**Spanish Springs Citizen Advisory Board**

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Spanish Springs Citizen Advisory Board held on May 7, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Spanish Springs Library.

1. **CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**

PRESENT – Bonnie Billings, Bradley Young, Jason Evans, Brandon Partain, Shannon Martell

ABSENT – Renate York

A quorum was established, and the meeting was brought to order.

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT -**

Pat Davison clarified a statement made during the April CAB meeting regarding the Dignity Index. She had previously assumed that the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners had officially adopted the Dignity Index and requested its inclusion in the CAB handbook. After following up with county staff, she learned that while the Dignity Index itself was not adopted, language consistent with its principles was included in the Board’s Rules of Procedure adopted on February 25, 2025. Davison expressed regret for providing incorrect information, emphasized the importance of not making assumptions, and apologized for any confusion her earlier comments may have caused.

Julie Weeks expressed strong opposition to the proposed La Posada Road project, stating it would negatively impact the quality of life in Spanish Springs by introducing a potential four-lane highway through residential neighborhoods. She cited concerns about increased traffic—estimated at over 10,000 cars per day from outside the area—along with greater noise, big rig traffic, and crime. Weeks noted that officials have discussed connecting La Posada to major roads like US 395 and I-80, effectively funneling regional traffic through Spanish Springs. She argued that although some consider this part of a longstanding plan, evolving conditions—such as new residential development and schools—require the plan to be revisited. Weeks emphasized that the proposal contradicts policies in the recently adopted Envision Washoe 2040 master plan, which prioritizes alternative transportation and walkable, mixed-use development. She concluded by voicing her opposition to any connection from La Posada to USA Parkway and noted that 94% of public feedback on the NELAS website opposes the plan as well.

Bruce Parks requested that the CARES Campus be added as an agenda item for the board, noting that this request has been made for nearly two years without action. He expressed concern about Washoe County’s $26 million budget deficit and suggested that hearing from CARES Campus representatives would help determine the program’s effectiveness and whether current funding levels are justified. Parks emphasized the need for transparency and evaluation, especially if budget cuts are necessary in other areas.

1. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE** **MEETINGS OF** April 2, 2025-

Brad Young motioned to approve the minutes of the April 2, 2025, Spanish Springs CAB meeting and Shannon Martell seconded the motion. The minutes passed unanimously.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**Washoe County Sheriff’s Office
Patrol Division Captain Amelia Galicia provided an update on law enforcement activity in Spanish Springs. She reported an increase in total calls for service—from 1,300 to 1,900—primarily due to proactive, self-initiated efforts by deputies, such as traffic stops and area checks. Despite the rise in activity, several crime categories have decreased, including assault offenses (12 cases), burglaries (2 cases), drug violations (0 cases), and larceny/theft (9 cases, down from an average of 16). However, there was an increase in DUI cases (8, up from an average of 5), aligning with the Sheriff’s countywide goal to reduce traffic fatalities through enhanced DUI enforcement. Vandalism and property damage cases also rose due to a localized crime series involving broken windows in new housing developments; the suspect was identified and arrested, resolving the case.

