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

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

**January 9, 2025 at 6:00 P.M. at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood,**

**Gerlach, NV 89412**

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

Present – Tina Walters, Kristy Evans, Russell Bierle, Brandy Wilbur, Schatzi Gambrell
Absent -

1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**The pledge of allegiance was recited
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**No public comment was made
3. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF DECEMBER 12, 2024 –**
Schatzi Gambrell made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 12, 2024, CAB meeting. Brandy Wilbur seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.
4. **DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY COMMUINTY MICROGRID ASSITANCE PARTERSHIP UPDATE –

Brian Beffort from Washoe County discussed the ongoing efforts in Gerlach to develop geothermal and solar resources aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, lowering energy costs, and creating a battery backup system for the community center and potentially other buildings. He mentioned that feasibility studies have been completed for both solar and geothermal microgrids, and the next step is to develop detailed engineering plans and investment strategies to bring these projects to life. He’s also actively seeking funding opportunities, such as the Department of Energy’s Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership, which could help move forward with the development of either or both of the microgrids. He as for their blessing to move forward with the application and opened himself up for questions.

Schatzi Gambrell asked Brian Beffort if a letter from the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) was also required for the Department of Energy's Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership (CMAP), in addition to the letter from the Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID). Brian confirmed that a letter from the CAB was needed, and he offered to provide a template for review. He then apologized for initially misunderstanding the requirements, thinking a more complex memorandum of understanding was necessary, but clarified that only a letter of support was needed. Brian then read aloud a draft letter of support that the CAB could use. The letter outlined the partnership between Washoe County and Gerlach, highlighting their previous work, including energy audits and feasibility studies for solar and geothermal microgrids. It emphasized the town's need for more resilient, affordable energy solutions due to its remote location, fragile electric grid, and reliance on propane. The letter concluded by expressing appreciation for the CMAP program’s potential and their eagerness to continue the collaboration. He also noted that the draft was open to revisions.

Kristy Evans asked Brian Beffort whether the grant specifies what the power generation for the microgrid will look like or if part of the process is figuring that out. Brian explained that the grant is primarily a technical assistance award, which means it will provide expert help to take their current knowledge and develop detailed plans for the microgrid. The goal of the grant is to create a comprehensive, feasible plan that can be presented to potential funders or used to develop a fundraising strategy. The end result will be a clearer understanding of what energy solutions are practical and feasible for Gerlach.**

Russell Bierle motioned to approve the letter as written, however Candee Ramos reminded the CAB the item is not for action. Brian Beffort added that the deadline is at the end of the month and deferred to Candee for the proper procedure. Tina Walters asked if they could do a special meeting and Candee responded that they can. Candee also asked if they could write a letter as the CAB in support or even each of the 5 members. Brian answered that as a body would be best.

The CAB agreed they would hold a special meeting to discuss the grant and approve a letter from the

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES**Washoe county Sheriff’s office
Deputy Cruz from the sheriff's office shared that their department is equipping him and Deputy Stapleton with automated external defibrillators (AEDs) for their vehicles. This is in response to the increasing number of medical calls they've been handling. The AEDs will help them address medical emergencies more effectively when they arrive at the scene. He also mentioned their ongoing efforts in assisting people who get stuck in the snow and offered to answer any questions.

Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
Fire Chief Don Pelt provided an update on public safety for Gerlach. In December, there were 14 calls for service, with 4 being medical (1 hospitalization), 3 motor vehicle accidents, and 1 false fire alarm. He also reported a fatality involving a suicide by train near Flanagan on Christmas Day. Over the course of 2024, Gerlach had 131 incidents, with 59% medical and 41% related to fire or other emergencies. However, Chief Pelt also shared unfortunate news: the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Council voted on January 3rd to end their contract with Gerlach and Washoe County. Despite efforts to prevent this, including a meeting with Mr. Brown, the new council was not convinced to continue the contract. As a result, Gerlach firefighters may be laid off, and the community will experience "brown outs" (reduced service) in the coming months. The contract will continue until June 30th, allowing time for planning, and ARPA funds will help reduce the brown outs from 4 days a week to 2. Tina Walters asked if there was any opportunity to change the Tribal Council's decision, to which Chief Pelt replied that the council meets on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of every month, and public comment is allowed. To have an item discussed, people could also contact the tribal secretary to request to be added to the agenda. He promised to send more information.

