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Minutes of the regular meeting of the West Truckee Meadows/Verdi Township

Citizen Advisory Board held on May 19, 2025, at 5:30 P.M.

Verdi Community Library & Nature Study, 270 Bridge St, Verdi, NV 89439

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

Present- Mac Rossi, Carly Borchard, Barbara Fenne, Robert Laurie

Absent- Cameron Kramlich

A quorum was established.

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT** –   
     
   There was no public comment
2. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETINGS OF** March 17, 2025

Bob Laurie motioned to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2025, West Truckee Meadows/ Verdi Township CAB meeting. Mac Rossi seconded the motion, and the minutes passed unanimously.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –**

**Washoe County Sheriff’s Department**Jeff McCaskill, a sergeant with the Washoe County Sheriff's Office, presented first-quarter crime statistics for the county, with a focus on the West Verdi area. He directed attention to the last page of the handout, which includes local data. The statistics reflect a mix of trends—some crimes are down, others remain steady, and a few have increased. Notably, DUI incidents are up in this area. McCaskill explained that this rise is due to proactive enforcement efforts, which align with the sheriff’s commitment to community safety by removing impaired drivers from the roads.   
  
Mac Rossi asked about the counter fitting statistics provided on the handout. McCaskill was unsure what case they had that dealt with that, suggesting that it was likely someone trying to pass a fake bill while shopping.   
  
Carly Borchard asked about not receiving updates after witnessing high police activity, such as a recent high-speed chase on Highway 40. She asked if there’s a public source where residents can learn what happened in such incidents. Jeff McCaskill responded that updates depend on which agency is involved—some incidents may fall under other jurisdictions like Nevada State Police. He advised residents to call the non-emergency number and ask to speak with a sergeant for information, if available. Carly also asked about abandoned vehicles and whether that issue has improved. Jeff responded that, in his 20 years with the Sheriff’s Office, their handling of abandoned vehicles—especially motorhomes—has significantly improved. He recommended reporting them to the Sheriff's Office front desk at (775) 328-3001 and noted that jurisdiction (county roads vs. highways or out-of-state) often affects response.   
  
Barbara Fenne raised concerns about drivers speeding off the freeway near an open pass and blind curve by 4th Street, creating a potentially dangerous situation. She asked whose jurisdiction covers that area. Jeff McCaskill responded that it’s likely within the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction but offered to confirm. He advised reporting recurring speeding issues to the front desk at (775) 328-3001 or to non-emergency dispatch at (775) 785-9276. This allows the department to send deputies or motorcycle officers to monitor and enforce traffic laws. If the area falls under Nevada State Police, they would be contacted for enforcement.   
  
Robert Laurie asked whether the reported arson and theft cases were a mix of residential and commercial incidents, and whether they indicate a new trend in the area. Sgt. Jeff McCaskill responded that he couldn’t give exact details without reviewing the specific case data. He noted that some case numbers may represent multiple victims from a single incident. Regarding notifications, McCaskill said the Sheriff's Office does provide notice when appropriate—such as leaving door tags in neighborhoods where a residential burglary has occurred, encouraging residents to check for missing items. He added that the agency practices strategic policing, meaning if a pattern is identified in a particular area, they increase patrols and visibility to address the issue.   
  
Mac Rossi shared his positive experience visiting the 911 dispatch center at the facility on Parr Boulevard. He attended a public ride-along-style program on a Friday night, spending four hours observing dispatchers at work. He found it eye-opening and informative, noting how impressive it was to see dispatchers managing multiple screens. He expressed interest in returning to observe the call-taking side of the operation. He thanked the team for the opportunity and encouraged others to participate if they have the chance.   
  
