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Description automatically generated**  **Gerlach/Empire Citizen Advisory Board**

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

**November 14, 2024, at 6:00 P.M. at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood,**

**Gerlach, NV 89412**

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

A quorum was established, and the meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

Present – Kristy Evans, Tina Walters, Russell Bierle, Schatzi Gambrell, Brandy Wilbur (online)

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT** – Comment heard under this item will be limited to three (3) minutes per person and may pertain to matters both on and off the agenda. The Citizen Advisory Board will also hear public comment during individual action items, with comment limited to three minutes per person. Comments are to be made to the Board as a whole. (non-action item)   
     
   No public comment was made.
2. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETINGS OF** October 10, 2024. (for possible action)  
     
   Tina Walters motioned to approve the minutes from October 10, 2024. Schatzi Gambrell seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.
3. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –** A Washoe County Sheriff’s Deputy and/or members from the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Fire Department may be available to provide a general community update on public safety (non-action item)Washoe County Sheriff’s Office  
   Deputy Jackson Cruz provided a public safety update, reporting that there were no major updates. He mentioned spending time with Principal Stacy Black at the school, discussing emergency response procedures and coordinating plans for different situations. The deputy noted that overall, it had been quieter recently, with fewer calls for service as the weather turned colder. However, they remain active and available to assist as needed.  
     
   Schatzi Gambrell asked when it is wintertime how will they know if a sheriff is available, as his door is typically open during warmer months. Deputy Cruz answered that if a car is there, then someone is there to help.   
     
   Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Fire Protection  
   Fire Chief Don Pelt provided an update, reporting that last month was more active than usual with 17 calls in the Gerlach area. This included a structure fire, one medical transport by ground, and one by Care Flight. Several people declined medical treatment against advice. Chief Pelt also noted that Captain Pritchard attended the same emergency management meeting at the school as the sheriff's deputies. During the meeting, it was discovered that there is an issue with accessing the school building due to a lack of a Knox box for the fire department. While the school police have two, distance is a problem. The fire department is working with the School Board to address this issue.  
     
   Kristy Evans commented to Fire Chief Pelt, noting that the issue with the Knox box has been ongoing for many years. She explained that both the fire department and sheriff's department should have a key to the school, as they are unable to access the Knox box otherwise. This box is a secure way to provide emergency responders with building access, but it is currently limited to the school police and doesn't work for other agencies. Chief Pelt acknowledged the problem and confirmed that they are working to resolve it.  
     
   Schatzi Gambrell asked Fire Chief Pelt about the status of the Vials of Life for residents, which had been discussed previously at CAB meetings. Chief Pelt confirmed that these items arrived in October and were being distributed, including at the senior center and fire station, and that the community center would also receive some. Next, Gambrell asked if there had been any progress on securing funding for the fire department. Chief Pelt replied that there had been no updates yet, but they were still working with Assistant County Manager Dave Solaro from Washoe County on the issue. She also inquired about the PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) money, specifically the $3.78 million for their neighborhood, which was placed in the general fund. Chief Pelt confirmed that they had discussed it but noted that the funds had already been allocated for emergencies and special projects, and for further details, she should refer to the county manager’s office.  
     
   Kristy Evans asked Fire Chief Pelt about the current staffing hours at the fire station, specifically which days of the week the station is staffed. Chief Pelt responded that the station is staffed on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and they are working on adjusting the schedule to add 12 more hours of coverage, especially on school days. He mentioned that the coverage may be added on the 48-hour shift rotation, but the details are still being worked out. He also noted that there are "brown outs" (when no coverage is available) in Nixon on Fridays and Sundays, affecting multiple areas, not just Gerlach. Evans reiterated that the community is ready to advocate for more funding from the County Commissioners if needed.  
     
   Fire Captain Jonathan Pritchard provided two updates for the fire department. First, he mentioned that they will have Vials of Life kits available at the upcoming spaghetti feed event for community members who want to participate. He is also working on a flyer to distribute at key locations like the community center, senior center, and post office to provide directions for picking up the vials. Second, he addressed the possibility of offering an emergency medical responder course for the community, which came up during the recent emergency management meeting at the school. The course would be about 60 hours long, and while EMTs wouldn't need to take it, they could help. Pritchard plans to circulate a flyer with more details after the holidays, depending on community interest.

