**Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board**

**Minutes of the regular meeting of the Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board held on July 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, Russell Bierle, Schatzi Gambrell, Brandy Wilbur (Zoom)

Absent -

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**The pledge of allegiance was recited.
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**
There was no public comment
3. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF** June 12, 2025

Schatzi Gambrell motioned to approve the minutes of the June 12th Gerlach CAB meeting. Kristy Evans seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.
4. **ELECTION OF CAB OFFICERS**

Candee Ramos explained the process for electing CAB officers.

Tina Walters moved to nominate Russell Bierle for CAB Chair and Schatzi seconded the motion. Russell Bierle accepted the nomination and was voted for unanimously by the Gerlach/Empire CAB.

Kristy Evans was nominated by Tina Walters as Vice Chair of the Gerlach/ Empire CAB and Russell Bierle seconded the nomination. All the CAB members voted in favor of the nomination for Kristy Evans as Vice Chair.
5. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

There were no public safety updates.

1. **ROYAL AMBULANCE INTRODUCTION -**John Rey Hassan, Chief Administrative Officer at Royal Ambulance, presented an overview of the company's new emergency medical services operations in Gerlach, Nevada. He introduced Royal as a Bay Area-based organization with a strong foundation in critical care, hospital partnerships, and 911 services, including medical support for Burning Man. Despite their size and scope, he emphasized that their approach in Gerlach is rooted in humility, partnership, and a desire to support — not replace — local services. Hassan acknowledged that the rural EMS work is a personal passion for him, stemming from his early career with the National Park Service and years spent in the region. He shared that Royal was awarded the service contract through a fast-tracked process, submitting a proposal in March, receiving notice in May, and partially launching operations by late June. A full go-live is planned for August 1, with a possibility of brief service interruptions before then. The Gerlach EMS service is currently operating with a 24/7 advanced life support ambulance under the familiar call sign Medic 83. It is staffed by an EMT or advanced EMT and a paramedic or EMS RN. The team has already responded to five calls, including care flights, ground transport, and treatment-in-place scenarios. The current ambulance is Royal-branded, but the plan is to transition to the existing Gerlach fire ambulance, with branding determined by community preference. Hassan stressed Royal's commitment to exceptional patient care, with a focus on rural-specific challenges like extended transport times. Medical direction is provided by Dr. Jeff Weston, and all protocols are state approved. Every call in Gerlach undergoes clinical review due to the lower call volume, ensuring high standards of care. Importantly, patients will not receive direct bills for services. While insurance will be billed, Royal will not pursue additional charges beyond what insurance pays — a practice Hassan said is meant to prevent fear of using 911 services due to cost. He closed by thanking numerous partners who helped make the rapid launch possible, including Royal’s internal team, Washoe County leadership, the Gerlach Fire Department, Pyramid Lake Fire Rescue, Burning Man representatives, and Nevada EMS officials. He made his personal contact information available and welcomed community engagement and questions.

Kristy Evans began by expressing gratitude to Royal Ambulance for attending the meeting and making the effort to show up in person. She acknowledged that while many in the community are unhappy with the broader arrangement regarding emergency services in Gerlach, their frustrations are not directed at Royal as a provider. She clarified that the community’s dissatisfaction stems from ongoing efforts to secure better rural services from Washoe County, and emphasized appreciation for Royal stepping in during a challenging time. She then asked how Royal plans to communicate any potential brownout days when services may not be available. John Rey Hassan responded that he had started a weekly stakeholder email and is open to expanding its reach, depending on community preferences. Kristy recommended using local Facebook groups and the post office bulletin board to reach residents both online and offline. She also asked where Royal was currently operating from and was told that operations are based out of the house on Short Street, which Hassan said is more practical than the fire station for EMS needs. Kristy then raised the issue of non-emergency medical support, noting that in other rural areas like Pyramid Lake, ambulance staff are sometimes called on to provide basic care like dressing changes. Hassan said Royal is open to responding to any call for assistance and has the time and staffing to handle the area’s relatively low call volume. Lastly, Kristy encouraged Royal staff to attend community events like potlucks and school graduations, saying it’s an important way for residents to get to know them and build trust. Hassan agreed and welcomed the invitation.