Barbara Fenne shared a story about her son sleeping in his bus when someone attempted to steal the catalytic converter using a reciprocating saw. Her dog chased the thief, and within hours, the Sheriff's Department responded. A neighbor reported seeing the stolen item, which was quickly recovered, confirmed as theirs, and returned. She praised the Sheriff's quick and effective response. Carly Borchard added that years ago, she was involved in promoting a catalytic converter theft prevention program while serving as a Public Information Officer. The program involved stenciling identification onto converters and resulted in a noticeable decline in thefts. She noted the program is still active and encouraged people to find more information on the Washoe County website. Jeff McCaskill emphasized the value of catalytic converters, mentioning they contain special fibers that are more valuable than gold, which contributes to their high theft rate.   
  
\*The following update occurred during the end of item #6   
Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District   
Martin Johnson Martin Johnson, Battalion Chief with Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, provided a brief update on public safety activity and seasonal changes. In April, there were 167 incidents in the Verdi area, including **one fire**, 18 EMS calls, several vehicle accidents, a few hazardous materials calls, and some false alarms—none of which were considered major. He noted that the region is now entering wildfire season, so open burning is no longer allowed. He also shared that Truckee Meadows Fire has hired a new fire chief, who is expected to begin by the end of July. Additionally, the green waste collection program has ended for the season, and both that and open burning will be reassessed in the fall.

Carly Borchard asked for more information about the new fire chief recently hired by Truckee Meadows Fire. Martin Johnson responded that the new chief is coming from Stockton Fire, where he served as chief for several years. He has a long career in fire service, having advanced through the ranks from firefighter to engineer, captain, and battalion chief. He also spent time in the Fire Prevention Division. Johnson highlighted the new chief’s experience during Stockton’s economic downturn and noted that he brings an extensive background in firefighting and leadership. He added that the new chief is excited to join the team in northern Nevada.

1. **DEFENSIBLE SPACE AND HOME HARDENING -**

Spencer Eusden from the University of Nevada, Reno Extension’s Living with Fire program gave a presentation focused on wildfire preparedness for homeowners. He began by explaining that his goal was to share practical strategies based on post-wildfire research—examining which homes survived and which didn’t—to help communities better prepare. He emphasized that home loss is often due to a combination of two factors: a lack of defensible space and fire-vulnerable construction. Even more than direct flame contact or radiant heat, the leading cause of structure loss is windblown embers. These embers can travel for miles, landing on homes and igniting flammable materials. For that reason, he said, it's critical to prepare homes even if they seem shielded by roads, rivers, or other barriers. To reduce risk, Spencer advocated for a “coupled approach” that includes both defensible space and home hardening. He explained defensible space as three zones around a house. The most important is the zero to five-foot zone, which should be kept clear of anything flammable, including plants, wood chips, or stored firewood. If plants are used in this zone, he recommended low-growing, moisture-rich species like succulents or tulips that bloom early and don’t linger in the fire season. He strongly discouraged planting junipers, citing their high flammability and giving a personal example of a home surrounded by them. The five-to-thirty-foot zone allows for some vegetation but should be well-maintained, with spacing between plants and plenty of clearance from the home. Grass in this area should be kept green and short, and dead plant matter should be cleared regularly. The final zone, thirty to one hundred feet (and beyond, if on a slope), can include more natural landscape but still requires spacing between trees and shrubs to break up fuel continuity. He recommended using a “mosaic” approach with clusters of plants interspersed with lawn, hardscape, or non-combustible elements like boulders. In all zones, removing invasive grasses like cheatgrass is essential, as they connect vegetation and allow fire to spread more easily. Spencer concluded this portion of the presentation by reinforcing that defensible space isn’t about removing all vegetation but about managing it thoughtfully to reduce fire risk. He opened the floor for questions before transitioning into the next section on home hardening.

