

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
WASHOE COUNTY, NEVADA**

TUESDAY

9:00 A.M.

OCTOBER 27, 2025

PRESENT:

**Alexis Hill, Chair**  
**Michael Clark, Commissioner**  
**Mariluz Garcia, Commissioner**  
**Clara Andriola, Commissioner**

**Janis Galassini, County Clerk**  
**Patricia Hurley, Director of Human Resources**  
**Michael Large, Chief Deputy District Attorney**

ABSENT:

**Jeanne Herman, Vice Chair**

The Washoe County Board of Commissioners convened at 9:00 a.m. in a special session in the Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, County Clerk Jan Galassini called roll and the Board conducted the following business:

**25-0763      AGENDA ITEM 3 Public Comment.**

Mr. Paul White of Education Crusade believed that the three key points that should be addressed were apology, humility, and prayer. He apologized to the three outside candidates for being brought into an interview process in which he felt the Commissioners had already made their decision. He remarked that the other candidates would eventually be grateful that they were not selected. He expressed disappointment that Ms. Kate Thomas had not shown more humility by withdrawing. He stated that Ms. Thomas could not identify any accomplishments during her employment with Washoe County. He suggested that she should seek a position that she enjoyed and had prior experience in, and added that being the County Manager (CM) was not a suitable fit. He stated that the County lacked leadership and asserted that Ms. Thomas was responsible for issues related to homelessness and the mismanagement of the Cares Campus. He shared his concern that Ms. Thomas was unaware of the daily reports of sexual assault, robbery, drug use, and violence that occurred at the Cares Campus. He prayed that the Commissioners would have the moral courage to make the right decision and not vote for any current candidate, but instead reopen the search nationally to find a strong leader capable of performing the duties of CM. He stated that the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) should seek a CM whose full-time job would be to provide strong leadership. He acknowledged that while the Commissioners oversaw operations, the CM must be a leader, and he questioned what examples of leadership the Board had observed in Ms. Thomas. He claimed that homelessness had increased by 2,000

percent under her oversight and suggested that the recently released statistics had been manipulated.

Mr. Drew Ribar, a candidate for Assembly District 40, stated that he had not initially intended to run for public office. He explained that he had been content focusing on running his business, but after experiencing negative interactions with the government, he began recording his interactions with government offices. He mentioned that several years ago, he had approximately 5,000 followers on his social media, which had now grown to nearly 230,000. He indicated that he had previously asked the BCC for assistance in resolving his issues but felt that his concerns went unanswered. He asked the CM candidates whether they would be willing to speak with him, and that Ms. Thomas had indicated she would have someone contact him. He noted that no one had reached out, which left him with little faith that any of the candidates would communicate with him. He suggested that the candidate selection was predetermined. He stated that, regarding his federal lawsuit against Washoe County, the damages and amounts continued to increase. He reported that on October 22, 2025, he filed a second amended motion that added additional Library Board of Trustees (LBT) members and increased the dollar amount. He mentioned that on October 22, 2025, he had recorded the court proceedings under Judge Barry Breslow, and noted that after the court proceedings concluded, he followed Deputy District Attorney (DDA) Amos Stege outside to ask him questions. He alleged that when they both entered an elevator together, DDA Stege assaulted him by rushing towards him and pushing him aside. He indicated that he intended to file a third amended complaint with the court, which would include a criminal complaint against DDA Stege. He believed that there was an ongoing long-term pattern of misconduct in Washoe County. He was reminded when Mr. Jeff Church had an issue with the Washoe County School District (WCSD), and made accusations about him, which he believed were untrue. He thought that Commissioner Clark might recall a time when a similar situation had occurred to him. He asked Chief Deputy District Attorney (CDDA) Michael Large why employees from the District Attorney's (DA) Office would attack people who were attempting to bring political change. He indicated that civil rights lawsuits could be costly. He asserted that he would continue to amend his lawsuit if government employees continued to bother him. He expressed that the government should allow people to live in peace and do what was right. He said that would be his approach if elected to State Assembly District 40. He encouraged the public to vote for him.