Schatzi Gambrell offered additional suggestions for building community trust, emphasizing that beyond attending local events, emergency personnel should consider personally introducing themselves by knocking on residents’ doors, something that has worked well in the past, especially with seniors who feel more comfortable seeing a familiar face before needing help. She also recommended posting a whiteboard with contact information in a visible location, so residents know how to reach the team if no one answers the door. She inquired about whether the local firehouse phone line, which used to ring in both the firehouse and the housing unit, was still active. John Rey Hassan responded that he didn’t believe that phone line was still in service but said he could provide the crew’s on-duty cell phone number. He added the important reminder that for any medical emergency, residents should always call 911, not the crew cell phone. Schatzi expressed appreciation for Royal’s presence at CAB meetings and encouraged continued participation, even virtually. She acknowledged the ongoing uncertainty around funding and the three-month service window but thanked the team for their persistence and effort in navigating the complicated contracting process.

Tina Walters asked whether uninsured individuals would be billed for ambulance rides. John Rey Hassan responded that Royal Ambulance will not send any direct bills to patients, regardless of insurance status, meaning uninsured individuals will not be charged for services.

Brandy Wilbur asked whether community members could stop by the station for non-emergency assessments, such as a possible broken toe, without calling 911. John Rey Hassan confirmed that anyone is welcome to stop by, and if the crew isn’t immediately present, they’ll do their best to respond promptly. Brandy also inquired about the availability of supplemental EMS insurance programs, like those previously offered by REMSA or Pyramid Lake, which cover air or ground transport for an annual fee. Hassan explained that Royal does not currently offer such a program, and given their no-balance-billing policy, it may not provide much additional value. However, he said they would be open to exploring it further if there’s community interest.

Kristy Evans asked whether REMSA still provides care flights in the area. The response confirmed that REMSA is one of several air transport providers serving the region, along with Intermountain Life Flight, Classic, and one based in Winnemucca. While Royal couldn’t speak to the specifics of REMSA’s insurance policy, it was acknowledged that having supplemental coverage could be beneficial if REMSA ends up being the responding provider for a care flight.Russell Bierle noted that many others have struggled to sustain medical services in Gerlach and asked Royal Ambulance to commit to its policy of not billing patients directly—even if labor costs rise or revenue falls short. John Rey Hassan affirmed that Royal’s commitment remains unchanged: they will bill insurance but will not balance bill patients under any circumstances while operating in Gerlach**.**Seth Strenzel thanked Royal Ambulance for stepping in during a time when Gerlach faced the potential loss of EMS services. He asked whether Royal's service area includes remote regions such as Vya or up to the Oregon and California borders. The response confirmed that Royal will respond to calls in the same way Pyramid Lake Fire did—if they’re dispatched to a location, they will go, regardless of whether it’s within northern Washoe County or nearby areas like Pershing County.

Robbie Zeno was introduced as one of Royal Ambulance’s permanent EMTs in Gerlach, bringing extensive 911 and ambulance experience. Jen Foss, an experienced paramedic, was also introduced as a casual medic supporting the team through the 17th. Robbie will be a consistent presence in the community, and residents are encouraged to stop by and meet him.

Carl Kopek welcomed Royal Ambulance to the Gerlach community and offered several suggestions to help integrate the new EMS team. He proposed that the crew join local seniors for lunch at the Senior Center, as the previous fire staff did, to build relationships. He also requested a care flight contact number and website that could be posted around town for those interested in enrolling in air ambulance coverage. Additionally, he recommended establishing a non-emergency phone line and suggested using the existing fiber optic connection at their location to set up a landline. This would provide a reliable communication option in case cell service goes down. He concluded by thanking the Royal team for stepping into a challenging role in a remote community, acknowledging both the difficulties and rewards of serving in such a frontier environment. Royal staff responded with appreciation and reiterated their commitment to becoming a trusted part of the community.

Brandy Wilbur offered to give the Royal Ambulance team a tour of the Empire mine site, noting that it's a complex area with multiple components beyond just a single address, including the pit, office, and other locations. She emphasized that while emergencies there are rare, it's helpful for responders to understand the layout and operations in advance. She invited them to reach out through any of the local contacts to arrange a tour. The Royal team appreciated the offer and expressed interest in becoming more familiar with the area’s unique terrain and challenges.

1. **GERLACH MICROGRID PROJECT -**Brian Beffort, Washoe County’s Sustainability Manager, provided an update on the county’s participation in the Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership (CMAP), a grant and technical assistance program from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. Washoe County was one of only 14 recipients nationwide—alongside 12 communities in Alaska and one in North Dakota—selected for support to develop a solar microgrid in Gerlach. He shared that the project is still in its early stages, with no formal agreements finalized yet, but two initial site options are being explored. The first is the Gerlach Community Center, which could be outfitted with a small solar-powered battery backup system (a “nano grid”) to maintain essential power during outages. The second site is a 50-acre parcel owned by the Gerlach GID on the west side of town, which has the potential to generate four to five times the town’s total energy needs. While the land presents some challenges due to soft ground, Beffort believes there are workable solutions. If developed, the solar installation could potentially generate income for the town, though how that would function is still undetermined. He promised to share updates with the community as soon as more information becomes available.