Deb Murray raised a safety concern about a large vehicle frequently parked near her cul-de-sac, which blocks visibility when she tries to turn onto Neighborhood Way. She noted that the vehicle appears to belong to a friend of the residents across the street and expressed worry that a fast-approaching car could cause a collision due to the obstructed view. Captain Amelia Galicia responded that if the vehicle is legally parked and registered, law enforcement has limited options. However, if it is illegally parked or obstructing traffic, residents can call the Sheriff's Office to investigate. Since the vehicle is not always present and the neighbors are friendly, Captain Galicia encouraged Deb to have a conversation with them and advised her to proceed cautiously when exiting, inching forward slowly to gain visibility.
2. **WONDERING ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE TOLL ROAD OR RTC’S TRANSPORTATION PLANS IMPACTING SPANISH SPRINGS? SPARKS MAYOR LAWSON WILL JOIN RTC LEADERSHIP TO SHARE THE FACTS –**Sparks Mayor Ed Lawson addressed concerns and clarified that the proposed toll road is officially off the table. However, he confirmed that a road will still be built from La Posada to Storey County to accommodate regional commuter demand. He explained that around 10,000 workers from the Reno-Sparks area commute daily to jobs in Storey County, including major employers like Tesla. Traffic congestion, particularly on I-80, is a frequent and growing issue, impacting residents' quality of life, especially for those with children in daycare. Lawson emphasized the urgent need for improved infrastructure to support economic growth, citing expected job increases from Tesla and the broader lithium loop project. He discussed funding challenges, including the $750 million cost to widen I-80, of which only about half is currently funded. He highlighted structural budget limitations at the state level, noting that Las Vegas receives the bulk of NDOT funding and that electric vehicles, which pay no gas tax, further strain resources. Lawson criticized the state’s failure to act on road usage fees for delivery trucks and EVs and described the difficulty local governments face in raising revenue due to state-imposed restrictions. He concluded by stating these are systemic problems that must be addressed at the state level.

Bill Thomas, Executive Director of RTC, provided an update on regional transportation planning focused on improving access to the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center (TRIC). He explained that RTC is exploring four main alternatives, including a potential two-lane road along La Posada, which is currently under design to assess its feasibility. He clarified that this is not a freeway, but a low-scale road intended as secondary access and not expected to carry high traffic volumes initially. He also discussed the planned widening of Interstate 80 from four to six lanes, a five- to six-year NDOT project estimated at $800 million, with $275 million already secured from federal funds. Another option being considered is a southern route through Storey County, which would be costly and serve fewer commuters. A fourth alternative involves a commuter rail connection using Union Pacific tracks, for which RTC has launched an $800,000 feasibility study co-funded by NDOT, Panasonic, and Tesla. This study will determine whether a rail solution is viable and how it might be funded, likely through a new tax source. In the meantime, RTC is also running a successful Vanpool program that helps TRIC workers carpool using subsidized personal vehicles. Thomas emphasized that La Posada is just one of several options being studied and that any final decision will be based on public input and the results of ongoing studies. He concluded by noting RTC’s commitment to addressing the rapid growth and transportation needs of Spanish Springs and the North Valleys, while NDOT focuses on the Spaghetti Bowl, which remains the region’s highest-priority transportation corridor.

Paul Nelson, Government Affairs Officer at RTC, explained that current and upcoming transportation projects are aimed at relieving congestion on Pyramid Highway, I-80, and even parts of US 395. He noted that diverting 10,000 cars via a new road from La Posada to USA Parkway would significantly reduce traffic on existing corridors. He provided updates on the six-phase Pyramid Highway project, with the first phase nearly complete and the next focused on improving the busy intersection at Sparks Boulevard and Island Ranch Road. Additional efforts include exploring a new road from Pyramid Highway to US 395 to ease traffic on Pyramid and McCarran, and improvements on Disc Drive. Nelson also highlighted the upcoming widening of Highland Ranch Parkway, starting with the Five Ridges development and expanding to Sun Valley Boulevard by 2028. Another project set for next year involves adding a southbound lane between Egyptian Drive and Ingenuity Lane on Pyramid Highway to reduce congestion and improve safety. He also previewed the major Sparks Boulevard widening project, scheduled to begin in July and last about two years, which will expand the road from two to three lanes in each direction. This project includes pedestrian, ADA, and multi-use path improvements, along with sound walls for nearby residents. Nelson emphasized that these projects are especially important because there are only three main routes into Spanish Springs, and easing traffic is essential for residents' daily commutes.

