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

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

 **May 8, 2025, at 6:00 P.M. at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood,**

**Gerlach, NV 89412**

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

For the previous minutes, Schatzi Gambrell asked for the minutes to be changed on Item#9 to correct the amount of the PILT money. Upon the change, Schatzi motioned to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2025, CAB meeting. Russell Bierle seconded the motion, and the minutes passed unanimously.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

Washoe County Sheriff’s Office
Deputy Crews from the Washoe County Sheriff's Office presented a quarterly report for the district, noting that crime statistics varied — some types of incidents decreased while others increased compared to the previous year. The data mostly consisted of point-by-point comparisons, and there was no major or specific information to highlight. He concluded by inviting any questions now or in the future. Tina Walters shared that when she called 911 the previous day, the call did not initially go to Washoe County EMS. Instead, it was routed first to a Pershing County deputy, then possibly another deputy, before finally reaching Washoe EMS. Deputy Crews believes that the call routing may have been affected by which cell tower — potentially in Pershing County — picked up the signal.

Schatzi Gambrell raised concerns about 911 call routing delays, referencing a similar issue from years ago that was supposedly fixed. She requested Deputy Crews to follow up with headquarters to check for any software or service updates that may be affecting call routing. Deputy Crews agreed to look into it. Gambrell also asked if anyone from Burning Man had reached out about the upcoming event, noting that people were already arriving in town. Deputy Crews responded that he had spoken with several individuals and that early planning meetings were underway, including efforts to connect with seasonal staff.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**
Candee Ramos demonstrated the Neighborhood Development Hub, a resource that provides information on local development projects. She showed the CAB how to access the hub. The hub contains detailed project information, including developer names, meeting dates, project descriptions, and related documents like sign-in sheets, meeting summaries, and public comments. She explained that public concerns and any developer commitments recorded during these meetings are submitted to planning authorities and must be incorporated into project plans if promises were made. In addition to the hub, Candee highlighted openings on two local boards and commissions: the Nevada Local Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council and the Washoe County Advisory Board to Manage Wildlife. She shared that these are good opportunities for community involvement, provided the application deadlines, and noted that the positions don’t require legal or professional backgrounds, with minimal time commitments. She invited questions from attendees about either topic.

Russell asked for clarification on a previous mention of the “Nevada local government justice” item, saying he didn’t catch the details and asked Candee to walk through it. Candee explained that the item refers to the *Nevada Local Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council*. This council advises the Nevada Sentencing Commission on legislation, rules, budget changes, and county-level programming related to criminal justice and reentry. It oversees local grants, develops performance measures, and seeks collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services. Terms are two years, no specific qualifications are required, and it’s suited for individuals passionate about rehabilitation and reentry. The council meets quarterly or as needed.

1. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS –**

Tina Walters stated that she will provide a report to the community summarizing requests made to the county during the previous CAB meeting. She noted that Dave Solaro is expected to attend the next meeting to give an update on the fire department, which will occur just before the Pyramid Lake fire contract ends.
Candee Ramos provided updates on two questions raised during the previous CAB meeting. The first question was whether Gerlach residents applying to county boards and commissions would be reimbursed for travel, given the long distance. She clarified that, currently, there is no travel reimbursement, though some boards may allow Zoom participation or create their own reimbursement policies. The second question concerned PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) funds. Candee explained that PILT funds, which come from the federal government for federally owned land, are pooled with other county revenues and not earmarked for specific programs or communities. Most PILT funds received by the County come from areas like Incline Village and Crystal Bay.

Schatzi Gambrell gave an in-depth explanation of the PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) program, stressing that while Washoe County receives federal payments for tax-exempt lands like BLM and national parks, the distribution of those funds does not fairly reflect the contribution or needs of rural areas like Gerlach. She noted that although the PILT formula is population-based, Gerlach is disadvantaged by being grouped with higher-population areas like Incline Village and Tahoe. She shared that out of nearly 2.9 million acres receiving PILT funds in Washoe County, more than 2.6 million are located in District 5, which includes Gerlach. Despite this, the funds are pooled and not proportionally redistributed. Schatzi cited federal language indicating that PILT payments should support essential services like fire protection, police, schools, and roads, and that they should be distributed to affected areas. She expressed frustration that the County has claimed Gerlach doesn’t generate enough tax revenue to support a local fire department, even though federal contributions through PILT significantly augment the area’s tax base. She argued that, when factoring in federal support, Gerlach residents are contributing as much—or more—than residents in areas like Incline Village. She concluded by stating that dismissing Gerlach as not paying enough taxes is unfair and insulting, given the contributions made both locally and federally.

1. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS**

Tina Walters asked Candee Ramos for an update on the art trail project, noting she had emailed her about it. Candee confirmed she received the request and had reached out to Gabrielle for information but hadn’t yet heard back, as she only sent the message earlier that day. She said she would try to get the update on a future agenda. Candee also mentioned that Brian Beffort, Washoe County’s sustainability manager, requested to present at the next CAB meeting to share information about a grant opportunity.

