



North Valleys Citizen Advisory Board

Minutes of the regular meeting of the North Valleys Citizen Advisory Board held on February 9th, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. Reno Stead Airport, 4895 Texas Ave, Reno NV 89506

1. CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

PRESENT – Scott Finley, Aaron Jennings, Susan VanNess

ABSENT – Krystal Ayers, Roger Edwards, Shelia Herring

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR THE MEETINGS OF January 12, 2026

Susan VanNess motioned to approve the minutes of the January 12, 2026, North Valleys CAB meeting. Aaron Jennings seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

4. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

James Phoenix introduced himself in his role with the Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) and as the incumbent candidate for Washoe County School District Board of Trustees, District C, which includes Wingfield, Spanish Springs, the North Valleys and Cold Springs. A member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, Phoenix shared his background of military service in the Marines and Army National Guard, retirement from the Reno Police Department, and prior service as tribal chairman. He was appointed to the school board in January 2025. At NDVS, he explained the agency works alongside, but is separate from the VA, providing veteran service officers, operating state veterans nursing homes in Reno and Las Vegas, and maintaining state cemeteries in Fernley and Henderson, along with statewide outreach and volunteer programs. Regarding his school board service, Phoenix said he supports the district's strategic plan with a strong focus on strengthening special education services, including increasing certified teachers, instructional aides and classroom resources. Over the past year, he visited all 20 schools in District C twice, meeting with principals to understand successes and challenges. He plans to continue outreach efforts to gather community input and bring concerns back to the district.

5. CAB MEMBER/ COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/ COMMENTS

Scott Finley announced an upcoming public hearing for the Lemon Drive Traffic Improvements and Resiliency Project, which will realign and reconstruct Lemon Drive above the 100-year floodplain. The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 19, at 4:30 p.m. at Lemon Valley Elementary School, 255 W. Patrician Drive in Reno.

6. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES

Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District

Battalion Chief Derek Reid reported that the department has begun distributing informational bulletins available on the back table, highlighting recent call volume and safety information. In January, crews responded to 347 medical calls and 50 vehicle accidents. The bulletin also includes seasonal safety tips, including guidance on space heater use and carbon monoxide awareness, reflecting common causes of fires and injuries. He encouraged attendees to take a copy and offered to answer any questions.

Washoe County Sheriff's Office

Sgt. Abigail Biggar, joined by Sgt. Stefanie Brady, presented fourth-quarter 2025 crime statistics for the North Valleys, comparing them to the three-year quarterly averages. Several categories were down or steady, including burglary, DUI, drug offenses, fraud, sex offenses and motor vehicle theft, while assault, larceny, trespass and weapons violations were slightly above average. Arson was at zero for the quarter. She noted lieutenants were unavailable due to out-of-state training and offered to follow up on any detailed questions. Sgt. Biggar also highlighted updates within the Sheriff's Office, including a new sergeant leading the HOPE team focused on the unhoused population and the launch of the real-time crime center. She explained the department's fixed drone program is used strictly to provide situational awareness for active calls, not for general surveillance, helping deputies assess risk and adjust response as needed.

A resident asked about expanding fixed drone coverage in the North Valleys, particularly with growth occurring near Stead Airport and stretching toward Cold Springs and the California line. Sgt. Abigail Biggar said the Sheriff's Office is currently piloting the fixed drone program in Sun Valley but anticipates adding more permanent units over time. She also noted the installation of more than 100 fixed Flock cameras at key egress points, parks and major roadways, which include license plate readers and vehicle-description search capabilities to assist with investigations. In addition, deputies across shifts are equipped with mobile drones to assist with active incidents, such as locating missing people using heat signatures. Another resident raised concerns about increased traffic and speeding on Ramsey Way, particularly with ongoing and upcoming construction, and requested a stronger law enforcement presence before someone is seriously injured. Sgt. Biggar said she would coordinate with the traffic unit and Sgt. Miller, who oversees motors, to explore targeted enforcement in the area. She noted that traffic operations can be scheduled and may include both motor officers and patrol deputies to address the concern.