Kristy Evans asked Captain Jonathan Pritchard about the details of the upcoming spaghetti feed and the emergency medical responder course. For the spaghetti feed, Pritchard confirmed it will take place on November 23rd at 6 PM at the community center. Regarding the medical course, Evans expressed enthusiasm and asked how the course might be structured. Pritchard explained that the 60-hour course could be spread over a couple of weekends or a few nights a week, depending on community interest. He plans to gather more information and will circulate flyers to gauge interest. Evans also asked about the cost of the course, and Pritchard said he would try to secure funding from the county to cover the cost of textbooks, aiming to offer the course for free to the community.

Russell Bierle asked about the training for new recruits at the Gerlach Fire Department, specifically inquiring about the availability of funding for training and the timeline for starting courses. He explained that potential volunteers had been asking when training would begin and whether there was funding for it. Captain Pritchard and Chief Pelt responded that while they could provide volunteer instructors, funding for textbooks was the main challenge. They noted that they already had some books available but would need more funding if the class size exceeded a few recruits. For the Fire Academy, they mentioned that state funding might be available for basic EMT courses, and it could be easier to organize an EMT class compared to the Fire Academy. Bierle also asked about the minimum class size needed to hold a Fire Academy. Captain Pritchard stated that at least 7 recruits were necessary for the Fire Academy and 8 for the EMT class. Chief Pelt added that with a new full-time paramedic joining, they now only need 6 more recruits to start the Fire Academy.  
  
Schatzi Gambrell asked if the emergency response class mentioned by Captain Pritchard would also require textbooks, and whether it was a volunteer or paid position. She also suggested that the nonprofit funds held by the fire department could potentially be used to cover the costs of the class, as it might be an appropriate use of those funds. Captain Pritchard confirmed that it was a community-based course, and Chief Pelt offered to check with community member Lisa Nash about using the funds, highlighting that the emergency medical responder course could be a valuable first step for potential volunteer firefighters. Kristy Evans followed up by asking how much the books would cost to which Captain Pritchard said he was quoted $1,300.   
  
Lisa Nash, the Volunteer Coordinator for Pyramid Lake and President of the Volunteers in Gerlach, offered to bring the issue of funding textbooks for the emergency response class to the volunteers for a vote. She expressed confidence that the volunteers would approve the books for locals and fire department members but noted that the volunteers should not cover the cost of books for people traveling from other areas to take the class. She plans to present this proposal at their upcoming meeting.

1. **BURNING MAN / BLM / WASHOE COUNTY COMMUNITY FEEDBACK SESSION –** Representatives from these entities will be present for a listening session from the community on how the operations of the Burning Man event, as they pertain to Gerlach/Empire, may be improved and what has worked well. [For Discussion Only]  
     
   The following individuals introduced themselves:
2. Katie Hoffman: Burning Man's Agency Relations Manager.
3. Greg Herrera: Government Affairs and Law Enforcement Liaison for Burning Man.
4. Pete Dronkers: Community Relations and Permitting Specialist for Burning Man.
5. Charlie Dolman: Event Operations Director for Black Rock City, Burning Man.
6. Bradlee Matthews: Deputy District Manager for the Winnemucca District and Acting Black Rock Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Garrett Saracanella: Staff Ranger and Burning Man Law Enforcement Planner for the Winnemucca District, BLM.  
  
Schatzi Gambrell shared concerns about the lack of staffing in Gerlach during this year's Burning Man event, noting the challenges of managing the influx of people without adequate support. She emphasized the impact on local businesses, services, and residents who rely on staff for their livelihood. Gambrell expressed a desire for a more balanced approach to staffing, with people living in town before and after the event, and without disrupting the locals too much. She also highlighted the benefits of less traffic during the event, but mentioned issues with vendor permits and their difficulties in selling goods. Gambrell stressed the need for more openness in the community about who is vending, citing an issue with inappropriate products being sold. She concluded by thanking everyone for their efforts and mentioned further discussions on the $3 million building project later. Kristy Evans clarified that the issue with vendors in Gerlach is a county permitting issue.   
  