Elisa Lambright asked about truck traffic related to the large warehouses in the area and whether trucks would be routed through La Posada. Bill Thomas responded that the current design for La Posada is not intended to accommodate heavy truck traffic and emphasized that local jurisdictions have the authority to determine truck routes, especially if the project is not federally funded. Dale Keller confirmed that while some truck use on La Posada is possible, local agencies—depending on ownership of the road—can evaluate and potentially restrict truck access based on the road’s intended purpose and community needs.

Bruce Parks asked whether RTC would pressure NDOT to abandon what he called a “stupid project.” In response, Bill Thomas explained that while RTC works closely with NDOT, it does not have authority over the state agency. He emphasized that RTC was created by the state legislature and must operate within state laws. Thomas outlined RTC’s successful strategy of using local funding to leverage NDOT and federal support for major projects. He cited three examples: the SBX interchange improvements on I-80 and I-580, the recent Pyramid Highway widening supported by a $25 million federal grant, and the North Valleys I-395 widening made possible by an $82 million grant. He acknowledged that Southern Nevada legislators have taken notice of Northern Nevada's success in securing funds and may push back politically. Nonetheless, RTC will continue using this proactive funding strategy, guided by local elected officials, to bring investment into Washoe County.

Gary Murray questioned why developers are not required to pay for the infrastructure costs their projects create, criticizing them for profiting and leaving the burden on local taxpayers. In response, Sparks Mayor Ed Lawson explained that the City of Sparks has recently implemented its first special assessment district for the Five Ridges development, with $12 million allocated specifically for road improvements on Highland Ranch Road. He acknowledged the complexity of such funding mechanisms but affirmed it is now city policy moving forward. Bill Thomas added that all three jurisdictions in Washoe County participate in a regional roadway impact fee program, administered by RTC. Under this program, developers are required to pay a fee—currently around $5,000 per new single-family home—which is used to fund road expansions and new infrastructure. He noted that these fees are standard across the country but must, by law, be proportional to the impact of each project and cannot exceed that calculated share since they are fees, not taxes.

George Forbush asked whether RTC plans to connect Eagle Canyon to Lemmon Valley Drive and expressed concerns about the safety risks to nearby schools, senior facilities, and a daycare center. Dale Keller responded that a transportation study conducted about five years ago evaluated this connection and, in response to public safety concerns, proposed an alternative route. Instead of routing traffic along existing Eagle Canyon near Spanish Springs High School, the preferred option follows a new alignment that avoids the school zone. Keller also noted that safety improvements are planned for Eagle Canyon this fall and into next spring, including enhanced pedestrian crossings, road resurfacing, and extending the shared-use path from Pyramid Highway to Spanish Springs High School.

Jennifer Harbor, who lives near La Posada, asked how neighbors like herself would be affected by the proposed project, expressing concern about access and potential displacement due to the projected 10,000 cars per day. Dale Keller responded that the project is currently in the feasibility study phase, where various alternatives are being evaluated. As the study progresses to more detailed engineering, RTC will assess how any proposed connections would impact local residents and their access. He explained that once the initial screening is complete, RTC will host a public meeting to share findings and gather additional input. Any preferred alignment that emerges will take into account neighborhood traffic impacts and necessary adjustments to existing roadways. She also inquired on how to keep up to date via email with the related development. It was answered that people can sign up for the RTC mailing list and use generaldetails.com or rtcwashoe.com.

Karen Vetter asked where the funding for road improvements comes from, particularly with all the new development in the area, and why developers aren’t paying more of the cost. Bill Thomas responded that since 1996, a regional roadway impact fee has been in place, requiring developers to contribute to infrastructure costs. The fee system is legally structured and recalculated every three years based on current and projected development. It considers traffic volume, anticipated growth, and road capacity needs. For example, traffic generated by new homes is factored into planning models, and costs for road improvements like those needed on La Posada are divided proportionally among future developments. Each new home currently contributes around $5,000 through this fee, which generates $7–10 million annually, dedicated solely to road construction and improvement.