Ms. Farrah Downey said that she prayed so that the words she spoke would come directly from the Lord and be received with kindness and not attack anyone. She explained that humility meant evaluating each candidate equally, focusing on their skills and qualifications. She felt that Ms. Thomas deserved an apology and believed that the majority, around 92 percent, did not think Ms. Thomas had done a terrible job. She shared that, as a society, people needed to remember that COVID-19 (C19) contributed to an increase in homelessness that began in 2020. She believed that the community needed to recognize that, although the Cares Campus fell under the Office of the County Manager (OCM), rather than blaming homelessness on one candidate, the community should question the lack of housing and shelters in Washoe County. She indicated that partnerships between Washoe County and the Cities of Reno and Sparks had built a facility, and over

the past five years, thousands of homeless community members had been able to access services. She said that the facility may not be perfect but added that, nationally, the County was recognized for its abundant resources. She believed that there had been controversy and changes within the OCM. She explained that she worked in the housing industry and had fought for housing services and resources for those in need, and each time she contacted the OCM, Ms. Thomas was available. She highlighted that Ms. Thomas supported people regardless of their opinions or affiliations and felt it was important to speak to her character and integrity. She apologized that something negative had to be experienced to reach something positive and thought that most people had similar experiences.

Ms. Trista Gomez stated that she had attended many BCC meetings and observed that former CM Eric Brown had received numerous positive reviews, bonuses, and raises. She explained that the BCC had commissioned a national consulting study, funded by taxpayers. She indicated that many inefficiencies were identified and not one department listed in the Raftelis report was found to be flawless, which included the OCM. She expressed concern that someone from within the OCM would apply for the CM position despite receiving a negative review from the Raftelis report, in which she believed Ms. Thomas played an integral role. She felt that the report was fact-based and addressed the entire OCM department, not just Mr. Brown, which she found concerning. She questioned how the Board could appoint Ms. Thomas after receiving a report that highlighted deficiencies in the department that Ms. Thomas oversaw. She mentioned that the stability of the County over the past eight years had deteriorated under Ms. Thomas. She believed that Ms. Thomas was a nice person; however, Ms. Gomez could not understand why the Board would consider her for a position after they received the feedback from the Raftelis report. She said that she would have additional information during Agenda Item 5.

**25-0764      AGENDA ITEM 4 Announcements/Reports.**

Chair Hill reported that Vice Chair Herman was not in attendance, which she found disappointing, as she had enjoyed working with Vice Chair Herman during the County Manager (CM) recruitment process.

Commissioner Clark apologized for the meet-and-greet event that occurred the previous evening in Spanish Springs. He did not recall any City of Reno or County elected officials present. He noted that only one City of Sparks elected official attended, and with over 3,000 County employees, he believed there were only a few who participated in the event. He speculated that the CM position was powerful because it controlled numerous departments and had a significant impact on the community. He announced that he would ask each candidate if they had read the Raftelis report. He thought that the County was in a much better place than it was in June. He referred to Ms. Trista Gomez's comments and indicated that former CM Eric Brown was responsible for the previous dysfunction, and those working under him were not in charge. He opined that since Ms. Kate Thomas was appointed interim County Manager (ICM), there was more acceptance and communication. Chair Hill reported that the Communications department conducted a

significant outreach effort to all community leaders to ensure they were invited. She thanked Commissioner Clark for his feedback.

**25-0765**      **AGENDA ITEM 5**   Discussion and possible action to consider the following top candidates: James Doar; Laura Freed; Tyler Stone; and Kate Thomas for the vacant Washoe County Manager position pursuant to NRS 244.125 to NRS 244.135 inclusive, including interviewing the top candidates, selection of the County Manager and possible direction to staff regarding the negotiation of an employment contract. Human Resources. (All Commission Districts.)