Brandy Wilbur raised concern with speeding, specifically regarding the industrial side who deliver the generators and supplies the few weeks before the event and after between Empire and Gerlach.   
  
Kristy Evans raised concerns about helicopters landing in Gerlach, citing disruption and strong community opposition. She also addressed speeding issues, particularly with BLM vehicles, and stressed the importance of enforcing the town's 25 mph limit. Evans praised the shoreline and shuttle service and emphasized the need for porta potties due to the town’s limited toilet facilities. She also highlighted that providing tickets and vehicle passes at the gate greatly reduced problems like trespassing and camping in town and urged this practice to continue.  
  
Russell Bierle expressed frustration over the lack of community involvement in the Burning Man event planning process. He pointed out that Gerlach residents are never proactively asked for input, leading to complaints after the fact. Bierle criticized the lack of a clear representative for Gerlach in the planning process, which results in the community getting passed around to different departments when seeking solutions. He suggested the creation of a community liaison role to ensure that residents can address issues with the appropriate people, improving communication and problem-solving.  
  
Schatzi Gambrell praised Marnee for her effective communication with the Gerlach community during recent open meetings, noting that Burning Man has been responsive to their concerns and has taken positive action. Gambrell also shared her personal experience of attending Burning Man for the first time in eight years, highlighting that the Point One pass improved travel times significantly. She acknowledged the success of the new system and expressed hope that it continues, while joking that the community would still voice some complaints.

Carl Copek emphasized that the Gerlach community and Burning Man are all stakeholders in the event, acknowledging its growth and the challenges involved. He praised the progress made in community engagement, including meetings and feedback from Burning Man and the BLM. While recognizing Burning Man's financial struggles, Copek urged against demanding more resources or money this year, given the event's financial difficulties. He emphasized that Burning Man is a major source of revenue and employment for Gerlach and should not be overburdened. Copek also highlighted the vital partnership between Burning Man and the town, especially in protecting local water resources, which has been essential for both parties' survival.

Luis Garcia emphasized the importance of repairing the relationship between Gerlach and Burning Man, urging both sides to collaborate rather than focus on extracting money from each other. He expressed concern about potential helicopter accidents in the town, calling for more thoughtful planning to prioritize community safety. Garcia also pointed out the economic struggles in Gerlach, where the median income is under $20,000, and suggested that supporting local vendors and businesses could help improve the town's financial situation. He concluded by stressing that meaningful change will only occur when the community works together.  
  
James Phoenix shared his positive experience with vending in relation to Burning Man, particularly highlighting the successful relationship between the local tribe and the Burning Man business office. He suggested that improving the vending process for others in Gerlach could be achieved by building better relationships with the county, understanding the business license process, and establishing clear timelines. Phoenix emphasized that this approach has worked well for the tribe and could be beneficial for others seeking to participate in vending at the event.  
  
Bradlee Matthews, Deputy District Manager of the Winnemucca District, addressed several points. He clarified that the $3 million facility on the hill, which was not open, had rotational staffing starting in May or June, though this could have been communicated better. He also explained that the BLM makes it clear to staff not to speed through Gerlach and emphasized the importance of being a good neighbor, with possible consequences for inappropriate behavior. Matthews suggested that the CAB (Community Advisory Board) could formalize a cooperative agreement with the BLM for improved communication, providing clear channels for outreach and follow-up.

Carl Copek raised concerns about a potential lithium mining operation on the south end of the Playa, which could negatively impact the area’s aesthetic, recreational value, and the viability of Gerlach as a residential location. He mentioned that the area was supposed to be protected under a conservation easement but wasn’t due to a loophole. Kopeck asked for more information and potential protection to prevent this development. In response, Matthews acknowledged the situation, explaining that while the area was not officially withdrawn from mineral entry, the likelihood of the project advancing was low. He emphasized that the company involved is a small, junior company seeking investors, and that it was unlikely the project would move forward.  
  
Russell Bierle asked about the process of converting geothermal leases into conservation leases, noting that Burning Man had recently purchased such leases outside of town. He wanted to know if this conversion was a common practice and whether there was an established process for it, or if it would be a novel project. In response, Matthews explained that the conversion process is relatively new due to recent changes in public lands rules, and while it’s still being worked out, the state office has a good understanding of the direction it will take and expects it to benefit the community.  
  
