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

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

 **February 13, 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, Russell Bierle (Zoom), Brandy Wilbur (Zoom)
Absent -
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**The pledge of allegiance was recited.
3. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**There was no public comment.
4. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF** January 9, 2025 and the special meeting from January 23, 2025. **–**

Kristy Evans motioned to approve the minutes from the January 9th meeting and the January 23rd special meeting. Schatzi Gambrell seconded the motion. The minutes passed unanimously.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

Washoe County Sheriff’s Office
Deputy Jackson Crews from the Washoe County Sheriff's Office provided a public safety update. He reported that a homicide occurred in Fish Springs on January 22, and it remains an active investigation with multiple personnel working on the case. He encouraged community members to share any relevant information. He also noted that residential burglaries in Fish Springs have decreased significantly, suggesting a possible connection to the homicide. Regarding traffic concerns, he mentioned ongoing efforts to slow down drivers passing through town and cited a recent traffic stop involving a tractor-trailer speeding from Portland to Winnemucca. Other than that, there were no major incidents to report. He concluded by offering to take questions or speak with attendees individually after the meeting.

Tina Walters asked about the population of Fish Springs and Crews answered that he did not know. He added that a group of people are believed to be responsible for the burglaries. He guessed that about 100 people reside in Fish Springs, many of which do not participate in theft and are interested in attending the
CABs.

Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Fire Department
Captain Pritchard provided a public safety update, noting that last month was relatively slow, but this month has been busier with four calls so far. There were two medical transports—one by CareFlight and one by ground transport to Reno. Other calls involved responses to Pyramid Lake, where mutual aid from Northline was requested based on call severity, allowing Gerlach units to return to town. During a recent patient transport, Medic 83 broke down again, but Pyramid Lake was able to assist, ensuring minimal delay in getting the patient to the hospital. On the training front, there was a good turnout for a required annual hazmat refresher, which is particularly important given the volume of hazardous materials passing through the area. As the weather warms up, more fire training sessions will take place, with efforts to conduct drills in different locations around the community. Residents may see emergency vehicles running lights and sirens for training purposes, and notifications will be posted on Facebook in advance. Due to the breakdown of Medic 83, Truckee Meadows is sending an ambulance on loan to ensure coverage, allowing the second-out ambulance to remain in reserve status for higher-priority situations.

Schatzi Gambrell asked Captain Pritchard if he was aware that the Tribal Council decided not to renew the fire contract beyond June and whether any plans were in place for after that time. Captain Pritchard confirmed that he was aware and had attended both January meetings where the decision was discussed. He is actively working with the county on a plan to ensure coverage by July 1, though planning is still in the early stages. Gambrell also inquired about whether additional funding had been found and if full fire service had been restored. Captain Pritchard responded that while full service has not yet resumed, the brownout schedule has been reduced to only Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Fire service is now covered from Thursday through Monday, and Advanced Life Support (ALS) services remain available every day unless staffing adjustments become necessary, which he does not anticipate at this time.

Kristy Evans asked about the status of offering basic emergency training for community members and whether there had been any interest. Captain Pritchard responded that a flyer was distributed to generate interest in the Emergency Medical Responder course. However, only one person from the community expressed interest, despite initial enthusiasm from some deputies and school staff. The effort to promote the course will continue, as at least five students are needed for the class to proceed, along with a 30- to 45-day approval process from the State EMS office. Evans also shared that she attended a Pyramid Lake Tribal Council special meeting where EMS services were discussed. The primary focus of the meeting was on the tribe’s own community needs, though the council did approve an extension of the contract until June 30. She expressed appreciation on behalf of Gerlach for the tribe’s past support. She noted that the tribe is facing significant funding challenges and government funding freezes, making it difficult for them to prioritize staffing services for Gerlach in addition to their own needs.