A resident shared a concern about being surrounded by two recent fires and asked what could be done when CC&Rs (Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions) prevent vegetation removal or defensible space work—especially because their property includes a steep slope and two creeks that feed into the Truckee River watershed. They wanted to know if there’s a way to override those restrictions in order to protect both their home and their neighbors. Spencer Eusden responded that this is a common issue and one he hears about frequently. He said that, increasingly, HOAs are becoming more open to updating their CC&Rs due to growing concerns over wildfire risk and insurance pressures. One strategy he recommended is bringing in someone from the local fire department, since communities tend to respond more seriously to fire professionals than to educators. Fire personnel can help explain the risks and advocate for changes. He added that it's a misconception that fire preparation means clearing everything, especially on slopes or near sensitive stream areas. Instead, fire-safe landscaping can be done in a way that balances wildfire safety with erosion control and environmental protection. Spencer encouraged reaching out for professional input, either from the fire department or the Living with Fire team, to get guidance tailored to that kind of terrain. He also mentioned the benefits of becoming a Fire Adapted Community—a neighborhood-level approach that includes formal assessments, collective preparedness actions, and peer leadership. Lastly, he noted that the local fire district provides free defensible space inspections, which can be a good first step. There are also private companies that offer similar services, but he stressed the free option as a valuable and accessible starting point.

In this portion of his presentation, Spencer Eusden focused on home hardening—the steps homeowners can take to make their houses more resistant to ignition from windblown embers during a wildfire. Rather than cover every detail, he highlighted the most critical areas and referred the attendees to a comprehensive guide available through Living with Fire. He began with vents, noting that they’re necessary for moisture control in homes but also a major entry point for embers. Embers can enter the attic and basement vents, smolder, and cause fires hours after the fire front passes. To reduce risk, Spencer recommended covering vents with 1/8-inch non-combustible screens, which provide a good balance between airflow and ember protection. Finer screens (1/16-inch) tend to clog with dust, causing ventilation problems. Next, he addressed eaves, which can trap heat rising from flames—especially if flammable plants or materials are nearby. Open eaves allow this heat to build up and ignite structural elements. Enclosed eaves with soffits at right angles are far better at deflecting heat and protecting the home. He moved on to siding, noting that leaves and pine needles often collect at the base of homes, becoming natural ember traps. A six-inch band of non-combustible material like concrete or stone along the bottom of the home can significantly reduce fire risk without requiring a full siding replacement. Decks were identified as another major vulnerability. Homeowners should treat their decks like the “zero to five feet” defensible space zone—clearing out accumulated dry material underneath and avoiding storage of lumber or flammable debris. Ideally, decks should be built or replaced with non-combustible materials like composite boards (e.g., Trex), though this can be expensive. As an alternative, homeowners can start by replacing just the first few boards nearest the house and using metal flashing where the deck meets the home to block embers from igniting the siding. He also pointed out other vulnerable areas such as roof-to-wall intersections—like those found in covered patios or pergolas—where heat and embers can accumulate. Adding metal flashing in these places offers a low-cost method to protect the structure. Spencer wrapped up the talk by highlighting three publications available to the public: one on defensible space, another on home hardening, and a third on fire-resistant landscaping (available online). Finally, he encouraged attendees to consider becoming Neighborhood Ambassadors through the Living with Fire program. These ambassadors are trained to help neighbors identify wildfire risks and connect them with free resources, such as inspections offered by local fire departments. The goal is to build peer-to-peer education networks that extend the program’s reach beyond official staff.

Barbara Fenne shared that she recently had her roof redone, including the full removal of old materials and installation of new ones. Because her home has multiple roof valleys and is surrounded by pine trees, she had the contractors install a 12-inch-wide strip of plastic in each valley to help manage the buildup of pine needles, which tend to collect and slide down into these areas.

In response, Spencer acknowledged that managing roofs—especially when surrounded by trees—can be challenging and often takes time. He emphasized that while not everyone can replace their roof immediately, major projects like this are the ideal time to incorporate protective features such as metal flashing. It's a relatively inexpensive upgrade when done during construction and can significantly improve wildfire resilience by preventing ember accumulation in roof valleys and intersections.