A resident raised concerns about speeding on Lemon Drive, particularly during morning and afternoon commute hours, noting an increase in traffic as more families move to the North Valleys. The resident said drivers frequently exceed speeds of 40–50 mph, especially between 5:30 to 8 a.m. and 3:30 to 6 p.m., and cited recent T-bone crashes near Idaho and Mistletoe. In response, Sgt. Abigail Biggar and staff acknowledged the concern and said the issue may coincide with shift changes but could be addressed through targeted traffic enforcement operations. They noted that with advance notice of peak problem hours, the department can adjust staffing, deploy motor officers and increase high-visibility enforcement. Similar operations in other neighborhoods have successfully reduced speeding through concentrated ticketing and presence.

Katie Finley, a Ramsey Way resident, echoed concerns about unsafe driving in the area. She reported drivers frequently rolling through the stop sign at Ramsey and Lemon without stopping, creating safety risks for children and pets. She also noted an increase in reckless driving during

the evening commute, typically between 4 and 6 p.m., including speeding, unsafe passing over double yellow lines and vehicles losing control and ending up in ditches. In response, Sheriff's Office representatives said the more specific timelines provided would help them coordinate targeted traffic enforcement operations with the traffic unit to address the issue.

7. COUNTY MANAGER KATE THOMAS MEET & GREET

County Manager Kate Thomas introduced herself as having served as Assistant County Manager before stepping into the interim role in June and officially becoming County Manager on Dec. 1. She emphasized her appreciation for Citizens Advisory Boards as an accessible way for residents to provide input and noted her long career in public service, including roles with the City of Reno, the Nevada Secretary of State's Office and Washoe County. Thomas said her focus is primarily internal: strengthening Washoe County's workforce, culture and accountability to ensure the organization operates with excellence. She highlighted recent efforts to right-size employee compensation through a Korn Ferry study to remain competitive in the region, improve retention and support a motivated workforce. She underscored the importance of fiscal sustainability, shaped by past experience during economic downturns, and reaffirmed her commitment to conservative financial management. Budget-wise, she said the county is stable but facing a structural deficit, as personnel costs continue to rise faster than revenue, which is largely driven by property taxes. The upcoming budget will be a "hold-the-line" year with no new staffing added. Thomas said the county will focus on efficiency, maintaining strong reserves and long-term fiscal health while continuing to deliver services responsibly.

A resident questioned how many county employees are working remotely under the county's \$1 billion budget, expressing concerns about data security and the handling of sensitive information outside county facilities. County Manager Kate Thomas clarified that while some employees work remotely part-time, there are no fully remote positions. Remote work is limited to certain roles and days per week, with strict accountability standards in place. Employees remain on the county's secure network, with required firewalls and county-issued equipment to protect sensitive data. Thomas emphasized that cybersecurity and data governance are top priorities, particularly in light of recent issues at the state level. She noted that a major cyber disruption could halt critical services such as courts, public safety operations and child protective services. As a result, the county is placing increased focus on strengthening its cybersecurity protections to prevent similar disruptions.

Susan VanNess raised concerns about funding for the Citizens Advisory Boards (CABs) compared to the County Leadership Academy, saying she believes the academy does not reflect a broad cross-section of the community and appears ideologically driven. She said if public funds are used, participation should represent all citizens, regardless of viewpoint. In response, County Manager Kate Thomas emphasized that CABs are not going away and have strong support from the Board of County Commissioners. She acknowledged concerns about funding imbalance, said Leadership Academy funding will be reduced, and noted CAB resources will be leveled out. Thomas added that new leadership overseeing the programs is aligned with ensuring broader balance and responsiveness.

8. NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE (NDOW) LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Tru Hubbard, Urban Wildlife Education Coordinator for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, presented an overview of wildlife behavior to help residents better understand and safely coexist with urban species. Drawing from her experience handling public calls and field responses involving animals from small mammals to bears and mountain lions, she explained that many wildlife conflicts stem from misunderstandings about animal behavior. Hubbard emphasized that wildlife encounters can be planned or unplanned and that humans should remember animals are also experiencing a “human encounter.” Understanding factors such as time of year, especially during spring breeding and denning season, animal health, distance, body posture and human response can help residents interpret behavior more accurately and avoid escalating situations.