Chair Hill advised that Director of Human Resources (HR) Patricia Hurley and her team were instrumental in the new County Manager (CM) recruitment efforts. She invited Ms. Hurley to speak about the process. Ms. Hurley introduced HR Manager Julie Paholke and CPSC HR Consulting (CPSC) Executive Recruiter Pamela Derby. Ms. Paholke recounted that on June 17, 2025, HR presented the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) with a proposal for a CM recruitment plan. The proposal outlined that HR would work with the BCC Chair and Vice Chair to create and distribute Requests for Proposals (RFPs). She reported that three RFPs were received and reviewed to identify agencies to interview. She shared that one of the agencies they interviewed was CPSC, which was selected to run the recruitment. She commented that the process was thorough and Nationwide, and the County had worked with CPSC for many years and was confident in the selection. She invited Ms. Derby to talk about her process once recruitment began.

Ms. Derby described that from the time that she started communicating with the County HR Department, and it was decided that CPSC would take on the recruitment process, CPSC spoke individually with each Commissioner to get their input about what they wanted to see in the next CM. She added that CPSC held conversations with people across the organization to gather their perspectives. She reported that information was included in the brochure marketing the recruitment, which was disseminated to over 10,000 individuals Nationwide. She also informed that significant outreach to individuals was conducted. She established that the opening was advertised with the International City and County Management Association (ICMA), the National Association of Counties (NACo), and other advertising channels. Additionally, CPSC staff called people who fit the profile developed by the Commissioners. She communicated that CPSC reached out individually to people who had experience with different types of organizations, including the federal government and city governments. She reported that they advertised the opening for four weeks and received over 100 applications, out of which she interviewed approximately 15 candidates. She described how those candidates were vetted thoroughly, and she spoke to each of them for over an hour about matters of concern to the County to gather their perspectives. She advised that CPSC also conducted significant social media and traditional media searches on the candidates to find anything that could be concerning. She worked with Chair Hill and Vice Chair Herman to narrow the candidate pool down to the top five. Ms. Derby noted that one candidate had to withdraw due to a family medical emergency, and two people being interviewed that day were currently county administrators in other jurisdictions.

Chair Hill praised the work done by the recruitment team. She remarked that she and Vice Chair Herman appreciated the thorough vetting CPSC did of the candidates and valued their help with narrowing the candidates down to the top five. She said all four candidates who were able to get to the final interview were excellent, and she was proud that they wanted to work for the County.

Ms. Paholke stated that the candidates were given 15 minutes to review the interview questions before they came in.

Chair Hill asked if the first candidate, Mr. Doar, should be called in. Ms. Paholke advised that he was ready.

Chair Hill asked if any Board members had questions.

Commissioner Andriola thought it would be helpful for transparency if everybody understood the ranking process the Commissioners would use to evaluate the candidates. She wondered if it was appropriate for Ms. Hurley or Chief Deputy District Attorney (CDDA) Michael Large to share information about how the ranking worked. CDDA Large advised that it was not appropriate to publicly display the forced rankings after each interview, but he recommended that each Commissioner utilize the forced ranking sheet that was provided to them and rank each candidate. He established that the County used a defensible hiring process and would pose the same questions to each candidate. He outlined that Commissioners would determine individual rankings, after which the top candidates would be identified using a similar process as appointments.

Commissioner Andriola thanked CDDA Large for the clarification. She theorized that not everyone was aware of the forced ranking process, and she thought it was important for Commissioners to be transparent and for the public to understand the legal parameters of the interviews and candidate selection. She asked CDDA Large to describe the forced ranking process so everyone could understand it.

CDDA Large explained that in the forced ranking system, the first candidate was ranked number one by default. After the second interview, each Commissioner would rank that candidate in comparison to the previous person. The third candidate would be ranked against the first two, and the final one would be ranked against the prior three.

Commissioner Andriola thanked CDDA Large for providing clarity.

Chair Hill welcomed Mr. Doar and expressed her excitement about having him there.

Mr. Doar thanked the Commissioners. He said it was a pleasure to be there and he appreciated the opportunity and the Commissioners' time.

Chair Hill told Mr. Doar that the first five minutes of his interview were an opportunity for him to introduce himself to the BCC.

