Snelgrove explained that the permit process involves establishing principal use on the property—such as a manager’s office—which would support Keith’s business operations. The plan also includes a layout for fire access, storage containers, water tanks, and other infrastructure. He noted that county staff are open to working with them due to the area’s rural limitations (e.g., lack of utilities), and they may request waivers for typical urban requirements like landscaping. A neighborhood meeting is scheduled for April 22 to share the same presentation in person, collect feedback, and continue community engagement. Notices were mailed to over 100 addresses. Snelgrove emphasized their intent to bring the property into compliance and requested community support for the project.

Keith Deforest added that they are continuing to clean the lot and expects the other guy to have everything on his end moved by June 1st as it is a fire hazard in that section.

Kristy Evans asked about plans for screening the storage lot, noting that this is a common concern raised in community meetings. She acknowledged the typical county requirement for vegetation but understood that water limitations may affect that. David Snelgrove responded that screening has been discussed with county staff, and fence slats are a likely solution, though they’re also considering other visual enhancements. Keith Deforest added that while they’ve tried using slats, the high winds often damage fencing, so they’re exploring creative alternatives—such as displaying art cars to create a more visually appealing frontage instead of just showing trailers.

Schatzi Gambrell shared her experience working with another local storage business, noting that fence slats were quickly destroyed by high winds, and that vegetation isn’t viable due to the harsh environment—sagebrush takes a century to grow and won’t provide meaningful screening. She emphasized that the area is industrial, and the only nearby home belongs to Keith’s parents, who already have screening. Given these conditions, she sees no reason to require additional screening that could cause more harm than good. David Snelgrove thanked her for the insight and encouraged her to submit those details in a comment card to support their case with county staff and the Board of Adjustment.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**

Candee Ramos provided an overview of the Neighborhood Development Hub, highlighting it as a useful tool for residents to track upcoming development activity in their area. She demonstrated how to view projects like Black Rock Rentals on the map and in a searchable list, which includes parcel numbers, developer information, project descriptions, and meeting details. She noted that information is also shared on Nextdoor and that postcards are mailed to at least 30 addresses, given Gerlach's low density. Residents can stay informed by subscribing to email updates for District 5 or neighborhood meetings through the Washoe County website.

Kristy Evans emphasized the importance of signing up for email announcements about development projects. She noted that, due to the wide spacing of properties in Gerlach, not everyone receives mailed postcards, but email notifications are effective and timely—she had already received one about the upcoming community meeting for the Black Rock Rentals project.
Candee Ramos announced a new opportunity for community involvement: an opening on the Open Space and Regional Parks Commission. While current vacancies on the Board of Adjustment and Planning Commission are for District 4 and not relevant to the Gerlach area, this Parks Commission seat is open to interested applicants. It's a partial term ending November 4, 2027, with the option to reapply. Meetings are held every other month on the fourth Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. The position is unpaid but offers a meaningful way to influence local parks and open space planning. Applications are now open.

Russell Bierle asked if they reimburse mileage for board members. Candee said she would find that out.

1. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS –**
Brandy Wilbur shared that a community conversation was held in March between Gerlach residents, Washoe County, and Pyramid Lake Fire to discuss the future of fire and medical services in the area. The community provided feedback on their priorities, which the county is now reviewing for feasibility. A follow-up discussion item is expected to be included on the May CAB meeting agenda to provide further updates.

Schatzi Gambrell raised concerns about the distribution of Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funds from the federal government to Washoe County. She noted that while the county receives $4.47 million annually—largely due to federally owned land in the Gerlach area—there is no clear indication that any of that money is allocated to support essential services in Gerlach, such as fire protection. Despite reviewing the county’s checkbook tool, she couldn’t find any PILT funds listed as going directly to Gerlach. She questioned why the community is struggling to fund its fire department when the county receives substantial federal dollars meant to support services in areas like hers. The Communications Division acknowledged her concern and offered to follow up directly to better understand her specific questions.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**There was no public comment.
2. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS**Russell Bierle asked if any community members had applied to serve as CAB alternates. Candee Ramos responded that Washoe County has received one application so far, which has been forwarded to Commissioner Herman for review. She encouraged residents to spread the word and invite others to apply, noting that more involvement would benefit the small community.

Pete Dronkers informed the CAB that they circulated the CAB nomination to as many people as they could.

**ADJOURNMENT** –

 The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 pm