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**Warm Springs/Rural Minutes of the regular meeting of the Warm Springs/Rural Citizen Advisory Board held on March 12, 2025, at 6:00 P.M. via ZOOM**

1. **CALL TO ORDER/DETERMINATION OF QUORUM** [Non-Action Item]

Present – Marshall Todd, Larry Chesney, Hugh Ezelle
Absent – Pamela Roberts, Kevin Cook

A quorum was established, and the meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE [Non-Action Item]**

 The pledge of allegiance was recited.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT** – [For Discussion Only]

Wanda Bright requested improved senior transportation services, noting that Access to Health transportation in Spanish Springs is currently available only two days a week and requires scheduling doctor’s appointments around limited availability. Bright expressed frustration and suggested this as an area for improvement.
2. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF** November 13, 2024[For Possible Action]

The minutes were approved unanimously

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATE** –

There were no public safety updates.
2. **COUNTY MANAGER ERIC BROWN UPDATE** –

County Manager Eric Brown provided a comprehensive annual update, highlighting Washoe County’s strategic direction, financial standing, and major initiatives. He explained that each year, the County Manager presents a public performance review to the Board of County Commissioners, followed by a strategic planning workshop in January where commissioners identify priorities that shape the county’s budget and work plan. For 2025, the county anticipates tightening revenues due to flattening sales tax income and reduced federal and state post-COVID funding, prompting a focus on maintaining current priorities—particularly senior services, dental health, and infrastructure—without expanding staff or launching new initiatives. Despite economic challenges, Washoe County remains in strong financial health with a balanced budget, improved bond rating, a clean audit, and four-year union agreements in place. Brown also announced the March 25 launch of the Washoe Checkbook tool for public financial transparency and a Budget 101 workshop to help residents understand how the county allocates funds. Key accomplishments included completion of the Cares Campus low-barrier shelter, expansion of the Crossroads substance use recovery program, and new behavioral health initiatives such as the Crisis Response Center and the Sequential Intercept Model pilot in the county jail. The county also purchased and is refurbishing the former West Hills Hospital for juvenile and adult mental health services, addressing gaps that currently force many to seek care out of state or remain in inappropriate facilities like shelters or jails. Brown reported on broadband expansion through $48 million in new state funding, with Sky Fiber expected to improve service in Warm Springs and Palomino Valley. Additionally, Verizon is completing a new tower to enhance cellular service. Public safety enhancements include the upcoming completion of a unified Computer-Aided Dispatch system among regional agencies to improve emergency response times. The county continues to support civic engagement through tools like eComment, virtual meetings, and new translation technology. He confirmed the continuation and reform of Citizen Advisory Boards (CABs), with an ordinance update underway. He also addressed upcoming emergency evacuation plan updates, FEMA floodplain revisions, and the use of public-private partnerships to support affordable housing development. Lastly, Brown emphasized recent improvements in election operations, including increased staffing, a new statewide voter registration system (known as KNOWiNK), and the appointment of a new Registrar of Voters.

Larry Chesney raised concerns about how poorly planned cities, particularly in economic downturns, begin to look to Washoe County for resources, despite their own lack of infrastructure investment. He noted this has happened before, such as during the 2008 financial crisis, and warned that cities might again seek to offload costs onto the county. County Manager Eric Brown agreed and said that sentiment is shared by the Commission. He emphasized that while some commissioners are sympathetic—believing that if cities fail, their burdens could fall to the county—Washoe County leadership is committed to protecting county taxpayers. Brown acknowledged Sparks and Reno’s frustrations with cost-sharing for services like the Sheriff’s Office, crime lab, and medical examiner, but stood firm that the county won't subsidize city responsibilities unless there's a mutual cost-saving benefit. He mentioned a newly released legislative bill regarding fire consolidation that he called “offensive” and confirmed that the County would reexamine interlocal agreements with the cities to ensure fair cost allocations. Brown also criticized city perspectives on issues like road maintenance and fuel tax allocations, noting a lack of consideration for the needs of rural and unpaved areas within the county.