Kristy Evans emphasized the importance of having a point of contact with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help address various issues in the community, as they often don’t know who to reach out to. Matthews suggested that future Citizen Advisory Board meetings should continue to invite BLM with both in-person and virtual options, so they can engage more effectively. Matthews expressed a desire for ongoing partnership, highlighting that despite challenges, they want to maintain good communication. Matthews acknowledged that the relationship is important for both Burning Man and Gerlach.  
  
Katie Hoffman from Burning Man acknowledged the importance of having clear communication and pointed out that Burning Man collaborates with local authorities, such as the Washoe County Sheriff's Office and Nevada State Police, for event operations. They discussed challenges with helicopter landing zones and the relocation of the Care Flight helicopter services, noting that changes in available space and land ownership have affected operations. Hoffman emphasized that they are mindful of feedback regarding issues like noise and road closures, and they are committed to considering this input in their planning for the next event.  
  
Greg Herrera addressed concerns about traffic safety and speeding during the Burning Man event. He explained that Burning Man collaborates with multiple agencies, including the Washoe County Sheriff's Office and Nevada State Police, to promote traffic safety along key routes, with extensive signage and public messaging aimed at reducing speed near communities. Herrera shared that Washoe County issued 231 speeding citations, and accidents were mostly attributed to driver fatigue. He acknowledged the importance of community feedback, mentioning how they worked with local authorities to address school bus safety issues in Gerlach. He expressed understanding of the frustration over speeding and emphasized that while improvements are ongoing, they are committed to continuing to enhance safety efforts.  
  
Schatzi Gambrell expressed concerns about the safety of children walking to school in Gerlach, especially with speeding vehicles coming through town, sometimes when children are on the streets. She suggested measures like speed limiters on vehicles as potential deterrents. She emphasized the urgency, mentioning the fear she feels when seeing kids walking and drivers speeding. She also offered to report speeding vehicles, noting that the trucks have identifiable numbers. In response, Greg Herrera acknowledged the importance of pedestrian safety and suggested that issuing citations or imposing penalties on drivers, such as losing commercial licenses, might be necessary to slow down traffic and improve safety.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB –** Staff to display the online HUB for review by the CAB members and/or attendees to determine if there are new or existing projects. [non-action Item

Candee Ramos from Washoe County provided an update on the monthly Neighborhood Development Hub, which lists upcoming community meetings for proposed developments. She mentioned there are no upcoming meetings in the Gerlach Empire area but highlighted two past meetings: the Empire MPA and RZA meeting in August and the Warm Water Monitoring Wells meeting in October. She explained that even if people cannot attend a meeting, they can access summaries, sign-in sheets, and contact information through the Hub, allowing them to stay informed about the public concerns raised and any changes to the proposals. She encouraged the community to reach out with any questions.

1. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS** — This item is limited to announcements and/or requests for future agenda items by CAB members and potential general announcements from the county commissioner and county manager. (non-action item)

No announcements were made.

1. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT** – Comment heard under this item will be limited to three (3) minutes per person and may pertain to matters both on and off the agenda. The public is encouraged to submit a “Request to Speak” form to the Board chairman. Comments are to be addressed to the Board as a whole. (non-action item)

Carl Copek expressed his appreciation for the meeting and the opportunity to discuss issues in advance of the busy season. He emphasized the importance of having these discussions before things get hectic, allowing for a clearer exchange of ideas. Copek thanked Burning Man for their efforts in improving public safety and access, noting that progress is being made, even if it's gradual. He acknowledged the value of cooperation and teamwork in easing challenges, such as managing speed and traffic. He also mentioned that while he won't attend the upcoming Monday meeting in person, he will participate via Zoom and reiterated his concerns about revenue generation, suggesting that this year might not be the right time to push for more but to focus on addressing immediate needs.  
  
Pete Dronkers thanked Carl Copek for his use of the term “metaphorical speedbumps” and will now add that to his vocabulary.   
  
Luis Garcia thanked everyone for attending the meeting, acknowledging that Gerlach may seem insignificant to some but emphasizing that it is a real town and home to its residents. He expressed appreciation for the ongoing conversation, highlighting that while disagreements are inevitable, they are a natural and valuable part of the process.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

Top of Form