She highlighted coyotes and bobcats as common North Valleys species, noting that coyotes are highly adaptable omnivores that thrive in urban areas because of accessible food sources, while bobcats are more strict carnivores. Hubbard addressed several common myths, including the belief that coyotes “stalk” people. She explained this is typically “escorting” behavior, where coyotes monitor people to ensure they leave the animal’s territory. She also dispelled the misconception that seeing a coyote or bobcat during the day means the animal is sick, explaining that both species adjust activity patterns seasonally and may be active during daylight hours, particularly when raising young. Finally, she debunked the myth that coyotes intentionally lure dogs to be killed. She said there is no evidence supporting that claim and explained that most conflicts occur when off-leash dogs pursue coyotes into their territory, prompting defensive behavior. Hubbard encouraged residents to think about wildlife behavior from the animal’s perspective and to use knowledge and situational awareness to promote safe coexistence.

A resident asked whether wolves are being seen in the region from Red Rock up toward Doyle, suggesting reports are being downplayed and noting ranchers are less likely to dismiss wolf sightings. Tru Hubbard responded that NDOW is limited in what it can say, but confirmed there have been verified wolf sightings, including on Peavine and at least one report north near Red Rock. She said the wolves observed are dispersing animals from California that cross into Nevada and generally return because Nevada does not have the habitat and large ungulate prey base wolves typically need. She described a recent dispersing male wolf that traveled through the Truckee area, moved along the foothills outside the Reno area, and then looped back northwest. Hubbard added that many reported “wolf” sightings turn out to be misidentified coyotes, especially when the animal is seen at a distance or captured in blurry photos. She said NDOW looks for clear evidence such as photos, tracks, or DNA sampling, and noted that a collar can be a helpful clue because coyotes in the area are not typically collared. She also explained key differences between wolves and coyotes, including wolves being roughly twice the size, having broader heads and snouts with more rounded ears, darker gray coloration more often, and a smoother, more fluid gait compared to the bouncier movement of coyotes.

A resident raised concerns about changes in bird populations around Swan Lake following past flooding and water pumping activity, noting shifts in migratory patterns and an increase in shotgun sounds in the area near new housing developments. He said it can be difficult to tell whether gunfire is occurring legally on public lands or closer to homes and expressed concern about potential impacts to wildlife. Tru Hubbard responded that nearly all birds in Nevada are protected outside of regulated hunting seasons, and it would be illegal to shoot them otherwise. She noted that firearm discharge restrictions may fall under local jurisdiction rather than NDOW. She explained that enforcement can be challenging because wardens need definitive evidence of illegal activity. Hubbard added that seasonal changes and habitat conditions can influence

bird movement and that geese are common and sometimes draw negative reactions from the public.

Daniel Yriarte asked whether the presence of a local wolf sanctuary and the sound of wolves howling would deter wild wolves potentially moving into the area from the Sierra Valley or instead attract them. Tru Hubbard explained that wolf vocalizations are primarily used for communication within packs and family groups, such as coordinating movement or alerting others to danger. Because wolves are territorial, she said it is more likely that hearing other wolves would serve as a deterrent rather than an attraction, since a lone wolf would generally avoid entering an area that appears to be occupied by another group. In a follow-up question about coyotes targeting poultry in neighborhoods, Hubbard said the most effective deterrent is a well-built chicken coop combined with preventative measures such as motion-activated lights or noise devices. She noted that electric fencing around coops is the most reliable method for preventing access to coyotes, bobcats, bears and other wildlife. She emphasized the importance of eliminating attractants and securing birds at night, since once a predator is rewarded with an easy meal, it is likely to return. She also said properly trained livestock guardian dogs can help, but untrained or free-roaming domestic dogs are actually responsible for more poultry losses than wild predators.

9. NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Sally Johnston explained how residents can stay informed about county activities and development projects through the Washoe County website. She directed attendees to WashoeCounty.gov, where they can connect with their commissioners and access the Neighborhood Development Hub to view upcoming public engagements and projects. She also noted that users can search by district, including District 5, to see active applications and detailed information about local items. Additionally, she encouraged residents to sign up for district news and email updates directly from the Board of County Commissioners page to receive county announcements and engagement opportunities in their inbox.

