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

Citizen Advisory Board held on March 26, 2024, at 5:30 P.M.

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

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

Present- Barbarba Fenne, Mac Rossi, Carly Brochard, Cameron Kramlich, Robert Laurie

Absent- Denise Kolton

A quorum was established.

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 CAB as a whole.

Mark Newman, a member of the Washoe County Senior Services Citizens Advisory Board, Commissioner for Open Space and Regional Parks, and member of the Sun Valley General Improvement District Citizen Advisory Board, commented about his work within the community and his bid to run for Nevada State Senate in District 15. He emphasized the importance of promoting services available to seniors and youth in the county, particularly those that are often underpublicized. He mentioned resources such as the Explore magazine, which lists various events and services for all age groups in Washoe County and noted that many people are unaware of these offerings. He expressed his commitment to raising awareness about these resources and getting more people involved.

Donna Clontz, a long-time volunteer with AARP Nevada and lead volunteer for the Age Friendly Reno program, provided a public comment focused on community resources for seniors. She highlighted the Age Friendly initiative, which aims to improve the community for all residents by making it more accessible and supportive for seniors. Examples included improving sidewalks for both children and seniors and enhancing parks for everyone to enjoy. Donna also discussed monthly Zoom meetings about Age Friendly initiatives, offering opportunities for the community to learn about services and events for seniors. She shared information about FlexRide, a low-cost transportation service for seniors, and promoted resources such as the Senior Spectrum publication, which provides information on local senior services. She encouraged community involvement and emphasized the importance of raising awareness about available resources to better serve seniors in the region.

1. **PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –** General community updates from public safety representatives; including but not limited to Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, Washoe County Sheriff’s Office, and others as such [Non-Action Item]

Washoe County Sheriff's Office

Captain Brandon Zirkle provided an update on the Washoe County Sheriff’s Office, focusing on staffing, crime statistics, and recent public safety efforts. He reported that the Sheriff’s Office is nearly fully staffed, with 23 deputies currently in training and 13 more enrolled in the Patrol Academy. He noted that the department's staffing levels are expected to improve further, which will help increase police presence on the streets. Zirkle also shared that calls for service in the West Truckee Meadows area have decreased, with 133 calls in Q4 of 2023, down from the three-year average of 143. However, self-initiated activity by officers in the area has increased significantly, which may contribute to the reduction in dispatched calls. Crime statistics showed slight increases in assaults and counterfeit/forgery cases, but overall, crime rates in the area are stable, with larcenies and sex offenses down. Zirkle highlighted a recent crime spree in Rancho Haven and Galena, where vehicle burglars were caught after a neighbor provided a detailed description of the suspect vehicle. He concluded by noting that with continued staffing improvements, the department will be able to enhance public safety efforts even further.

Mark Neumann asked Captain Zirkle about the status of individuals arrested for burglarizing in the area, specifically whether they were able to post bail or were being held until trial. Zirkle responded that while initial charges were filed, the District Attorney later decided not to pursue those cases. However, additional charges were brought based on interviews with the suspects, and some were eventually released on their own recognizance after being booked. Zirkle emphasized that once the suspects were processed, the decision to release them was made by the judge, and that he could only control the actions within his department.

Donna Clontz asked Captain Zirkle whether any of the recent crimes in Verdi, particularly car burglaries and house burglaries, involved minors, especially those not in school. Zirkle responded that he didn't have specific data on juvenile involvement but mentioned that some vehicle burglaries are crimes of opportunity, often committed by unsupervised youth. However, in the cases he was aware of, such as the Rancho Haven and trailhead burglaries, the suspects were adults. Zirkle acknowledged the possibility of juvenile crimes but noted that the cases he was handling at the moment involved adult offenders.