Brett Taylor focused on practical wildfire evacuation strategies, drawing on lessons learned from recent local fires such as the Gold Ranch and Davis fires. He emphasized that while Spencer Eusden had addressed how to prepare homes, his talk centered on what to do when evacuation becomes necessary; framed around the national “Ready, Set, Go” program. He stressed that homeowners must be ready before the fire starts, that means making defensible space improvements well ahead of time, not as flames approach. Too many people were delayed evacuating during the Davis Fire because they were scrambling to protect belongings or hadn’t prepared a plan. He emphasized that evacuation is often chaotic and dynamic, and people should not wait for fire crews to knock on their doors. Leave early if a warning is issued, especially given the limited road access in areas like Verdi, where multiple communities may be trying to evacuate on the same route. To help reduce panic and confusion, Brett recommended having an action plan in place with your household. This includes identifying where you’ll go, how you’ll get there, and preparing a go-bag in advance with essentials like medications, identification, and supplies. He advised against relying on fire crews to protect every home, especially during large-scale incidents when hundreds of structures may be at risk. Homes with better defensible space and preparation are more likely to receive protection, simply because they are safer for crews to defend. Brett also clarified that while sheltering in place may occasionally be used by fire managers in extreme situations, evacuation is almost always preferred and is the standard message from emergency officials. He stressed the importance of paying attention to official notifications through Washoe County’s emergency management system. He encouraged residents to sign up for Smart911 and YouReady.Washoe.gov, which can store important household details for first responders. He also mentioned a new app, Community Connect, that provides visual home information to help fire services respond more effectively. Finally, Brett highlighted a few critical “don’ts” during wildfires: don’t rely on late warnings, don’t fly drones (which shut down firefighting aircraft), and don’t assume fire crews will be available to save unprepared homes. He closed by urging everyone to stay alert, evacuate safely, follow instructions from emergency managers, and not return until officially cleared. Overall, Brett’s message underscored individual responsibility, advanced preparation, and respect for the fast-moving and resource-limited realities of wildfire response.

\*\*audio at this point (54:06) began cutting in and out, making it very hard to decipher.

A citizen asked a few questions. The first was about agency jurisdiction and fire protection—specifically whether local fire services or federal agencies (like the U.S. Forest Service) are the primary responders in the area. In response, it was explained that protection agreements are in place among multiple agencies, and the responsible agency varies depending on location. However, federal agencies like the Forest Service generally prefer local fire departments to take the lead in residential areas, even if it's technically within federal land jurisdiction. The second question related to evacuation notifications. The citizen noted that during a past fire, their home and a few neighbors didn’t receive an alert, and they were curious about how to confirm their status for future notifications. The response encouraged residents to check their registration with emergency alert systems, such as Smart911 or local fire and rescue websites. These systems rely on residents keeping their contact information up to date and registering voluntarily. The citizen was also informed that search and rescue teams conduct checks during events, but the best way to ensure alerts are received is to actively confirm and manage one’s subscription to these services.

A resident asked for clarification on what "sheltering in place" actually means during a wildfire, particularly in a scenario where everyone receives alerts at once and roads become too congested to evacuate. They wanted to know if staying home should be part of their emergency plan. In response, officials explained that sheltering in place is not the preferred or typical strategy. The fire department's top priority is always to evacuate people early and safely, not to instruct them to remain in their homes. The only time sheltering in place might be used is in very rare, highly specific situations, such as when a safer, defensible evacuation point nearby is identified but not immediately accessible. Even then, it's considered a last resort. They emphasized that residents should not plan to hunker down or stay inside their homes once evacuation orders or alerts are issued. The safest choice is always to leave early, especially during red flag weather days—those with high winds and dry conditions. On such days, residents should be on heightened alert and prepared to evacuate quickly. Finally, the discussion briefly returned to CC&R restrictions, noting that many newer communities are now incorporating fire safety measures and defensible space standards into their development plans. These updated CC&Rs may be a helpful place to start when considering home modifications for wildfire safety.

Barbara Fenne asked about how communication during evacuations worked before modern emergency alert systems were in place, especially in more remote areas. In response, officials acknowledged that reaching everyone—particularly at night or in remote location remains a challenge, even with today's technology. While new tools have significantly improved emergency messaging, there are still gaps. That’s why local coordination remains crucial. They highlighted that some neighborhoods, like Montreux, have developed their own internal communication systems, which can send alerts directly to residents in addition to countywide messages. These neighborhood-level systems serve as an extra layer of communication and are especially helpful during fast-moving emergencies. When an evacuation is issued, emergency officials also notify these community systems to reinforce and expand outreach.