Don Vetter asked whether the proposed road alignment is tied to the passage of the Truckee Meadows Public Lands Act and whether the route would serve areas slated for land disposal to the City of Sparks, potentially contributing to urban sprawl. Mayor Ed Lawson confirmed that the alignment is indeed intended to support future Sparks development. He explained that the city is nearly out of developable land, with only about 3,000 lots remaining. The expansion plan, which has been in the works for decades, is aimed at accommodating economic growth, particularly from the technology sector. Lawson stressed that without adequate infrastructure, businesses like those in the tech industry may leave, jeopardizing the region’s economy. He acknowledged concerns about growth and quality of life but emphasized the need to manage expansion responsibly. He also criticized the state’s property tax system, noting its limitations in funding services and infrastructure, and advocated for policy changes such as requiring companies receiving tax abatements to contribute to infrastructure. Lawson explained that the City of Sparks is already under financial strain, having not fully recovered from the Great Recession, and is now forced to reduce staff further due to budget constraints. He concluded by stating that without changes to how infrastructure and services are funded, residents should expect reduced services and slower response times due to staffing and budget limitations.

A citizen questioned Mayor Ed Lawson’s earlier statement about property values taking 25 years to recover after the recession. They pointed out that their property taxes have doubled over the past 25 years—from under $3,000 to $6,000—despite no similar drop in property value. They also criticized the continued approval of new developments, saying it contributes to worsening traffic and infrastructure strain. In response, Lawson clarified that property taxes are governed by state law. If a property’s assessed value dropped during the recession, its tax rate can only increase by 1.5% annually if the home is less than 50 years old. He explained that his own property experienced that drop and is still slowly recovering. He advised the citizen to contact the county assessor if they believe their home did not experience a similar decline or recovery.

Paul Augustini asked why property owners can seemingly develop vacant land—whether industrial, commercial, or residential—without regard to existing infrastructure limits. He questioned who has the authority to regulate development and whether communities can delay projects until infrastructure catches up. Mayor Ed Lawson responded that development regulations are controlled by the jurisdiction governing the land: Sparks City Council for Sparks, Reno City Council for Reno, and the Washoe County Commission for unincorporated areas. He explained that local ordinances dictate what can be built on land based on zones. Bonni Billings added that a detailed discussion on how development decisions are made took place during an October 2024 meeting. She encouraged residents to review the meeting minutes posted on the HUB for more insight into the process and how planning decisions are coordinated.

 A citizen expressed concern that the La Posada Road project is being driven primarily to serve the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center (TRIC) in Storey County, while the negative impacts—such as traffic and infrastructure strain—fall on residents in Washoe County, particularly those living along the residential La Posada corridor. The citizen criticized Storey County for failing to build housing to support TRIC’s workforce and questioned whether the planning is fair or adequate. Mayor Ed Lawson agreed that the perception is largely accurate. He acknowledged that Sparks bears the consequences of Storey County’s development decisions, including traffic from workers commuting to TRIC without Storey County contributing to local infrastructure. Lawson explained that while TRIC originally avoided residential development due to lack of water and development agreements, Storey County is now beginning to collect tax revenue—though it remains roughly $150 million behind in infrastructure needs. He emphasized that Sparks has limited land but does have water, and noted that many of the pressures and burdens fall on Sparks and Washoe County, even though the economic activity is occurring elsewhere.

Bill Thomas added that while Storey County has not contributed significantly to regional infrastructure, they have started to acknowledge their responsibility. Specifically, they contributed $100,000 toward the commuter rail study—an early but modest sign that they are beginning to engage in regional solutions. Thomas noted this is not the level of support Washoe County leaders would hope for, but it indicates Storey County is starting to recognize that the impacts from TRIC are also their problem to address.