Schatzi Gambrell praised Brian Beffort for his dedication to the microgrid project, emphasizing that it was his hard work—not luck—that secured the partnership. Brian thanked her and shared the saying, “Luck favors the prepared,” acknowledging the effort involved. Schatzi then asked for the Assessor’s Parcel Number (APN) for the 50-acre site being considered for the solar project. Brian began to look it up using the Washoe Regional Mapping System, but Schatzi quickly provided the number herself: 071-240-08. She confirmed it’s the parcel with the old 4-H stable behind her house, and Brian acknowledged that it was the correct location.

Brian Beffort explained that while Washoe County received a $295,000 grant through the Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership, that amount alone is not enough to build a solar microgrid in Gerlach. To secure the additional funding needed, he is working with the Community Foundation of Northern Nevada and the Nevada Clean Energy Fund to establish an independent charitable fund that would support renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate resiliency projects in the community. The fund aims to raise $100,000 in seed money, with $51,000 already committed. Brian is seeking additional donors and hopes to launch the fund by August to take advantage of seasonal visitors, possibly by setting up signage with a QR code for donations. Once established, the fund will not be managed by Washoe County, but rather by the Community Foundation, with funding decisions made by an independent advisory board including local representatives, subject matter experts, and citizens. He added that the inspiration for the fund also comes from a previously canceled federal grant for a community forestry program, noting that Reno is the fastest warming city in the U.S., and local action—such as planting trees—is critical. He closed by encouraging anyone interested in contributing or helping to reach out, promising to personally pick up checks if needed and to make donation methods as accessible as possible.

Russell Bierle asked Brian Beffort if the $100,000 fundraising goal for the new charitable fund was just a starting point and whether more funds would be needed. Brian confirmed that the $100,000 is simply the minimum required to establish the account with the Community Foundation and that the actual cost of the microgrid project will likely be in the six-figure range, necessitating ongoing fundraising. He mentioned that corporate donations might be possible, especially if the fund can align with carbon offset metrics that appeal to companies looking to reduce emissions. Russell then raised questions about the current state of the carbon credit market, noting recent changes at the national level and wondering whether such credits still have value for funding projects. Brian acknowledged that while the domestic carbon credit market is uncertain, international markets remain active. He expressed hope for recovery, noting that climate challenges like heat waves, fires, and rising sea levels persist, making carbon offsets a meaningful tool. Russell pointed out that while planting trees is beneficial, dead or removed trees can become fuel for fires, which undermines their carbon benefits. He asked whether small communities could sequester this biomass to generate carbon credits. Brian agreed that the focus must be on successfully growing and maintaining trees, which requires significant investment in irrigation, infrastructure, and community involvement. He cited the One Truckee River project as a model for combining workforce development with environmental restoration. For trees that don’t survive, Brian suggested alternatives to burning, such as creating biochar or mulch, as potential options for carbon sequestration.

Kristy Evans disagreed with a previous comment suggesting trees can’t survive in Gerlach, asserting that when properly watered, they thrive—making it a user issue rather than a climate issue. She then asked Brian Beffort whether donations to the new energy fund would be tax-deductible. Brian confirmed they would, as the Community Foundation of Northern Nevada is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Kristy followed up with a suggestion to prepare for donation opportunities during August, when there is more visitor traffic. She proposed creating eye-catching lawn signs with QR codes to place at local businesses and around town to encourage contributions. Brian agreed it was a great idea, said the county’s graphics team could help design them, and suggested they also explore larger signs. He said he would follow up with the GID and CAB to coordinate next steps. Kristy expressed enthusiasm about making the signs as visible and widespread as possible.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**Candee Ramos from Washoe County gave a presentation demonstrating how residents can access local development and volunteer information through the county’s website. She walked participants through the process of navigating to the *Neighborhood Development Hub*, a tool that shows upcoming and recent development projects, including map-based data and project listings. She used a previous project, Black Rock Rentals, as an example—explaining how the hub provides parcel numbers, meeting details, developer information, and opportunities for public comment. She noted that public feedback is considered and can influence project plans, and that all meetings are recorded and shared with the planning department to ensure accountability. She then highlighted the *Community Involvement* section of the website, showing how residents can explore and apply for volunteer roles and open positions on boards and commissions. At the time of the meeting, openings included the Open Space and Regional Parks Commission and the Human Services Agency Senior Advisory Board. Candee emphasized the importance of community participation and encouraged anyone with questions to reach out. She mentioned this information is reviewed monthly to keep residents informed and engaged.
2. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS –**There were no outstanding requests from the last meeting.
3. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS**
Russell Bierle requested a future presentation on a unique piece of Nevada history known as the Sagebrush War—a little-known conflict that occurred when this part of Nevada was reassigned to Washoe County after a border survey revealed the original county seat was actually in California (now Susanville). The dispute reportedly ended in a shootout that turned into a shared drink among parties involved. He suggested this historical context might help explain local sentiments and asked Candee Ramos to look into organizing a brief presentation on the topic. Candee agreed to follow up. Russell also announced a community Bingo fundraiser happening that Saturday at Bruno’s, where he would be calling numbers. Proceeds from the $6 Bingo cards will go toward prizes for Senior Bingo.

