



WASHOE COUNTY

Integrity Communication Service

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: October 21, 2025

DATE: September 26, 2025

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Kelly Mullin, AICP, Planning and Building Division Director,
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THROUGH: Eric Crump, Community Services Department Director
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SUBJECT: Recommendation to receive an update and provide direction to staff by confirming or modifying the priority order of actions to implement the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan and changes mandated through the 2025 Session of the Nevada Legislature. Topics for prioritization may include, but are not limited to: County-wide affordable housing initiatives; public noticing; permitting requirements for equine businesses; dark skies; heat mitigation; and agritourism. (All Commission Districts.) FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

SUMMARY

The Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan sets the policy-level vision that guides future growth and development in the unincorporated County. When it was adopted in November 2023, the Board identified the first set of initiatives to begin implementation of the plan. That priority list was subsequently updated in December 2024.

This item is intended to: (1) provide an update on progress made thus far in 2025, and (2) seek Board direction on the priority order for the updated set of potential initiatives, including changes mandated during the 2025 Session of the Nevada Legislature.

Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item: Economic Impacts.

PREVIOUS ACTION

On November 14, 2023, the Board adopted the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan and prioritized the first six initiatives to implement the plan.

On December 10, 2024, the Board updated that list, adding changes to equine business regulations as fifth on the priority list.

BACKGROUND

Adoption of the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan was the culmination of over three years of work with community members, partner agencies, elected/appointed officials, and other

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stakeholders. It provides a vision for how the unincorporated County will develop over the next 10-20 years. Implementing the master plan's vision will be a multi-year, labor-intensive endeavor.

Chapter Three of the master plan identifies short-term, medium-term and long-term actions intended to fulfill the vision and execute the policies within the plan (see Attachment A). These actions generally require code revisions, capital projects, additional plans or studies, the creation of programs, or allocation of resources. Implementation is anticipated to occur in stages over the next 20 years.

In order to best focus staff resources, in late 2023 and 2024, the Board identified and then updated the priority order for initial actions to begin implementing the Envision Washoe 2040 master plan. As Board and community priorities are anticipated to shift over time, annual strategic plan goal-setting by the Board will help prioritize future implementation actions. Any initiatives requiring code amendments or budget augmentation will return to the Board for action at the appropriate time.

Implementation actions are generally expected to be completed consecutively (i.e. work on the current item to conclude prior to commencement of work on the next item). This expectation may evolve as resources allow.

In December 2024, the Board confirmed the priority order of the items shown below. Significant work has been accomplished thus far in 2025 on the highest priority items, and status updates are noted for each. Items 2, 3, 6 and 7 are either completed or proposed to be removed from the list for the reasons noted in the status.

1. County-wide affordable housing initiatives

Overview: Numerous master plan policies and action items aim to address housing affordability challenges in Washoe County over a several year period. This item is focused on shorter-term initiatives identified as part of the County's Strategic Plan to spur the creation of more affordable housing in unincorporated Washoe County and increase availability of a broader range of housing types. The Board identified this work as a critical need, and it is recommended to remain the highest priority implementation item.

Status: Multiple housing-related initiatives are in process and anticipated to continue through FY26. A broad set of code amendments were adopted by the Board in April 2025, primarily aimed at reducing barriers for missing middle housing types such as triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage courts. This followed amendments in 2024 that made it easier, cheaper and faster for homeowners to establish accessory dwelling units, aligned manufactured home sizing standards with state law, and updated standards for multi-family housing.

In-process or upcoming work is focused on creating incentives for senior housing, reducing barriers to development of smaller homes, better supporting redevelopment of infill parcels, modernizing standards for fabricated housing, creating incentives specific to affordable housing development, developing a streamlined program for homeowners to construct accessory dwellings, and other related initiatives. Multiple housing-related bills were also passed during the 2025 legislative session. Those requiring immediate

action include AB 540 (effective July 1, 2025), which, in part, mandates the creation of an expedited review process for attainable housing, and AB 241 (effective March 1, 2026), which mandates allowing for mixed use and multi-family housing in commercial regulatory zones.

2. Resources to implement new master plan

Overview: Implementation of the goals and policies within Envision Washoe 2040 is expected to occur in phases over the next 20 years. Recognizing that long-range planning efforts are often pre-empted by more time-sensitive project review processes, successful implementation of the master plan is dependent on ensuring dedicated positions exist to complete that work.

Status: A long-range planning manager position was authorized during the FY26 budget as part of a budget-neutral re-class with permanent offset. Once filled, this position will be tasked with leading efforts to implement the vision and policies of the new master plan. It is recommended that this item now be removed from the priority list.

3. Tahoe Area Plan

Overview: Amending the Tahoe Area Plan was mandated by TRPA to incorporate a series of housing incentives passed by their Board in December 2023. Work on this initiative began in December 2024 and was slotted to take 9-12 months due to the complex conformance and environmental review processes applicable to the Tahoe basin. The overall update included TRPA's mandated housing incentives (density, height, coverage, and parking incentives for deed-restricted achievable housing), as well as multiple clean-ups and changes aimed at relaxing select standards for accessory dwellings and workforce housing.

Status: Amendments were adopted by the Board in August 2025 and have been submitted to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for a conformance review. TRPA is expected to hold an additional three public hearings before the changes become effective. It is recommended that this item now be removed from the priority list.