Carly Borchard shared her experience trying to organize wildfire preparedness efforts in her community, which includes around 500 homes. Despite high interest and engagement from residents, progress stalled because it was difficult to identify and connect with the right contacts across multiple HOAs. She noted that coordinating this effort on her own, while working full-time, became overwhelming and lacked clear direction or support. She referenced a promising model she saw in the southwest region, where two large HOAs representing 15,000 people came together with government officials to discuss lessons learned and commit to community-level solutions. In response, Brett Taylor acknowledged the difficulty of uniting fragmented communities and suggested that seeking Firewise Community recognition could be a helpful starting point. Firewise is a nationally recognized program that can serve as an organizing framework and provide credibility, resources, and structure for neighborhoods looking to collaborate on wildfire risk reduction. He also noted that while some residents may resist outside guidance or oversight, having an umbrella organization like Firewise can make coordination easier and help secure buy-in from reluctant neighbors.

Mac Rossi suggested creating a simple, eye-catching publication or flyer—something short and clear like a single-page "Get Firewise" checklist—that could be easily shared and understood, especially by residents who don’t regularly read through detailed alerts or messages. He emphasized the need for something that feels official and could even go viral if widely distributed, ideally backed by a credible organization.

Spencer Eusden responded positively, agreeing that this type of resource is both valuable and doable. He shared that the Living with Fire program already has a request form on its website where people can ask for materials, and that his team is equipped to create and distribute print-ready resources. He also mentioned that if a community or organization wants something specific, Living with Fire can work with them to design and deliver official, high-quality materials with clear and effective wildfire messaging.

Mac Rossi shared his frustration after receiving a notice that his homeowner’s insurance was canceled, despite what he sees as minimal risk—his property only has “two bushes and a rabbit,” and neighboring homes weren’t affected. He suspects the cancellation may be tied to nearby unauthorized off-road motorcycle activity in a vegetated area behind his home, which is federally managed land. He noted that while most riders have spark arrestors, the area is posted as restricted, and he’s concerned about fire risk. He’s tried contacting the U.S. Forest Service but said they’re underfunded and unable to respond. Mac also shared that he once confronted a rider and had a gun pulled on him, adding that local law enforcement doesn’t have the equipment to patrol the area. In response, Brett Taylor acknowledged the seriousness of the situation but expressed limited options. He advised Mac to report any unauthorized activity, especially if someone is violating fire safety rules. However, he also recognized the resource limitations faced by both federal agencies and local law enforcement, making enforcement and fire prevention in remote areas difficult.

Carly Borchard asked why the County stopped using the CodeRED alert system and expressed concern that not all her family members receive emergency alerts consistently. She noted that during past incidents, some received notifications while others didn’t, and she wondered if location (like being on opposite sides of the highway) or phone service played a role. Brett Taylor explained that CodeRED was replaced by Smart911 through a service called Rave, which offered better functionality, especially for individuals with functional or access needs. Smart911 allows users to register with detailed information—like their address, phone number, and email—enabling the system to send alerts through multiple channels, even if the person is out of the area. He clarified that there are two types of alerts: Reverse 911, which sends alerts to all phones connected to a specific cell tower. Smart911 direct alerts, which are sent based on your registration data, not your location during the emergency. Brett also noted that cell tower congestion—such as during the Davis Fire—can prevent alerts from being delivered. That’s why signing up for Smart911 is so important: it doesn’t rely on tower proximity and can still deliver messages via email or text if the network is overwhelmed. Carly suggested bringing back a representative (like Kelly) to provide a more in-depth update, which Brett agreed would be helpful.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITES –**