Carly Brochard raised concern about a specific area in Verdi along the main highway where abandoned vehicles, including a broken-down motorhome and now a truck for sale, are causing issues. She expressed worry that if left unaddressed, this could become a recurring problem. Captain Zirkle acknowledged the issue, noting that vehicles for sale on public roads are illegal and that they could potentially tag the truck. He also mentioned ongoing challenges with people living out of vehicles in the area, but highlighted a new homeless ordinance passed by the County Commission, which gives law enforcement more authority to address such situations. Zirkle shared an example of a recent case where a couple living in a broken-down car was dealt with by identifying a warrant for one of them and offering resources for the woman. He assured Carly that he would investigate the specific truck issue and provide an update.

Captain Zirkle complimented the recent success of the County Commissioners passing the new homeless ordinance, calling it a positive step forward. He emphasized that law enforcement's role is not to arrest everyone experiencing homelessness, but it becomes challenging when individuals refuse offered services. He explained the importance of balancing the needs of people living in vehicles or on the streets with the safety and well-being of the surrounding community. Donna Clontz also praised the county's efforts in providing services, noting that the outreach team and law enforcement are working effectively together to guide individuals to available resources while ensuring community safety.

Mark Neumann shared his impression of a recent tour of the CARES campus, highlighting its role as one of the largest homeless shelters in the U.S., surpassing even Los Angeles in terms of resources for the homeless. He noted that while the shelter offers food, clothing, counseling, education, and job help, some individuals remain homeless because they choose not to access these services. Captain Zirkle responded by confirming that the shelter does provide extensive resources, including housing options, counseling, and safe camps. However, he acknowledged that while some people on the streets choose to remain there, a significant portion of the homeless population struggles with mental health issues. Zirkle explained that many individuals facing mental health challenges have no place to go but the streets or jails, as mental health facilities are scarce. He mentioned that the Sheriff's Office has recently received a grant to dedicate officers specifically to mental health cases, highlighting the increasing role law enforcement plays in addressing mental health needs within the community.

Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District

Taylor Brett, the newly hired Wildland Urban Interface Coordinator for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, provided an update on his role. He explained that his job focuses on reducing wildfire risk in the Truckee Meadows area by identifying high-risk areas and coordinating efforts to mitigate potential fires before they happen. His position is part of the Wildland Pools Division, and he emphasized that wildfire is inevitable, with fire season typically starting in June or July. Taylor also highlighted that part of his work involves offering defensive space inspections for residents to help them reduce their individual fire risk. While he works with homeowners to make changes at the personal level, the goal is also to address larger community-wide fire risks. Additionally, part of his role is to apply for federal grants to secure funding for mitigation projects, with millions of dollars in available grants to support these efforts.

Battalion Chief Martin Johnson provided an update on Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) activities in the Verdi area. There were 39 total incidents, mostly medical calls, and one structure fire in February. In terms of wildfire season, open burning is expected to begin around April 1st, weather permitting, with burn permits available on the TMFPD website. Green waste collection will take place on April 13th and 14th at two locations: East Lake and Washoe Valley/Lemon Valley at the Lemon Valley Volunteer Fire Station. Additional green waste collection opportunities will be available in the fall. Johnson also mentioned that three TMFPD personnel are currently in a joint fire academy in Carson City, which will conclude in June. These new members will join the team by July.

Carly Brochard asked if they knew what the cause of the brush fire was, and Johnson responded that he would follow up on that for an answer. Later, Chief Martin was able to update that the fire was in the jurisdiction of the US Forest Service, and they would have to reach out to them for further information.

Cameron Kramlich raised concern regarding a fire potentially caused by NV Energy power lines, particularly since there was a fire near those lines. He said that he would feel more at ease if it was confirmed that NV Energy was not responsible for the fire, especially considering the company is planning to build a high-voltage power line through the area. Battalion Chief Martin Johnson assured him that they would investigate the issue and follow up with an answer.