Ed Edgecomb raised concerns about traffic impacts if 10,000 cars per day begin using La Posada. He questioned whether planners truly believe that volume of cars can queue up without overwhelming the neighborhood, especially during busy morning hours when kids are boarding school buses and people are out walking. He warned that drivers would likely cut through surrounding residential streets to avoid congestion, effectively turning them into freeways. Dale Keller acknowledged the concern and clarified that the 10,000-car figure refers to total daily traffic, not all at once during peak hours. He emphasized that safety and traffic flow impacts are being taken seriously and will be analyzed in detail as part of the ongoing project study. These findings will be presented to the public in future forums as the study progresses through its various phases.

Dawnee Olson asked Mayor Ed Lawson whether he still intends to pursue the purchase of federal land for industrial use and fund it through revenue from billboards and solar farms. She expressed concern that such development would damage the natural scenery and views in the area, particularly around La Posada. Mayor Lawson responded that the intention is to place industrial development and any associated infrastructure, like billboards, on the far side of the hills—out of sight from the existing residential areas. He emphasized that the goal is to preserve the visible natural landscape for current residents while accommodating necessary growth and economic development further to the east.

Johnny Lau asked about the status of the Copper Canyon project, a once-hyped development that stalled when the economy slowed, and the developers failed. He wanted to know what became of the project. Mayor Ed Lawson responded that the City of Sparks is still actively trying to stop the project, stating clearly that they do not want housing built in that area. He emphasized a preference for directing future development eastward rather than near La Posada. He also clarified that areas north and west of La Posada fall under the City of Reno’s jurisdiction, not Sparks, and noted he wasn't criticizing other jurisdictions but simply explaining the division of authority.

Randy Brink asked whether developers are required to submit traffic impact studies for their projects and, if so, whether they are responsible for mitigating the traffic they generate. He also questioned whether developers are meaningfully contributing to infrastructure improvements. Mayor Ed Lawson confirmed that developers are required to pay various fees, estimating the cost at around $60,000 per unit in Sparks, making them among the highest in the country. He noted that while these fees go toward infrastructure, they also drive up the cost of housing, complicating the goal of affordability. Lawson emphasized Sparks' strategy of using special assessment districts to ensure developers fund needed infrastructure improvements. Commissioner Clara Andriola added that Washoe County is similarly focused on getting infrastructure in place first, also considering the use of special assessment districts. She noted that even with these strategies, housing costs are unlikely to decrease and could rise further if the federal lands bill does not pass to allow for expansion. Ed Lawson concluded by pointing out that only about half of new residents moving into the area are from California, countering a common assumption.

Mayor Ed Lawson encouraged residents to contact his office directly with any questions, stating he is accessible and willing to discuss concerns. He acknowledged that many of the issues raised involve complex details and "inside baseball" topics that can be difficult to fully explain in a public forum. He thanked attendees for coming and reiterated his openness to continued dialogue and clarification.

1. **REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEEITNGS –**Bonnie Billings stated she will not read the report to save time and that citizens are able to read the minutes from the previous meeting for the chair report online.
2. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES –**

This item was skipped.

1. **CAB MEMBER/ COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/ REQUESTS -**Commissioner Clara Andriola emphasized the importance of providing accurate, transparent information to the community, even when the topics are difficult. She explained that recent efforts, including the evening’s meeting, were designed to address issues directly affecting local residents. She thanked the Spanish Springs CAB for helping gather community feedback and encouraged residents to use the QR code, call 311, or contact her directly to suggest future topics. Andriola stressed that development is not an uncontrolled process, and that Washoe County is actively working on infrastructure-first planning through tools like special assessment districts. She noted that these mechanisms have been in place since 1967 and are successfully used in other jurisdictions, including Clark County. She acknowledged the slow pace of government but reassured residents that efforts are underway to reform how infrastructure and development are coordinated. She reiterated her commitment to data-driven decision-making and responsiveness to constituent concerns. She also shared that she had been late to the meeting due to her role on the selection committee for the next president of TMCC, with the Board of Regents expected to vote the following day. Throughout her comments, she encouraged continued community engagement and emphasized the value of CAB meetings as a direct line to local government.