Schatzi Gambrell reflected on the long process of working toward a sustainable fire department for Gerlach, which has been a six-year effort filled with challenges. She admitted that she never proactively sought meetings with the tribe to discuss the issues and recognized that this lack of communication may have contributed to the current situation. She acknowledged the financial shortcomings, particularly around salaries, and the failure to fully understand the complexities of balancing fire department hours. Despite this, Gambrell emphasized the importance of better communication and partnership with the tribe moving forward. She expressed a willingness to engage with them to find a solution. She also raised concerns about the tribe's financial impact, the status of fire training, and the ongoing difficulties caused by brownouts, which have created uncertainty and safety concerns for the community. Gambrell called for improvements, especially in guaranteeing safety for all, and asked if there were any suggestions on how to address these challenges more effectively. Don Pelt responded to Schatzi Gambrell's concerns about how to improve the situation, acknowledging the ongoing challenges. He explained that efforts were made to resolve financial issues with the tribe using ARPA funds, but due to timing, they could not address past expenses, which soured relations. Pelt admitted that he didn't have a solution at that moment but emphasized his dedication to resolving the problems. He also acknowledged the lack of involvement from the Gerlach community in the contract discussions, pointing out that while it was a government-to-government process, communities like Gerlach, Nixon, Wadsworth, and Sutcliff were not consulted. Pelt suggested that if there had been more community input from the beginning, it might have made a difference. Both he and Gambrell agreed on the importance of doing better moving forward, and Pelt expressed his commitment to trying to improve the situation.

Kristy Evans expressed her gratitude to Don Pelt, acknowledging the hard work and dedication of him, Manager Brown, and their team in the community. She praised their involvement, which made them feel like a vital part of the community rather than just service providers. Evans then sought clarification about the tribe’s decision to end the contract, asking if it was because they viewed it as a drain on their resources. Pelt confirmed this, explaining that the tribe believed more resources were being allocated to Gerlach than to tribal areas. He further elaborated on the challenges of explaining the separate funding for Gerlach and the tribe's fire personnel, and how mutual aid was used when needed. Evans empathized with the tribe’s perspective but also recognized the practical benefits of sharing resources, especially in emergency services. Pelt reassured her that despite the end of the current contract, they would still sign a mutual aid agreement to ensure that Gerlach would remain the closest available fire and ambulance service to her community.

Russell Bierle asked Don Pelt whether the tribe would be open to continuing the contract if the funding issue were resolved, or if some members of the tribe were fundamentally opposed to serving Gerlach. Pelt responded that while securing the funding might make it easier, there would likely still be resistance from some tribe members who feel that resources are being directed toward Gerlach instead of their own community. He emphasized that the challenge would be convincing them that the funding comes from Washoe County, not the tribe, but many in the tribe only see their employees going to Gerlach. Pelt suggested that even with the money, the tribe’s internal dynamics and opinions would remain a significant hurdle.

Washoe County Manager Eric Brown shared that his experience mirrored Chief Pelt's regarding the situation with the tribe. He noted that a significant portion of the Tribal Council was uncomfortable with serving non-members, and even with funding, the optics of that might still be an issue. He praised Chief Pelt for his transparency and confirmed the county’s commitment to finding solutions to maintain services in Gerlach. Brown mentioned promising discussions with REMSA, who have a similar model with rural communities, and hoped this could provide a solution for medical services in Gerlach. He also acknowledged the ongoing efforts to find funding for firefighting and other services, and although he didn’t have immediate answers, emphasized that the county would continue working to resolve the issues before the contract ends.

Schatzi Gambrell asked Manager Eric Brown about the funding for the contract, recalling that in the beginning, the county was paying for the services to Gerlach, which had caused some budgeting issues. She wanted clarification about the source of the funds, specifically whether they were from ARPA or the general fund. She also questioned why the money wasn’t sufficient, given that PILT funds are allocated for schools, fire, and health. Gambrell suggested organizing a communication circle to address misunderstandings between the tribe and the community, ensuring everyone understands that Washoe County is funding the services and it’s not all coming from the tribe's budget. She emphasized the importance of providing medical care for Gerlach and asked what could be done collectively to find a solution. Finally, Gambrell inquired if a joint meeting could be arranged with the tribe to improve communication, and Candee Ramos responded that she would look into that possibility and work with leadership and the tribe.

Manager Eric Brown acknowledged that after watching Don's presentation to the Tribal Council, it became clear that a regional approach is needed to address the funding and service issues in Gerlach and surrounding areas. He emphasized that it doesn't make sense to seek funding only for Gerlach and Empire while excluding other areas. Brown also suggested revisiting the boundaries for Truckee Meadows and REMSA’s coverage to ensure more comprehensive service. He mentioned that the county is committed to finding a solution and would be open to participating in any roundtable discussions. Brown also noted that there is significant frustration within the community, as some residents feel that Gerlach and Empire are unfairly using their resources, and despite efforts to provide honest answers, those concerns were not well received.