Kristy Evans asked for an update on the status of CAB (Citizen Advisory Board) membership. Candee Ramos responded with the news that longtime member Tina Walters had just submitted her resignation after 18 years of service, prompting expressions of gratitude from the group. With Tina’s departure, one at-large seat on the board is now vacant. Candee explained that two recent alternate appointments had already been made by Commissioner Herman—Elizabeth Shoemaker and Luis Garcia—bringing the total to five active at-large members and two alternates. Commissioner Herman will now have the option to either move one of the alternates into the newly vacant seat or appoint someone from the general applicant pool. Kristy followed up by asking whether applications were still open, and Candee confirmed they are accepted year-round. Applications are valid for one year and reviewed by the commissioner when vacancies arise. She encouraged interested community members to apply soon if they’d like to be considered for the current opening.

Schatzi Gambrell raised two main concerns during her comments. First, she asked for clarification on how hotel or entertainment tax revenues collected in Gerlach are distributed. She expressed a belief that, like Reno's $16 entertainment tax, those funds should stay within the community where they are generated. She requested a report or explanation detailing where Gerlach’s portion of those funds goes, emphasizing her desire to see more local reinvestment. Second, Schatzi noted that when she visited the CAB (Citizen Advisory Board) website, the Gerlach area of responsibility map appeared to be incorrect or inaccessible. Instead of showing the vast northern Nevada region traditionally associated with Gerlach, the map only displayed areas like Sun Valley. She asked Candee Ramos to investigate and correct the issue. She concluded by paying tribute to Tina Walters, recognizing her as an inspirational leader on the CAB and inviting others to join in honoring Tina with drinks at Joe's after the meeting.

Russell Bierle requested that a future meeting includes a presentation from the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office regarding the automated license plate reader recently installed on Aspen Way in Gerlach. He asked for information about what data is being collected, how it is stored, who it is shared with, the approval process for the installation, and how the community can learn more about the program. Candee Ramos acknowledged the request and noted it for follow-up.

Tina Walters shared a heartfelt message reflecting on her time serving on the Gerlach Citizen Advisory Board. Though not quoted directly in your excerpt, the surrounding conversation indicated that she had recently submitted her resignation after 18 years of service. She was recognized by her peers for her dedication and influence, with several members—particularly Schatzi Gambrell and Kristy Evans—expressing their admiration and noting how much they had learned from her. The meeting concluded with warm tributes and an invitation to gather at Joe's afterward to honor Tina’s contributions.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**
Carl Copek publicly thanked Tina Walters for her 18 years of dedicated service to the Gerlach community, highlighting the sacrifice and commitment it takes to consistently show up for meetings and put the community's needs first. He praised all board members for their volunteerism and emphasized that Tina’s long service deserves deep gratitude. He then shifted topics to address fire prevention, specifically the issue of fuel loads in town and at the burn pile. Carl mentioned a facility near Susanville, California, that converts wooden waste into power by burning it in large furnaces. He suggested exploring the possibility of transporting Gerlach’s green waste there as a more environmentally responsible option and potentially partnering with carbon offset programs to cover costs. To support local fire prevention efforts, Carl offered his personal dump trailer to anyone who pulls weeds and needs help hauling them away. He concluded by thanking Brandy Wilbur for a trailer full of gypsum, which he described as an effective soil amendment. He offered to deliver gypsum to anyone interested, noting its immediate positive effect on local greenery.

**ADJOURNMENT**The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM.