**Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board**

**Minutes of the regular meeting of the Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board held on June 12, 2025, at 6:00 P.M.**

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

1. **CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM –**Present – Schatzi Gambrell, Tina Walters, Russell Bierle, Brandy Wilbur, Kristy Evans (online)
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 April** 10, 2025

Schatzi Gambrell motioned to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2025 Gerlach Empire CAB meeting. Russell Bierle seconded the motion, and the minutes passed unanimously.
5. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

Washoe County Sheriff’s Office
Deputy Crews reported that the dispatch supervisor is actively investigating concerns raised by Tina about 911 calls being routed outside the county, which caused delays in emergency responses. The supervisor is reviewing call recordings and tracing which cell towers handled the calls. Deputy Crews will follow up once more information is available.

1. **EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES & FIRE UPDATE FROM WASHOE COUNTY -**

Assistant County Manager Dave Solaro provided an update on emergency services in Gerlach following the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe's withdrawal from providing EMS. In response, Solaro explored alternatives including REMSA, Royal Ambulance (used during Burning Man), and working with the local volunteer fire department. Washoe County allocated $650,000 in the new fiscal budget (starting July 1) to support Gerlach EMS and related station costs. However, due to a countywide hiring freeze, the option of staff with new county employees was not viable. REMSA declined service, but Solaro negotiated a proposed contract with Royal Ambulance to provide 24/7 paramedic service year-round. For nine months, the service would include both a paramedic and EMT. For the other three months (low call volume), only a paramedic would be staffed unless licensing requirements necessitate a second EMT—potentially requiring contingency funds. Fire service remains unresolved, but Solaro is collaborating with the volunteer fire department and regional mutual aid partners. The contract with Royal Ambulance will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners on June 17 for approval.

Tina Walters asked for clarification that in 2 weeks they will not have any fire service except for volunteers. Dave Solaro responded that they are correct.

Schatzi Gambrell expressed concern about the contract language that gives Royal Ambulance access to all equipment in the firehouse, including fire engines, even though Royal is not providing fire services. She was worried this might restrict volunteer firefighters from using the equipment unless given permission. Dave Solaro explained that while the contract includes all equipment for flexibility, Royal has no intention of operating fire apparatus. The inclusion mainly allows for the use of items like the UTV for medical responses and any usage would require county authorization. Solaro emphasized that fire equipment remains under the control of trained and licensed volunteers and that Royal may train alongside volunteers to support emergency response. Gambrell also brought up the need for sleeping accommodations for volunteer firefighters who don’t live in Gerlach. She noted that housing is sometimes needed when volunteers come in to support the community. Solaro acknowledged the concern and said he would work with Royal to ensure shared use of the quarters, noting that Royal will not require the entire space and that arrangements can be made to support the needs of local volunteers.

Russell Bierle questioned the plan to have only one paramedic on duty from January through March, noting that without a second responder, the paramedic wouldn't be able to transport patients. He pointed out that mutual aid or care flight would be required, and referenced past issues when Gerlach faced similar fire department budget crises. He asked whether the State EMS is likely to approve this setup, given past rejections. Dave Solaro responded that Royal Ambulance is working directly with the State EMS to secure the necessary approvals. He acknowledged the concern and reiterated that the goal is to maintain advanced life support in town, even if transportation logistics remain challenging. If the State doesn’t approve the one-paramedic model, he plans to request about $50,000 in contingency funds from the County Commission to support a second EMT during those three months. While the current budget of $700,000 is an improvement from past years, it still falls short of fully meeting community expectations.

Kristy Evans thanked Dave Solaro for his explanation and acknowledged the funding challenges. She emphasized the importance of EMS and fire services, referencing a recent destructive event, and asked whether future budget cycles might allow for better coverage in the area. Dave Solaro responded that he is exploring ways to increase funding for Gerlach’s fire and EMS services. He discussed a potential proposal to expand Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District’s service area into regions like Red Rock and Warm Springs. This expansion would increase tax revenue from areas currently not paying for fire services. That shift could free up roughly $540,000 currently paid from the general fund to Truckee Meadows Fire, which could then be redirected to Gerlach. Additionally, Solaro mentioned a $300,000 grant awarded for studying a microgrid electricity project. This would create an opportunity for the community to oversize and sell that power, creating a new, sustainable revenue source—though this would require coordination with the local GID (Gerlach General Improvement District). He concluded by affirming that these are early-stage ideas under discussion and hoped the explanation addressed Kristy’s question.

Russell Bierle raised several concerns regarding Royal Ambulance. First, he questioned the contract’s inclusion of the Gerlach Volunteer Fire Department brand, noting that the local department was not consulted. He emphasized that the brand carries generational significance and community pride. In response, Dave Solaro clarified that the contract was designed to keep the Gerlach brand visible alongside the Royal brand to maintain community identity. He acknowledged the community’s concerns and said further discussion with the volunteers could determine whether co-branding is appropriate. Russell then brought up the issue of Royal being granted full use of the local fire station, stating that the Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID) owns the building and land, and that no approval was given for a third-party to use the facility. He asked whether a formal lease could be presented to the GGID before the agreement goes into effect. Solaro confirmed there is no clear documentation establishing Washoe County’s right to use the facility, noting that past improvements were likely done through informal agreements. He said if the GGID requires a lease, the County will begin that process, although it would not be completed by the service start date. He suggested the ambulance could be temporarily housed elsewhere if necessary. Russell stressed the GGID's concern about liability, explaining that if Royal personnel are not vetted or authorized, the district could face legal risk. Solaro responded that he would work with the County’s and Royal’s insurance providers to explore naming the GGID as an additional insured under existing policies to offer temporary protection while a lease is negotiated. Finally, Russell noted that the contract assigns fire response duties to local volunteers and mutual aid agencies, but the Gerlach volunteers are not currently equipped or trained for that role. He asked whether Washoe County could provide support, including training, equipment, and insurance. Solaro confirmed that Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, under existing county contracts, is available to provide training and support. He also mentioned that Chief Pelt from Pyramid Lake had offered to assist. Solaro committed to involving the volunteers in TMFPD’s training regimen, depending on their willingness to participate.

Schatzi Gambrell reflected on past experiences related to fire service transitions in Gerlach. She recalled that about 9 or 10 years ago, after local volunteers departed, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District was brought in without any clear lease agreement—she doesn’t remember one being discussed, and it seemed they simply started operating. She also expressed frustration that during their time there, Truckee Meadows stripped the firehouse of memorabilia and historical items tied to Gerlach’s firefighting legacy. She asked that, in discussions with Royal Ambulance, the county ensure the community's history is respected and that the firehouse remains decorated with its original historical displays.

1. **GERLACH ARTRAIL TRAILHEAD UPDATE -**Gabrielle Enfield, Washoe County’s Community Reinvestment Manager, provided an update on the Washoe Artrail project, specifically the effort to establish a trailhead and install a new piece of art in Gerlach. The main challenge has been identifying a suitable location for the installation. The County is currently considering a 38.6-acre parcel at the town's entrance as a potential site, which could also serve as the starting point for a trail leading across the playa to Guru Road. Enfield shared that Washoe County has partnered with the Nevada Land Trust to explore options for preserving the site for cultural and recreational use. These options include a conservation easement—though complex and time-consuming, or a simpler long-term lease or intergovernmental agreement with the Gerlach GID, like past arrangements for local parks. Once GID feedback is received, the County will determine how to proceed. In terms of funding, Enfield reported that the County has access to a $500,000 Arts and Culture Grant, which could support this project as well as others, such as murals across unincorporated Washoe County. She praised the existing murals in Gerlach and said similar public art would be extended to county buildings and utility boxes in rural areas. Because the grant funds must be spent by December 31, 2026, the team is shifting focus to accelerate progress now that staffing has increased.

Schatzi Gambrell expressed her enthusiasm for the art trail project but raised two concerns. First, she asked whether the artists who previously revised their proposals after community feedback would be reconsidered. Second, she noted that the Gerlach GID had previously questioned who would be responsible for maintaining the art installation and how that would be funded. In response, Gabrielle Enfield confirmed that past artists would be welcome to participate again, but the County plans to issue a new, open call for artists with public engagement beforehand. The selection process would involve community input from Gerlach, ensuring local voices shape the design and expectations. She emphasized the goal of supporting local artists and said this approach was successful at the Crystal Peak trailhead. The artist selection will include a representative from Gerlach and be informed by community feedback gathered before the call is finalized. Maintenance concerns were acknowledged, though no detailed solution was provided in this portion of the discussion.
2. **PRESENTATION AND DRAFT ORDINANCE OUTLINING NEVADA STARRY SKIES CERTIFICATION PROCESS –**

Chelsea Kincheloe from the Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation presented an overview of the Nevada Starry Skies Certification Program. She began by explaining that the Division was created in 2019 to support and promote sustainable, high-quality outdoor recreation across Nevada, including efforts to protect the state’s exceptional dark skies. Kincheloe emphasized that Nevada, especially rural communities like Gerlach, still offers rare access to pristine night skies—a contrast to increasing global light pollution, which is rising by about 10% annually. The Nevada Starry Skies Certification aims to preserve these skies by working with communities to reduce light pollution. Kincheloe explained that misdirected or excessive lighting negatively impacts not only visibility of the stars, but also human health, wildlife, and pollinators. For example, certain native primroses rely on nocturnal hawk moths for pollination, and excess lighting disrupts that natural process. She introduced the Bortle Scale as a tool to measure night sky quality and encouraged Gerlach residents to observe their night skies during a new moon to better understand the darkness level in their area, likely a 2 or 3 on the scale. Kincheloe highlighted the growing popularity of astrotourism and community events centered around stargazing, such as those held in state parks and national programs like “Park to Park in the Dark.” She noted that observatories and dark sky-friendly communities across the West are capitalizing on these opportunities and that Nevada is keeping pace with programs, including a dark sky-themed license plate supporting monitoring, education, and infrastructure. She introduced the Nevada Starry Skies Certification Program, established by Senate Bill in 2021, making Nevada one of the first states to formalize this type of community-level dark sky initiative. Eligible applicants include unincorporated towns, HOAs, tribes, parks, schools, and businesses. Certification requires developing a lighting management plan, inventorying public lights, and applying dark-sky-friendly lighting practices, such as fully shielded fixtures and low-wattage, warm-colored lights. For Gerlach, Kincheloe said the next steps involve collaborating with Washoe County to draft a lighting ordinance and conducting a lighting inventory with Dave Cooper to assess public facilities like schools, businesses, and community buildings—excluding private homes. The application window for the program runs annually from October 1 to 31. She closed by offering her contact information and inviting the community to ask questions about the process.

Russell Bierle asked whether the Nevada Starry Skies Certification could be expanded beyond the central area of Gerlach to cover a broader radius, such as five miles, given the town’s lack of defined boundaries and visibility concerns related to nearby developments like proposed power plants or mining operations. Chelsea Kincheloe responded that this is a topic she had begun discussing with Brian Beffort and would need to follow up to determine the possible extent of the ordinance’s reach. She noted that clarifying where the ordinance could legally apply would be necessary before considering expansion beyond Gerlach’s core.

Pete Dronkers asked whether the Nevada Starry Skies Certification would lead to enforceable lighting standards or if it was simply symbolic. He noted that while earlier discussions made the program seem mostly voluntary, the mention of a county ordinance suggested it might have legal weight. He wanted clarification on whether the goal was to implement binding regulations and, if so, how they would be incorporated into Washoe County’s codes. Chelsea Kincheloe confirmed that the intention behind the ordinance is to go beyond recognition and actually implement better lighting practices, such as reducing light levels on public-facing buildings to curb light pollution. However, she acknowledged that she hasn’t yet worked through a full ordinance adoption process and would need to collaborate more with Washoe County to determine how it would fit into the development or building code. She agreed that enforceability is important for the program’s success and committed to following up as that process develops.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**Casey McDonald provided that there were no upcoming developments in the HUB. He then introduced the Budget 101 Engagement where people can give their input prior to the upcoming July 22nd in person session. He also explained that each week they look at the input the gage where the community is on the topic as well as identifying reoccurring concerns or questions that may be addressed during the session.

Tina Walters asked if the meeting would have a Zoom link and Casey responded that he was unsure and would find out the correct answer for them in the morning.

Casey further explained that the purpose of the meeting is to demonstrate transparency on how the County spends their money. He then explored the Boards & Commission Openings page where there were two openings: one for the Board of Equalization and one for the Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board.
2. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS –**
Tina Walters had no updates.

**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**\*\*public comment was taken after item 11

Luis Garcia thanked county staff for attending and expressed regret that he hadn’t had the chance to work directly with County Manager Eric Brown, whom he praised based on the positive things shared. Speaking as a community member rather than in his official capacity as postmaster, Luis delivered a heartfelt message about the importance of compassion and inclusion in small towns like Gerlach. He condemned actions within the community aimed at sabotaging or harming neighbors, particularly over something as symbolic as a Pride flag. He emphasized that the Pride flag is not a political statement but a representation of human rights and belonging, honoring the ongoing struggle for equality among LGBTQ+ individuals. Luis compared it to other advocacy flags like the POW/MIA flag, stressing that it doesn’t infringe on anyone’s rights but seeks equal treatment. He concluded by calling out the divisiveness he observed from some long-time locals who, despite claiming to love the town, create conflict or alienate others. His message was a plea for empathy, unity, and a more inclusive Gerlach.

Carl Copek began by thanking County Manager Eric Brown, Assistant Manager Dave Solaro, and Commissioner Jeanne Herman for their dedication to the Gerlach community. He expressed appreciation for their understanding, empathy, and efforts—particularly in addressing the local fire and EMS service challenges. Carl acknowledged the complexity of the situation but emphasized that the community is eager to work with the county to restore fire services and sees potential in the proposed solar project as a long-term funding solution. He then briefly responded to Luis Garcia’s earlier remarks about the Pride flag, calling the situation complex. Carl affirmed that everyone in Gerlach deserves safety and respect, and he condemned threats or harm against others based on who they are or what they represent. However, he also cautioned that Gerlach is a traditional Western town where change must be approached with tact. He urged both respect for new expressions of identity and understanding of long-standing community values, emphasizing the importance of civility to maintain peace. He closed by thanking the public and law enforcement for their continued presence and service.

Steve Grau, CEO and founder of Royal Ambulance, introduced himself and expressed gratitude for being considered to provide EMS services in Gerlach. He emphasized the importance of listening to the community and understanding its unique needs, noting that while Royal is new to this type of rural environment, they are committed to adapting and learning. Grau shared that the company, which started small in the Bay Area, has grown over 20 years to serve six counties with more than 800 employees who care deeply about the communities they serve. He highlighted Royal’s experience providing EMS at Burning Man and stressed the company’s core values of transparency, adaptability, and community integration. Grau stated that if selected, Royal intends to hire and train people to serve effectively while also living in and becoming part of the Gerlach community. He introduced John Ray, their clinical manager with extensive rural and flight medicine experience and closed by reaffirming Royal’s dedication to working hard to make the partnership successful.

1. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS**Commissioner Jeanne Herman acknowledged the length of the meeting and the strong county presence. She expressed deep concern about the fire services issue in Gerlach and wished there were a way to secure funding, joking about "robbing a bank" to help. She recognized the hard work of county staff, including Dave Solaro and the county manager, and encouraged the community to hear from him as well. She closed by saying she would be praying for the community.

Eric Brown, Washoe County Manager, began by thanking Dave Solaro for his work on the EMS and fire service challenges in Gerlach, acknowledging the issue’s complexity and reaffirming the County’s commitment to finding solutions. He emphasized that although he hasn’t visited recently due to responsibilities in Reno, the Gerlach fire issue remains an active and ongoing priority. Brown then shared personal news: he announced at the recent County Commission meeting that he will be stepping down as County Manager after five and a half years of service. He expressed his deep appreciation for Washoe County and Gerlach, calling it his favorite part of the county. He explained that the change is due in part to a shift in the demeanor and direction of the County Commission, that while Commissioner Jeanne Herman has remained supportive, other commissioners appear ready to choose a new manager. He stated there’s no animosity, recognizing that leadership changes are common with newly elected officials, and he has already exceeded the national average tenure for such a role. While stepping down, Brown clarified that he isn’t retiring permanently—he plans to take a short break with his wife before pursuing new opportunities, ideally remaining in Northern Nevada. He concluded by reiterating his respect for the community and his commitment to always be transparent and present, whether the news is good or bad.

Schatzi Gambrell expressed heartfelt appreciation for Eric Brown, acknowledging the many contributions he made to the Gerlach community during his time as County Manager. She highlighted achievements like securing DSL service and helping establish two fire departments, noting that while progress wasn’t always fast, it was meaningful and impactful. She said she would miss him deeply and shared her sadness over the upcoming transition, describing it as the loss of something truly valuable. Schatzi also voiced concern about the challenges ahead with new leadership, thanking Eric sincerely for his five years of dedication.

Kristy Evans expressed her sadness and disappointment upon hearing that County Manager Eric Brown is stepping down. She thanked him sincerely for his dedication and all he has done for the Gerlach community, calling him an asset to the county and praising his compassion and efforts. She wished him the best and said he would be greatly missed.

Tina Walters announced that a QR code has been added to the bottom of their meeting agendas, which she had requested. This code allows community members to submit requests for agenda items or updates, and it will be included on all future agendas.

**ADJOURNMENT** –

 The meeting was adjourned at 7:19 pm