Casey McDonald explained how residents can track local development applications by visiting the Washoe County Applications page, where they can search by district (e.g., District 1) to view current and progressing development projects, including details like meeting schedules. He also gave a quick overview of the Community Input Portal, which is accessible via a QR code on meeting agendas. The portal is designed to make it easier for people who can’t attend CAB meetings to still share feedback. Even in areas without an advisory board—like Hidden Valley—residents can submit comments by answering a few simple questions. Casey emphasized that he personally reviews submissions every Monday and uses the input to inform staff, commissioners, and CAB Chairs when there’s a recurring theme in community concerns. If a topic doesn’t make it into a CAB meeting, they still try to provide relevant information in other ways. He noted that no input had recently been received from the Verdi area and encouraged attendees to spread the word—highlighting that their comments are truly valued and reviewed.

Carly Borchard asked whether residents who sign up for development notifications can manage or unsubscribe from them. Casey McDonald confirmed that yes, residents can subscribe and unsubscribe, but with a caution: if someone forwards an email containing an unsubscribe link and the recipient clicks it, they could accidentally unsubscribe the original sender. Casey recommended each person subscribe individually to avoid this issue. He explained that residents can sign up through the "Stay Informed" section on the Washoe County website by selecting newsletters like the Board of County Commissioners updates or district-specific news, such as for Verdi, Gerlach, or South Valleys. The system usually allows users to see a list of all available newsletters, although there appeared to be a temporary glitch during the meeting. Casey also committed to contacting Kelly to return for a future presentation and said she would email Carly with follow-up details to ensure the right information is shared.

1. **CAB MEMBER/COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS –**

Barbara Fenne provided an update on a new booster (water pump) station being built in the Mogul area along the curve on 4th Street. It's designed to pump water uphill toward Sunset Rocks. She noted there doesn't appear to be an existing water flow issue, so she questioned whether new development or buildout in the Sunset Rocks area might be prompting the construction. Carly Borchard responded that this infrastructure has been in the works since at least 2016, referencing a presentation by TMWA and others at the FW Hall where it was stated the booster station was part of a long-term plan to support the area's infrastructure. She said it was likely tied to anticipated growth and development and suggested contacting one of TMWA’s engineers for further detail.   
  
Carly Borchard shared two updates she had previously requested. First, she addressed the Reno-to-Verdi Corridor (R2C) multimodal study, noting that while it has led to several improvements—such as better on- and off-ramp access, wildlife fencing, and road repairs—her main concern remains unresolved. Specifically, she is still pushing for guardrails to be installed on South Verdi Road coming off Boomtown, citing safety concerns with school buses and winter traffic. She mentioned meeting with RTC last week to follow up, and they plan to attend the next CAB meeting to provide an update. Her second update was a request to Washoe County Parks for the status and timeline of the Riverbend trailhead project. She noted that the parking lot is now in place, though she described it as “hideous,” and added that trails, bridges, and connectivity features are in development. She hopes to receive further details soon.

Mac Rossi reported that he contacted NDOT about the section of road near Gold Ranch where animal fencing and railroad ties are installed to prevent wildlife crossings. He expressed concern that during cold weather, vehicles could lose control on that surface and end up crashing—half in one direction, half in the other. NDOT had mentioned plans to do some spot welding to improve tire traction, but so far, no action has been taken. He also shared a positive update about the upgraded senior center on 9th Street, noting it looks great and offers many activities. He encouraged anyone with senior neighbors, especially those who can still drive—to check it out and suggested using RTC’s new bus system as a transportation option.   
  
Barbara Fenne reported contacting what she believes was the engineering department regarding a serious safety hazard at 4th Street and Silver Range Road near the west overpass. The area features a 25–30-foot unmarked drop-off that previously led to a serious accident. Although some improvements have been made, including a gas company extension and soil grading, the area remains dangerous. Overgrown willows obscure the drop-off, making it appear safe when it is not. She isn’t sure if the work is complete but has alerted the local cycling group (the Peddlers) about the danger, noting that if someone misses the curve, they may not be found easily. She’s awaiting further progress and remarked that government action can be slow.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT -**

There was no public comment.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.