10. CAB MEMBER/ COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/REQUESTS/COMMENTS

Susan VanNess raised concerns about Facebook posts related to school board issues, saying that when she and others try to post meeting information, their posts are sometimes removed, possibly due to Facebook's AI moderation. She also referenced social media posts about an alleged fight at North Valleys High School during a protest and questioned whether the reports were real, noting that some accounts appear to use nicknames and may not be legitimate. In response, JJ Phoenix said he receives official reports for the entire district and confirmed that there was a report related to the protest that day. He indicated the information referenced was real and documented through official channels.

Scott Finley shared an upcoming public meeting hosted by Washoe County Emergency Management featuring the Nevada Division of Insurance and Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District's Wildland-Urban Interface program. The presentation and Q&A will take place Feb. 24 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 E. Ninth St., Building A, and will focus on recent changes to Nevada law affecting homeowners insurance and wildfire risk. He also noted a wildfire risk reduction grant program offering up to \$75,000 for eligible agencies and organizations, with applications due March 1, 2026. Finley then addressed the recent student walkout in Washoe County School District schools protesting ICE, saying he had

seen social media reports alleging harassment or threats against students who chose not to participate. He said such behavior would be unacceptable and emphasized the importance of civil discourse, civic engagement and nonviolent dialogue. He encouraged residents to bring concerns to Board of County Commission or CAB meetings during public comment. As a UNR student, he referenced Wolfpack Community Hall events that facilitate discussions on controversial topics and said he plans to reach out to Professor Amy Pason about potentially hosting a similar forum locally to provide a constructive outlet for community concerns.

Sally Johnston asked about inviting the Sheriff's Office HOPE team to attend a future meeting, referencing the earlier suggestion during the safety update. She also noted that Fire Adapted Nevada is expected to present next month following the insurance-focused meeting, which will provide residents with additional information and resources related to wildfire preparedness.

11. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

A resident asked whether it was true that several board members had attended an evacuation safety planning meeting. Scott Finley confirmed that he and Vice Chair Aaron Jennings attended a meeting at the Washoe County Emergency Management facility where they provided input on fire mitigation and evacuation planning. He said the group reviewed North Valleys evacuation zones using ArcGIS mapping technology and discussed strategic evacuation routes based on likely fire behavior and wind patterns. Aaron Jennings added that while an alert system was already in place, the updated platform allows first responders to issue highly targeted evacuation or shelter-in-place orders, sometimes affecting areas as small as two blocks. He explained that responders can select specific zones on their devices, input the reason for the alert, and send notifications directly to residents' cell phones, reducing unnecessary disruption to unaffected areas. Finley concluded by noting that although the system can be used for flooding and other emergencies, the primary focus of the meeting was wildfire disaster preparedness and evacuation planning, which remains the top priority.

Katherine Yriarte announced she is running for Washoe County Commission District 5 and outlined her core commitments, which include strengthening rural and suburban communities through improved emergency response and partnerships, working with tribal nations on a government-to-government basis, supporting seniors, caregivers and people with disabilities, protecting property rights and ensuring responsible use of tax dollars. She emphasized that issues such as safe roads, strong businesses and community safety are local, not partisan, priorities. Yriarte highlighted data showing seniors are the fastest-growing group experiencing homelessness and that individuals with disabilities face significantly higher rates of homelessness and mental health challenges. She cited rising mental health diagnoses among older adults, high suicide rates among seniors, and the increased likelihood of mental distress and depression among people with disabilities. She said these trends require proactive county-level solutions. Her proposed approaches include partnering with existing organizations to deploy mobile mental health support teams focused on seniors and people with disabilities, creating a caregiver support network with respite vouchers and peer support, establishing a 24/7 crisis hotline, and collaborating with nonprofit and faith-based partners to expand supportive housing and prevention strategies. She encouraged residents to connect with her to continue the conversation.

Heidi Soper, chair of the Sun Valley CAB, added to the evacuation planning discussion by noting that Sun Valley has a large population of seniors and residents who are not online or do not have cell phones. She said that in the event of an evacuation, especially if power is down, the Sheriff's Office conducts door-to-door notifications to ensure residents are informed.

Susan VanNess asked whether the findings related to the recent protests and reported incidents would be publicly announced and if there would be an investigation. In response, it was noted that a press release had already been issued, and an offer was made to locate it and provide the information.

ADJOURNMENT The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 P.M.

DRAFT