Hugh Ezelle expressed strong confidence in the Washoe County Commission’s ability to negotiate on behalf of residents and offered personal support if Manager Eric Brown ever needed negotiation advice. In response, Manager Brown acknowledged Ezelle’s support and emphasized that he attends CAB meetings to understand the unique perspectives and challenges of different communities across the county. He noted that the concerns and needs of rural areas often aren’t understood by city leadership in Sparks and Reno, reinforcing the importance of staying connected with constituents.

Jan Martin inquired about the Axe Handle cell tower near Pyramid Highway, wondering if it was on the east or west side. Manager Brown initially didn’t know, but a CAB member clarified that the tower is on the west side and is being upgraded with new equipment to expand its coverage. Jan noted poor reception in the area despite the tower’s presence. Second, she asked about regional emergency response coordination. Manager Brown explained that Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County are working to integrate on a shared platform to better track and dispatch emergency vehicles. Currently, agencies don’t have visibility into each other’s resources, which can delay response times. Jan expressed concern about fire coverage in Warm Springs and how the lack of nearby professional fire services affects residents’ ability to get homeowners insurance. Brown acknowledged this and noted that the new system could help, though implementing it would come with costs. He encouraged her to watch the upcoming County Commission meeting, where the Insurance Commissioner would be present to discuss related issues.

Hugh Ezelle raised concerns about Washoe County’s $1 billion budget, pointing out that 75 percent, or about $750 million, is spent on employee compensation. He questioned how non-compensation costs are defined and whether they are significant, to which County Manager Eric Brown explained those costs are relatively minor and include things like training, not direct employee pay. Ezelle expressed skepticism about the county’s claim of a flat revenue environment, citing visible growth, and questioned why property taxes haven’t gone down. Brown acknowledged the concern and explained that while the county employs around 3,100 people—fewer than during the last recession, personnel costs remain the largest expense. He said the county would consider a hiring freeze before layoffs if financial pressures increased, and that such options would be discussed during upcoming budget meetings. Ezelle then shifted to public safety and drug enforcement, expressing concern that too much funding is going toward addressing the consequences of drug use, such as mental health and recovery services, rather than preventing drugs from entering the community. Brown explained that drug intervention efforts are primarily funded through federal grants, not the county’s general fund, and that Washoe County receives such grants due to its location on the I-80 corridor, which is a major route for drug and human trafficking. He said both the Sheriff’s Office and District Attorney’s Office receive support from the Department of Justice. When Ezelle questioned the use of opioid settlement funds, Brown said they are used for both mental health and substance abuse programs, as the two issues are often inseparable. Ezelle pushed back, arguing that not all drug users have mental health issues, and that enforcement of the drug supply side deserves more attention. Brown acknowledged the point and said it’s a fair topic for the Sheriff to address directly, adding that he is working to bring the Sheriff to an upcoming CAB meeting to talk about both drugs and immigration enforcement. Ezelle also brought up ongoing frustrations about election logistics, noting that he received his real ballot before the sample ballot during a recent cycle. Brown confirmed past issues related to printing and distribution and referenced a 2020 county-led study that found a 12 percent error rate in ballot delivery, significantly higher than the expected 4 percent. He said the new Registrar of Voters is improving operations, and that training and exposure to statewide best practices are now a priority. Ezelle suggested lobbying the state to return to in-person voting, calling universal mail-in ballots “absurd.” Brown responded that decisions about voting methods are made by the state and legislature but noted that the governor appears interested in improving the speed of election results reporting, which may eventually shift the conversation around voting formats. Finally, Brown mentioned ongoing statewide conversations among sheriffs and police chiefs about developing a common approach to immigration enforcement and ICE cooperation. He said these discussions are active but reflect diverse perspectives across counties.

\*\* Unfortunately, the audio for the rest of the recording of the CAB stopped at this point.

1. **NEW COMMUNITY INPUT PORTAL FOR WARM SPRINGS RESIDENTS** –

There is no audio from this section.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB -**

There is no audio from this section**.**

1. **WASHOE COUNTY COMMISSIONER UPDATE -**There is no audio from this section.
2. **CAB MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS/ REQUESTS -** [Non-Action Item]

There is no audio from this section.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**There is no audio from this section.

 **ADJOURNMENT -** The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.