1. **COUNTY MANAGER ERIC BROWN UPDATE –**County Manager Eric Brown provided an update on Washoe County’s strategic priorities, financial standing, and ongoing initiatives. He explained that the county's annual strategic planning process involves commissioners reviewing past performance and setting priorities for the upcoming year. Key focus areas for 2025 include improving senior facilities and programming, expanding mental health services, and investing in infrastructure using remaining ARPA funds. Brown reported that Washoe County remains in strong financial shape, with a structurally balanced budget, an upgraded credit rating, and a clean audit. The county recently approved four-year collective bargaining agreements with employee associations, providing long-term financial stability. A new transparency initiative, Washoe Checkbook, will launch by the end of March, making it easier for residents to track government spending. Additionally, a public workshop on budgeting will be offered to improve public understanding of county finances. On the housing and social services front, the county has secured $20 million from the Home Means Nevada Fund to develop affordable housing next to the Cares Campus, with 50 units scheduled to open in April. Contracts for shelter service providers have been renewed for consistency across facilities, and the Crossroads substance use recovery program has been expanded to include families. Brown highlighted the sequential intercept model, an initiative aimed at providing mental health services to incarcerated individuals, inspired by a successful program in Miami. The county is also repurposing the former West Hills Hospital into the Washoe Behavioral Health Center, with 60% of its space dedicated to youth mental health care. Regarding public safety and emergency services, Brown acknowledged ongoing discussions about securing a sustainable EMS and fire service solution for Gerlach. Talks with providers like REMSA and Royal Ambulance are progressing, with promising options under consideration. The regional computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system remains on schedule for completion in September, which will improve response times by allowing dispatchers to identify and route the closest emergency resources. In the realm of elections, Brown reported that Washoe County successfully conducted three elections in 2024 and is collaborating with the Secretary of State’s office on a new voter registration and election management system. He also announced that Andrew McDonald has been appointed as the new registrar of voters, following his successful oversight of the November election. The county is working on multiple technology and public engagement initiatives, including expanding virtual meeting access, improving online development tracking, and launching a new AI-based translation tool for non-English speakers and the hearing impaired. Brown emphasized efforts to update outdated emergency evacuation plans and floodplain designations, as well as to balance caseloads between the District Attorney’s Office, Public Defender, and Alternate Public Defender. Finally, Brown discussed the county’s push for public-private partnerships to fund projects that the general budget cannot cover. One approach involves leasing underutilized county-owned land to developers for affordable housing projects, reducing costs while generating long-term revenue. This strategy mirrors successful models used in other communities and is being pursued in collaboration with economic development agencies.

Kristy Evans thanked County Manager Eric Brown for his update and shared her appreciation for the county’s ongoing efforts in mental health and emergency services. She first inquired about stability within the Registrar of Voters office, noting the department’s past challenges. Brown acknowledged the turmoil the office had experienced, attributing much of it to public hostility since the 2020 election. He explained that previous Registrars faced significant stress, leading to resignations, but the department is now at full staffing capacity with 17 employees, making it more resilient. He expressed confidence in the new Registrar, Andrew McDonald, citing the smooth execution of the November election as a positive indicator. Evans then asked about the regional dispatch system and whether it would include their area. Brown explained that the system primarily serves urban areas but remains open to expansion. He noted that Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe officials were aware of it but cautious about committing before seeing how it operates and understanding potential costs for smaller agencies. Regarding EMS and fire services for Gerlach, Evans asked if an external agency like REMSA would only provide medical coverage, leaving fire services unaddressed. Brown confirmed that while REMSA would cover medical services, discussions are ongoing about potential fire service solutions. He mentioned that Royal, an ambulance provider that served Burning Man, had recently expressed interest in offering fire services, though talks were still in early stages. Evans also asked how an outside provider like REMSA would staff emergency services in Gerlach. Brown explained that in Tonopah, REMSA rotates staff in shifts with housing accommodations, and a similar model could be implemented in Gerlach. He added that the county's fire regionalization discussions could also impact service delivery. Additionally, he noted that REMSA was considering hiring existing local staff familiar with the area, which would help maintain continuity. Finally, Evans asked if the community could have a discussion about emergency evacuation plans once they are updated. Brown assured her that community input is a key part of the process, especially in unique areas like Gerlach and Incline Village, and that public discussions would be included in the planning efforts.

Russell Bierle raised two questions with County Manager Eric Brown. First, he inquired about the process for determining when remote public comments are available for County Commission meetings. He noted that while remote comment has generally been successful in Gerlach, it was not available for a recent meeting where a master plan amendment and rezoning application for a parcel in Empire was discussed. Because it wasn’t listed on the agenda, he did not keep the community center open for potential commenters. Brown initially believed the opportunity had been provided but acknowledged that they may have overlooked it and apologized for the oversight. Bierle pointed out that while no one attempted to comment, a procedural misstep like this could be grounds for appeal in future cases. Bierle then asked about Royal Ambulance, a company being considered for EMS services in Gerlach. He noted that, to his understanding, Royal has primarily operated as a transport service between medical facilities rather than as an emergency response provider. Brown admitted he was not fully familiar with Royal’s history but mentioned that the company received positive feedback from Burning Man organizers for its performance during the festival. He assured Bierle that county staff, including Assistant County Manager Dave Solaro, would conduct further research to ensure Royal’s qualifications for emergency response services.