1. **BUSINESS LICENCING IN WAHOE COUNTY –**

Sarah Tone, a Business Facilitator at Washoe County, provided an overview of her role and the work she does to improve community services and streamline processes. She acts as a troubleshooter for the Community Services Department (CSD), which includes regional parks, engineering, and building inspections. Sarah introduced a new initiative to enhance the CSD’s website, making it easier for the community to access services and information, including a simplified permit process for common building permits like electrical, HVAC, and roofing. She also highlighted the creation of a new business license toolkit, designed to simplify the licensing process for businesses in Washoe County. The toolkit includes a 5-step licensing process, a checklist of required documents, and links to helpful resources. Sarah emphasized that local business licensing ensures adherence to public safety standards, such as fire codes and health regulations, which are vital for businesses, especially those dealing with food or public access. Finally, she mentioned that the new online business licensing system and resources will improve efficiency, reduce errors, and support both small home-based businesses and larger enterprises, while also helping to manage a significant number of licenses issued annually.

Mac Rossi asked Sarah Tone whether the business license guidelines for Washoe County address the requirement for home-based businesses to check with their homeowners' association (HOA) before obtaining a license. He suggested adding this step to the process, as some HOAs may have restrictions on running businesses from home. Sarah agreed it was a good idea, acknowledged that it wasn't currently part of the checklist, and promised to make the necessary update to include it.

Carly Brochard commented that the website looks more user friendly and is more accessible than it has ever been.

Cameron Kramlich raised several questions about business licensing for people working from home, particularly in cases where employees work remotely (e.g., as 1099 or W-2 workers), or for out-of-state businesses. He also inquired about whether someone needs a business license if they own a Nevada-based business but are operating out of state. Sarah Tone explained that working from home for an employer (whether 1099 or W-2) doesn't constitute owning a business and thus does not require a business license in Washoe County. However, for businesses that are based in Washoe County or are operating within the county, a business license is required, even if the company is domiciled elsewhere. She emphasized that licensing requirements can vary by jurisdiction and acknowledged that business license regulations can be complex, particularly with multi-jurisdictional issues.

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB –**

Alexandra Wilson from Washoe County provided an update on the Neighborhood Development Hub and upcoming meetings. She explained that the hub, which replaced the previous "capture" process, focuses on developer-led neighborhood development and includes important planning meetings. While there are no specific meetings for areas like West Truckee Meadows or Unincorporated Washoe County this month, there are amendments coming to the code affecting areas like Sun Valley and Spanish Springs. These amendments cover topics like open space and definitions for short-term and long-term bicycles, including e-bikes. A couple of meetings are scheduled in early April, one in person and one via Zoom. Wilson also highlighted improvements in the Neighborhood Development Hub, where most feedback has been positive. She mentioned that meetings are scheduled to avoid conflicts, such as the cancellation of a meeting due to overlapping with another important one. She encouraged community input on the hub for continued improvements. She also explained the Washoe County applications page, which allows users to track the progress of various development projects, view related documents, and contact the relevant planning team members. This page includes detailed project information, meeting outcomes, and upcoming board reviews. Wilson invited feedback to improve this system and provided an overview of the planning process for special use permits and other neighborhood development projects.

Mark Neumann asked Alexandra Wilson about the time of the April 1st meeting, which was confirmed as 5 PM, and about amendments to code sections on height restrictions, parking, and landscaping, referring to the planning page for details. He also asked whether all events in Washoe County require business licenses. Alexandra clarified that permits are required for some events, particularly through parks reservations, and suggested contacting Sarah for more details. Neumann further inquired about how residents are notified about local events, like block parties, that may affect them. Alexandra explained that notifications are typically complaint-based rather than proactive but suggested discussing this with Sarah for potential improvements.

Robert Laurie expressed a lack of expertise regarding a specific project but acknowledged their awareness of transmission and distribution lines. They asked if the group had reviewed or commented on the project yet and noted the complexity of the project, which spans both county and city jurisdictions. They also confirmed that the project was moving through both the city and county, with special use permits likely involved. Additionally, they referenced a recent postcard sent out with further details about the project.