Russell Bierle expressed frustration over the ongoing lack of local representation in planning discussions with Burning Man. He’s been trying for years to get someone from Gerlach involved in the decision-making process, particularly to address basic community concerns like road closures or sanitation. Despite being advised by county staff to ask Burning Man to recognize Gerlach as a cooperating agency, that request was denied. Russell questioned how he can fulfill his role as a CAB member if he’s shut out of key meetings, emphasizing that Burning Man continues to operate without meaningful public input under the guise of a temporary permit. He said the current cycle—being excluded from planning, experiencing negative impacts, and then receiving apologies—repeats year after year. He urged that someone with authority outside the CAB step in, speak up for the community, and contact Burning Man directly, as his own attempts have been blocked.

Candee Ramos explained that it had been recommended for a local Gerlach entity—such as the CAB, if formally voted on—to request recognition as an "affected party" in the BLM permitting process for Burning Man. She noted that other entities, including Pershing County, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office, NDOT, and NHP, already have a seat at the table. Candee mentioned that the Gerlach Volunteer Fire Department is considered an affected party and advised reaching out to the BLM Winnemucca Field Office for more information, suggesting that the CAB could later agendize an action item if they wish to pursue this role. Russell Bierle responded that he had already spoken with Jonah Blustain, BLM’s Black Rock Field Manager, who said “affected party” is not an official term they use. Instead, BLM recognizes “cooperating agencies.” Russell said he requested cooperators meeting invitations for the CAB, GID, and the fire department—who were surprised to learn they supposedly had a seat at the table. As treasurer of the Gerlach Volunteer Fire Department, he confirmed he had never been informed. Although BLM initially said the volunteers could attend the cooperators meeting in Reno, he was later told they could not, which left him frustrated. Russell concluded that despite following the suggested steps, his efforts have led nowhere. Candee acknowledged his concerns and reiterated that the information came from Dave Solaro, who will attend the next meeting, and that the topic could be formally agendized for action at that time.

Schatzi Gambrell noted that the issue of Gerlach having a seat at the table in the Burning Man permitting process has been repeatedly discussed on meeting agendas since she joined. She credited Christy with actively working to push the issue forward. Schatzi expressed frustration that permits related to Burning Man are often approved by Washoe County without any consultation with the local community, leaving Gerlach residents unaware of plans until setup begins, which she described as inconvenient and dismissive of local input.

Candee Ramos interjected to caution that the discussion about Burning Man was veering into territory not listed on the current agenda, which could present issues under open meeting law. She acknowledged the importance of the topic and recommended placing it on next month’s agenda as a "for action" item. Candee suggested working with Tina in the meantime to clarify exactly what the CAB would be voting on—such as pursuing recognition as a cooperating agency—so that the discussion can take place appropriately and in full detail during the next meeting.

Kristy Evans, acknowledging Candee Ramos’ earlier point about open meeting law, stated that one of her past requests—which could be included in a future agenda item—is for Gerlach to be directly engaged by Washoe County when the County participates as a cooperating agency in the BLM permitting process. She emphasized the importance of ensuring the Gerlach community has a role in that involvement.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**Pete Dronkers responded to concerns raised by Russell Bierle, saying he was surprised by the claim that Russell’s emails were being blocked. He stated that he has personally communicated with Russell by email and invited him to reach out anytime, offering to test the communication if needed. Pete emphasized that he regularly attends CAB and GGID meetings to listen to community concerns and encouraged addressing specific issues case by case. He noted that Burning Man maintains multiple channels for public communication, including office hours, a phone number, a newsletter, public meetings, and open houses. He reiterated his willingness to engage and address any matters the community brings forward.

Carl Copek began by complimenting the new public art in the community, saying it looks beautiful. He also thanked Schatzi Gambrell for explaining the disproportionate impact and contributions of the small population between Pyramid Lake and the Oregon line. He emphasized that this sparsely populated region, with support from the federal government and Washoe County, is generating significant revenue through federally managed lands and is in urgent need of fire protection services. He stressed that while those funds go into the general fund, it's the wide open spaces of northern Washoe County that generate them and should benefit from them, especially given the area's recreational importance to southern Washoe residents as well. Carl also supported Russell Bierle's call for Gerlach to have a seat at the table with Burning Man, suggesting the CAB is the most appropriate entity to represent the community due to potential conflicts of interest within other local organizations like the GID. Finally, he urged Burning Man to include Gerlach in its nationwide outreach efforts, pointing out that past feedback loops led to real progress and that Gerlach deserves the same opportunity for engagement as other communities across the country.

**ADJOURNMENT** –

 The meeting was adjourned at 6: 35 pm