Captain Johnathen Prichard asked Don Pelt if he understood that, based on the tribe's current direction, the three full-time staff members currently serving the Gerlach community would be laid off on July 1st at 12:01 AM. Don Pelt confirmed that these employees are scheduled for layoffs, but mentioned that it is uncertain whether they would be reassigned to Gerlach or Pyramid Lake. However, he emphasized that the tribe is exploring other options to keep the employees employed and has not given up on finding funding to support their continued employment.

Captain Johnathen Prichard provided an update on efforts to support the Gerlach fire district. In December, he worked with Connie Lucido from Washoe County to successfully submit a grant application for new equipment through the Assistance to Firefighters program. He also discussed other potential grants, including the FEMA SAFER grant, which had been initially dismissed due to past issues but now has revised funding. Prichard mentioned distributing flyers for the "Vial of Life" and an emergency medical responder course but noted no community interest in the course so far. He also revealed his attempts to meet with County Manager Dave Solero to discuss the transition plan following the unexpected news that the Gerlach station would stay operational until the end of the fiscal year, instead of closing in May as previously thought. Prichard expressed his continued commitment to ensuring services for Gerlach remain intact and is working on a budget proposal for the station to become independent from other agencies, like REMSA. Despite the challenges, he reassured the community that he is not giving up and will continue advocating for the station’s future.

Russell Bierle asked how recent developments would impact planned training for the year, specifically whether the AEMT Academy scheduled for the fall would be canceled or unavailable to Gerlach volunteers.

In response, Captain Johnathen Prichard clarified that the training is still on track. While the location of the Advanced EMT class might change (potentially hosted at Pyramid Lake instead of Gerlach), the class is still planned for the fall. Additionally, Prichard mentioned that they had requested significant funding through a grant for fire academy and EMS training, and if that isn’t approved, they will apply for alternative funding in July.

Don Pelt expressed that, as long as he remains Chief at Pyramid Lake, Gerlach residents will always be welcome to attend classes offered at Pyramid Lake. He emphasized that he sees no reason to charge Gerlach participants for these courses. Pelt reiterated his commitment to helping Gerlach, continuing mutual aid partnerships, and offering support to teach Gerlach volunteers whenever possible.

Kristy Evans expressed deep gratitude to Manager Brown, Chief Pelt, and Captain Pritchard for their hard work and efforts. She acknowledged the challenges and understood the tribe's possible perspective. Evans also recognized that the community could have done more to show appreciation for the contract with the tribe, calling it a lesson for the future. She thanked everyone for their care and dedication.

Carl Kopek expressed gratitude to Chief Pelt, Captain Pritchard, and Manager Brown for their ongoing efforts to resolve the fire protection issue. He proposed focusing on vegetation management, specifically reducing the fire fuel load in the area, as an immediate step while waiting for a solution. Kopek offered to lead an auxiliary team to address fire prevention. He also emphasized that Gerlach serves as a hub for many tourists, particularly during events like Burning Man, and that fire protection should extend beyond just Gerlach to cover the broader area, highlighting the need for professional responders.

1. **COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS –**
Commissioner Jeanne Herman expressed her deep sympathy for the situation, acknowledging the challenges faced by the community. She praised the efforts of Chief Pelt, Manager Brown, and others for their work in bringing fire services to the area, and emphasized the importance of achieving stable, permanent fire protection. She agreed with the need to use PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) funds to support this and promised to continue advocating for it. While she recognized the difficulties, she encouraged the community to stay hopeful, reassuring them that the situation could be resolved within the next five months. She thanked everyone for their patience and assured them that efforts were ongoing.

Manager Brown updated that he will return next week to deliver his “state of the county” report.Johnathen Prichard asked if he should send meeting requests to Manager Brown. Manager Brown replied that he can send them to him as he has been keeping Dave Solaro busy.

Schatzi Gambrell expressed the importance of remembering that the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) represents a vast area, not just Gerlach, spanning from Nixon to the California border. She highlighted the vast responsibility of the fire and sheriff departments covering 2,200 square miles with limited staff. Schatzi also shared her appreciation for the collaborative efforts between neighbors, including the Paiute natives, in improving community relations and enhancing fire department capabilities. She thanked everyone for their work and participation in the meeting.

Tina Walters mentioned that next month's meeting will feature Gabrielle Enfield, who will discuss the art trails and a housing update.

Russell Bierle asked for clarification on a housing update, and Candee Ramos explained that it pertains to a "Housing Rehab Project" possibly involving a nonprofit called "Stay Together in Northern Nevada" (RTNN). She mentioned that the group received a grant for a feasibility study, likely from the county commissioners, aimed at helping people stay in their homes as they age. The study would be conducted in Gerlach.

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1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB –**This item was skipped
2. **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**

There was no public comment

**ADJOURNMENT –**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm

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