4. Public noticing

Overview: Input from the public, elected/appointed officials, and partner agencies has identified a need to examine current public notice practices for opportunities to increase effectiveness. An assessment is recommended to increase efficient engagement in the County's planning processes. This would be a subsequent phase to the introduction of "neighborhood meetings" in 2022. That effort was aimed at engaging residents earlier in the review process by requiring that developers meet with neighbors prior to application submittal, and to identify how their proposals were updated to address community concerns.

Status: Not yet started. With the completion of items #2 and #3, it is recommended that the Board move this up to priority #2.

5. Permitting requirements for equine businesses

In December 2024, the Board added this initiative as fifth on the priority list, seeking an assessment and update to permitting requirements for equine businesses.

Status: Using \$30,000 in special district funds from Commissioner Andriola, a consultant was retained in 2024 to research and report on equine codes in other jurisdictions, as well as to solicit community input on the topic via an online survey and a series of in-person and virtual workshops. This information will be used as part of the process to update related standards. With the completion of items #2 and #3 on this list, it is recommended that the Board move this up to priority #3.

6. Warm Springs ground water rights dedications

Overview: Within Warm Springs, current ground water rights dedication requirements are insufficient to sustain the underground aquifer under current water demands. It is recommended that the County work with the community and the Nevada State Engineer to update the number of acre-feet of ground water required to be dedicated during development of property located within the Warm Springs Valley Hydrographic Basin.

Status: Not yet started. This is an initiative where the work will primarily be driven by the County's Engineering Division, with support from the Planning Program. It is therefore recommended to be removed from this list. Updating the dedication requirements is a priority item for the Engineering Division, and they have indicated these efforts are anticipated to begin in 2026.

7. Dashboard indicators for measuring plan achievements

Overview: This item focuses on establishing indicators that measure achievement of key aspects of the master plan. It also includes creating a functional dashboard to highlight successes/challenges and allow members of the community to view current implementation priorities quickly and easily.

Status: The Washoe County website has been updated with implementation efforts achieved since the master plan was adopted in late 2023. It also reflects upcoming work. Due to the complexity of the other initiatives prioritized by the Board, it is recommended that this initiative be scaled back and shifted off this list, with development of a more advanced dashboard occurring over time as resources allow.

The following three topics have been identified for potential prioritization since the Board last set master plan implementation priorities in December 2024. The Board is asked to provide direction on whether (and where) to prioritize this work.

▪ **Heat mitigation**

Effective July 1, 2026, AB 96 requires that Washoe County update its master plan to contain a heat mitigation plan that includes, "without limitation, access to public cooling spaces, public drinking water, cool building practices, shade over paved surfaces and other mitigation measures to address heat in the community." There are multiple master plan implementation actions that relate to this requirement and will be furthered by this effort. It is recommended that this initiative be prioritized as #4.

▪ **Dark skies**

Following the Board's last priority-setting exercise in December 2024, Commissioner Andriola requested that work on a dark skies ordinance be added, strengthening existing requirements within Article 414, *Noise and Lighting Standards*. During creation of the Envision Washoe 2040 master plan, dark skies were recognized as highly important to residents across many areas of the County. As a result, development of an ordinance to

minimize impacts of excess lighting while maintaining a safe level of visibility at night was established as a nearer-term implementation item within the master plan. Creation of such an ordinance would be expected to enhance existing code requirements on lighting, glare and reflectivity. It is recommended this initiative be prioritized as #5.

▪ **Agritourism**

In summer 2025, Commissioner Andriola requested the Board be formally asked to consider development of an agritourism ordinance. The American Planning Association defines agritourism as “any activity incidental to the operation of a farm that brings members of the public to the farm for educational, recreational, or retail purposes.” (Source: www.planning.org/knowledgebase/agritourism). Agritourism commonly includes activities like farm tours, petting zoos, hayrides, corn mazes, hunting/fishing, etc. In some jurisdictions the term is more broadly applied and includes lodging and events such as weddings, festivals, and concerts.

Agritourism is not currently specifically defined within the Washoe County Development Code. However, several activities commonly considered to fall within this category are regulated, including pumpkin patches, animal shows, Christmas tree sales, farm to fork events, indoor/outdoor markets, outdoor entertainment events, wineries, wineries with special events, various lodging types, as well as various agricultural use types such as agricultural sales, animal production, and produce sales. There are several master plan implementation items that could be furthered by such an ordinance. Should the Board choose to prioritize this work, it is recommended to be prioritized as #6.

Recommended updated priority order

Based upon the information above, and considering the Board’s previously set priorities as well as the 2025 legislative mandates, the following updated priority order is recommended:

1. County-wide affordable housing initiatives
2. Public noticing
3. Permitting requirements for equine businesses
4. Heat mitigation
5. Dark skies (if the Board chooses to add this to the priority list)
6. Agritourism (if the Board chooses to add this to the priority list)

FISCAL IMPACT

No new fiscal impact is anticipated at this time, apart from staff resources used to implement the plan.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board receive the update and provide direction to staff by confirming or modifying the proposed priority order of actions to implement the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan and changes mandated through the 2025 Session of the Nevada Legislature.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation, a possible motion would be:

“Move to confirm [or modify as follows _____] the proposed priority order of actions to implement the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan and changes mandated through the 2025 Session of the Nevada Legislature.”

Attachment A: Excerpt of Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan Chapter 3, *Implementation*