Bonnie Billings announced upcoming Spanish Springs CAB meetings. The next meeting will be on June 4 and will feature a presentation from the local librarian about the wide range of library services available resources many residents may not be aware of. In July, NDOT is expected to return for further updates. September will feature a presentation on emergency preparedness, including how to assemble a “go bag.” In October, the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency may return, and in November, RTC is scheduled to provide another update. Billings encouraged residents to use the QR code on the agenda to suggest future topics.
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**

A citizen expressed frustration over increasing congestion and development, comparing the area's traffic to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. They criticized officials for leaving the meeting early and not listening to public concerns. The citizen questioned how the Sparks Boulevard widening project would be handled, pointing out limited space due to existing sidewalks and medians, and asking how construction impacts—such as dust, noise, and pollution—would be mitigated for residents who live along the corridor. They also raised concerns about heavy truck traffic, existing road conditions, and peak-hour congestion, and concluded by stating that residents still haven’t received a clear explanation of what a special assessment is.

George Forbush voiced strong opposition to the proposed toll road or any new road crossing the Pah Rah Range, citing concerns about wildlife impacts, which he noted had been largely ignored in discussions. He criticized the current approach to I-80 improvements, questioning why available funding isn't being used to immediately address known bottlenecks—such as the eastbound exit to USA Parkway, Patrick interchange, and westbound Vista—rather than waiting for full project funding. He urged a phased, common-sense strategy to ease congestion. Forbush also expressed distrust of the toll road proposal, describing it as a disguised plan to spur housing development. He recalled speaking with state assembly members who opposed the toll road due to concerns over private joint ventures, false promises, and the risk of the state needing to bail out failed projects. He concluded by thanking those legislators for being fiscally responsible, even while acknowledging traffic problems still need to be addressed.

Johnny Lau shared his experience working in the USA Parkway area for companies like Apple, a chemical plant, and Switch Data Center, where he has been employed for nearly six years. He emphasized that traffic has grown significantly and acknowledged that road expansion is necessary due to inevitable regional growth. Lau noted the urgency by describing his own rushed commute from Switch, which he completed in half the usual time by speeding. He stressed the importance of planning for emergency access, recommending that engineers consider additional exits or alternate routes—such as Winfield Road or La Posada—to ensure emergency services can reach hospitals quickly. Drawing from his background in electronic engineering, he concluded by warning that current road conditions have become dangerously poor.

Dawnee Olson expressed frustration and disappointment, stating that many residents have already voiced concerns that reflect her own and that it feels like their opinions don’t matter. She criticized Mayor Ed Lawson, saying she doesn’t believe he genuinely cares about the Spanish Springs community, especially since he left the meeting early and is supporting projects that residents oppose. She concluded that his actions contradict his stated concern, making the situation feel disingenuous and disheartening.

Darrick Bissell expressed concerns about increased traffic, noise, and the potential cost to taxpayers related to the proposed road project. He kept his remarks brief, simply reiterating those key issues.

Don Vetter urged RTC and local officials to rely on accurate data when making decisions about development and transportation. He questioned the claim that 35,000 people work at the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center (TRIC), citing Storey County records that list 17,000 and NDOT traffic counts showing 21,000 vehicles on USA Parkway daily. He recommended contacting economist Dave Schmidt at DETR for better commute data, including zip codes of TRIC employees, to support informed planning. Vetter also advocated for a shift in development focus from sprawl to infill, referencing Assembly Bill 241 and calling for an inventory of infill opportunities in Sparks, Reno, and Washoe County. He suggested this would be more cost-effective for developers and more sustainable for communities. Finally, he encouraged action on the Truckee Meadows Public Lands Act currently in Congress and jokingly offered to start a GoFundMe campaign—and contribute himself—to improve the meeting room’s audio-visual system, highlighting the need for better public engagement tools.

**ADJOURNMENT –** The meetingadjourned at 7:31 p.m.