Tina Walters asked County Manager Eric Brown whether any of the available parcels in Gerlach might qualify for the county’s affordable housing initiatives. She acknowledged past efforts to pursue this but wanted to keep the idea in consideration for the future. Brown agreed that previous attempts had been made but admitted he did not have an immediate update. He assured Walters that he was not giving up on the possibility and appreciated the reminder to keep it on the county’s radar.

1. **GERLACH ARTRAIL TRAILHEAD UPDATE & HOUSING REHAB GRANT UPDATE –**Gabrielle Enfield presented an overview of Washoe County’s housing rehabilitation program in collaboration with *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada*, a nonprofit focused on home repairs for low-income residents, seniors, and people with disabilities. She explained that the county previously worked with the organization using ARPA funds and that they have now received additional state funding for housing rehabilitation. However, the state funding only covers renovation costs, so Washoe County is stepping in to assist with assessments, eligibility, and homeowner coordination. Enfield highlighted that the initiative will include a special focus on Gerlach due to its remote location and unique challenges in accessing handyman and repair services. To make repairs more cost-effective, multiple projects will be bundled together to attract contractors willing to work in the area. A survey has been launched to gather information on community needs, and all Gerlach homeowners, regardless of income, are encouraged to participate. Information on the program and the survey link is being distributed via Facebook and posted at the local post office. The program offers three types of assistance: *Safe at Home*, which provides safety modifications like grab bars, lighting, and fall prevention measures; *Critical Home Repairs*, which covers major renovations such as plumbing, electrical work, and HVAC repairs; and *Accessibility Modifications*, which support those with mobility challenges. The maximum grant per home is $20,000, and repairs will be conducted by licensed contractors vetted by *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada*, with a one-year warranty on all work. The timeline for the program begins immediately with community outreach and survey collection running through mid-March. Assessments and minor repairs will take place in April, followed by a formal request for contractor bids in May. Major renovations are scheduled to take place between July and September, with final inspections ensuring all work meets safety and quality standards. Enfield emphasized the program's goal of improving safety and livability for Gerlach residents while making repairs more accessible through coordinated efforts. She noted that residents will have direct involvement in the process, and *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada* will manage contractor oversight to ensure quality results. She concluded by expressing appreciation for the community and the opportunity to bring these resources to Gerlach.

Schatzi Gambrell asked if the housing rehabilitation program was available to residents outside of Gerlach and Empire, specifically those living in more remote areas like Duck Flat and Fish Springs. Gabrielle Enfield confirmed that the program aims to serve all of Northern Washoe County, though logistical details would need to be coordinated with *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada* to schedule assessments and services efficiently across the large area. Gambrell expressed enthusiasm for the program, noting how costly it can be to get contractors to travel to the region. She also raised concerns about eligibility, as the program is primarily designed for homeowners, while many people in the area rent their homes. Enfield explained that the state-funded portion of the program is strictly for homeowners, but in past housing rehab programs, there have been ways to collaborate with landlords to benefit tenants. She said she would follow up with *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada* to see if any flexibility exists for rental properties. Gambrell expressed her appreciation for the program and its potential impact on the community.

Kristy Evans thanked Gabrielle Enfield for the presentation and sought clarification on how information about the housing rehabilitation program would be shared with the community. She asked if there was a plan to post details at the post office for those who may not be active on Facebook. Enfield confirmed that Cindy Carter had been given the materials and was posting them at the post office. She also offered to send printed flyers to the *Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)* so they could be distributed more widely. Evans reiterated the importance of making the program accessible to all homeowners, not just those who meet the income eligibility criteria, given the difficulty of getting contractors to travel to the area. She confirmed that everyone, regardless of income, should fill out the survey to take advantage of the opportunity. Enfield explained that while higher-income homeowners wouldn’t qualify for free services, *Rebuilding Together Northern Nevada* would still coordinate contractor bids for them, helping to bring services to the area at more reasonable prices. She emphasized that all repairs, whether grant-funded or privately contracted, would follow the same July-September timeframe. Evans expressed her appreciation for the effort put into the program.