Cameron Kramlich discussed the installation of transmission lines designed to prevent fires by stacking wires vertically, rather than having them cross each other, which could cause friction and fires. They expressed concern about the impact of fire-related insurance claims on electric rates, citing a 400% increase in San Francisco. The speaker worried that the transmission line project could make their home more vulnerable to fires, potentially making it uninsurable and jeopardizing their ability to maintain a mortgage.

Brett Taylor discussed the growing issue of home insurance cancellations in Northern Nevada, with many insurers reducing coverage or not renewing policies, particularly due to wildfire risks. He mentioned that the Nevada Fire Chiefs are addressing the problem, aiming to prevent state-mandated insurance policies that could raise rates. He noted that State Farm and U.S.A.A. are still offering coverage, with U.S.A.A. providing discounts for fire wise communities. Taylor also shared that energy companies are taking steps to mitigate fire risks, such as undergrounding lines (like in Tahoe), coating conductors, and installing fuses that deactivate during wildfire season to reduce transmission line fire risks.

Mark Newman shared that in Sun Valley, where he lives, the community worked with local agencies like the American Red Cross and the Bureau of Land Management to reduce fire risks by clearing dead trees and brush. This effort led to a 50% reduction in the HOA's insurance costs, and homeowners also saw lower insurance premiums. He suggested that other communities could consider similar fire mitigation measures to lower insurance costs.

1. **BOARD MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS/REQUESTS/DISCUSSION** — This item is limited to announcements, requests for future agenda items, or discussion by CAB members and/or Commissioners. [Non-Action Item]

Mac Rossi announced that the City of Reno's new aquatic park, located on Moana, is on track to open on August 23rd. Originally budgeted at $47 million, the cost has risen to around $53 million. The project has received nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in government funding, and the city has invested $650,000 in artwork and design elements, making it a significant and visually appealing addition to the area.

Cameron Kramlich mentioned that two neighbors had inquired about the NDOT interchange project, with one neighbor being strongly opposed. Carly Brochard suggested it would be helpful to get an update on the RTC study, including its progress and approvals, as they were unable to find information online or get much feedback. They recommended adding this topic to the agenda for further discussion.

Carly Brochard suggested inviting Brett Taylor to return to the next meeting in May to provide more information and updates. He proposed offering a brief presentation on “firewise” to explain what it is and how it works, allowing attendees to learn more or decide if they want to get involved.

Carly Brochard expressed frustration with the City of Reno's lack of action regarding the sphere of influence and efforts to bring certain areas back into unincorporated Washoe County. She felt that more initiative was needed from local leaders, particularly Chair Alex Hill, and plans to step up her own efforts. Carly also highlighted ongoing development projects in the area that the community is unaware of due to city manipulation. She requested that the issue be added to a future agenda for further discussion.

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 chair. Comments are to be addressed to the Board as a whole.

Donna Clontz shared insights from a recent tour of the Cares campus, which provides services to homeless individuals, and encouraged others to take a similar tour. They discussed efforts to address homelessness in the region, particularly in Paradise Park, where multiple jurisdictions are working together to provide counseling and referrals to services instead of jailing homeless individuals unless necessary. They highlighted the success of the Cares campus, noting that it has helped over 365 people find housing this year. They emphasized the importance of balancing community safety with helping those in need and expressed frustration with resistance from some individuals to these efforts. The representative urged continued support for these initiatives.

Mark Neumann commented on changes to the community engagement process for development projects. He noted that in the past, CAB meetings allowed for broader participation and input, but since 2021, notifications about new developments are only sent to residents within a 750-foot radius or the closest 10 homes. If no one within that radius is informed, the public has no notice of developments, which often leads to confusion when decisions are made by the County Commissioners. He expressed frustration that community members are not adequately informed about local projects. Neumann also encouraged others to take the tour of the Cares campus, mentioning that his group asked many questions and spent more time there than initially planned.

Carly Brochard highly recommended touring the Cares campus, sharing that they initially felt hesitant about visiting but found the experience welcoming and comfortable. They were impressed by how inviting the staff and atmosphere were and noted that the campus is doing great work in a positive and safe environment.

1. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.