Gabrielle Enfield shared exciting news about long-awaited funding for repairs to County Route 34. While she couldn't take credit for it personally, she explained that after multiple unsuccessful applications for various grants, Washoe County's *Community Services Department (CSD)* successfully secured a *Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)* grant worth $20 million. This funding will go toward much-needed road repairs, as the route takes significant wear and tear each year. She noted that the county is currently in negotiations with the federal agency overseeing the grant, and while some projects are stalled, this one is moving forward. However, the process will take time, beginning with the required *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)* review before work can begin. Despite the lengthy timeline, Enfield expressed excitement and confidence that, after years of effort, the project is finally happening.

Russell Bierle asked whether the $20 million FLAP grant was solely designated for County Route 34. Gabrielle Enfield and County Manager Eric Brown confirmed that the funding is specifically for that road. Brown clarified that the project will cover an eight-mile stretch from the Y intersection up to the eight-mile marker, though they had initially requested funding to extend repairs up to the 12-mile marker near the Burning Man cutoff. Enfield acknowledged that while securing full funding remains a challenge, getting approval for eight miles of repairs is a significant success compared to previous attempts, and they continue refining their approach to improve future funding opportunities.

Gabrielle Enfield provided an update on the progress of the *Art Trail* trailhead project, explaining that it has been more complicated than expected. Washoe County has been working with Alicia at the *Nevada Land Trust* to resolve legal and logistical issues, particularly concerning securing the *Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)* land as a permanent recreational site. Delays have been caused in part by staffing turnover on her team, which has slowed progress. However, *State Lands and Infrastructure Funding (SLIFF)* has been set aside to support the project once the legal aspects are resolved. The *Nevada Land Trust* is assisting with the technical details, and Enfield assured the community that they are continuing to navigate the necessary steps to move the project forward.

Russell Bierle suggested that Gabrielle Enfield attend the next *Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)* meeting to discuss the *Art Trail* trailhead project, as recent elections have brought in new board members unfamiliar with the plan. He noted that past discussions included concerns about who would retain ownership of the land and be responsible for its maintenance. The previous board had hesitated due to worries that maintaining a park without a revenue source would create an unfunded mandate, potentially forcing an increase in utility rates, since GGID’s income comes solely from utility services. Enfield agreed that it was a good idea and committed to attending the next GGID meeting with *Nevada Land Trust* representative Alicia to provide an update.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB –

Candee Ramos from Washoe County provided an update on upcoming developer meetings, stating that there are currently none scheduled for the Gerlach area. The only upcoming event in Washoe County is the *High Desert Armory* project in Washoe Valley. She reminded attendees that they can sign up for email notifications about future developer meetings through their district list (*District 5 for Gerlach*) or by subscribing to neighborhood developer updates. She offered to walk through the sign-up process but noted that she reviews it monthly and didn’t want to repeat information unnecessarily. No attendees had further questions.**
2. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS –**

Schatzi Gambrell expressed appreciation for Candee Ramos's hard work and thanked County Manager Eric Brown for the broadband improvements in Gerlach, calling it a lifesaver. They also praised Brown's planning efforts, especially in comparison to recent news about issues in Lovelock. Brown thanked them in return and mentioned he would try to visit Gerlach in person in March.

Kristy Evans thanked Gabrielle Enfield, Candee Ramos, and County Manager Eric Brown for taking the time to attend the meeting and for providing valuable updates. She expressed excitement about the planned rehabilitation of County Road 34 and other community projects. Evans also acknowledged and welcomed new attendees at the meeting, appreciating their participation in the community discussion.

Schatzi Gambrell asked Candee Ramos whether a mailing could be sent to all residents in *District 5*, informing them about the availability of Zoom meetings and remote public comment at the *Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)* building. She was concerned that residents in remote areas like Duck Flat might not be aware that they can participate in county meetings without traveling to Reno. Ramos acknowledged the request and said she would explore creative outreach methods in coordination with the county’s communications director while considering budget constraints. She noted that previous postcard mailings had caused issues but emphasized that other communication strategies might be available to better inform rural residents about their options for participation. Gambrell appreciated the effort and clarified that her main goal was improved outreach.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**

There was no public comment.

**ADJOURNMENT** –

 The meeting was adjourned at 7:26 pm