Mr. Doar stated that he was currently the County Administrator in Gallatin County, Montana. He advised that the county seat of Gallatin County was Bozeman. He reported that he had been in that role for 11 years and led a staff of about 600 employees, with a budget of approximately \$170 million. He determined that Gallatin County faced many of the same challenges and issues that Washoe County did. He cited examples of growth and the need to work collaboratively and regionally with partners, including the state, cities, and local nonprofits, to try to best deliver services to taxpayers who expected value for their money. He disclosed that he had a Bachelor of Political Science and Economics degree from the University of Florida and a Master of Public Administration from Florida State University. He noted that he served with the 82nd Airborne Division immediately after he left high school.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *As County Manager, you serve at the pleasure of the Board. What is your philosophy for maintaining a productive and transparent relationship with five elected Commissioners who may hold diverse policy views? How do you balance being responsive to individual Commissioners while remaining faithful to the collective direction of the Board?*

Mr. Doar responded that his philosophy was that county commissioners should never be surprised by anything. He explained that he tried to overcommunicate when he could and tended to be direct. He mentioned that tendency was not well-received by all people, but it was his approach, nevertheless. He believed that productive and transparent relationships were best developed and maintained with communication. He felt individual meetings were the optimal way to understand the perspective of each commissioner and determine how to consider that point of view when making decisions. He aimed to be responsive by always answering questions and providing information. He summarized that elected county commissioners made decisions, not bureaucrats. He viewed his role, along with other staff, as an efficient, effective, transparent executor of decisions made by commissioners.

Commissioner Clark asked Mr. Doar if he was able to read the Raftelis report about the County. He said the question was important to him because of what out-of-town experts quickly identified as the real problems within the County. He specified that the report highlighted a lack of communication with certain Commissioners. He commented that the former CM sometimes acted as though he was running the County, which he believed was a different approach to the role than Mr. Doar took. He recalled challenging the former CM on that and reminding him that he was not an elected official. Commissioner Clark asked Mr. Doar to speak about his reaction to the Raftelis report and what he discerned about the past four or five years.

Mr. Doar responded that Ms. Derby pointed him towards the Raftelis report, and he read it. He affirmed that he approached things differently. He said that he had three county commissioners in Montana and did not consider himself to be the fourth commissioner. He thought county commissioners made decisions, and the county administrator operated in a separate role. He noted that commissioners in Gallatin County were full-time and had offices in the building. He disclosed that sometimes it created a

challenge with providing proper notice of public meetings and not making decisions outside of that venue. He conveyed that they were working to reinforce that standard and had been successful. He restated that he did not think of himself as the fourth commissioner in Gallatin County and would not be the sixth commissioner in Washoe County.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County is a large, service-driven organization that values innovation, integrity, and collaboration. What steps would you take in your first year to assess organizational culture and employee morale? How would you build a high-performing, accountable, and motivated workforce across multiple departments?*

Mr. Doar outlined that a step he would take in the first year to assess the culture and employee morale would be to visit where everybody worked. He supposed that it would not be possible to meet all of the more than 3,000 County employees, but he thought there was value in being visible, listening, and having an open mind to what employees were saying. He referred to his direct communication style and said he liked to communicate with employees that way. He stated that employees sometimes wanted things that could not be given, and he determined that employees needed to hear that communicated clearly. He believed that it was more kind to be clear. He theorized that clarity often helped to build morale, and he warned that nothing killed the motivation of a good employee faster than watching a supervisor tolerate a bad employee. He revealed that he could be decisive when it was time to make changes like that, which he reasoned was beneficial in the long term.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved question: *Establishing long-term objectives is key to strategic planning; however, when you are taking on a new role, short-term objectives can be equally as important. If you are selected as County Manager, please describe your plans and key objectives for the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job.*

Mr. Doar responded that it was a difficult question to answer, but he appreciated it. He thought the difficult part was the key objectives, because he believed it was the role of the BCC to determine key objectives. He suggested an assessment of staff and work plans be conducted after 30 days, then, starting after 60 days, staff and plans could be monitored and adjusted as needed. He advocated for a report to be provided to the BCC at 90 days to define what staff tried to do, what they could not do, and areas where more resources were needed. He reasoned that with good information, Commissioners could decide what the key objectives and priorities were, after which staff could execute those priorities and objectives.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County's success depends on regional collaboration with Reno, Sparks, state agencies, and neighboring jurisdictions. Describe your experience fostering intergovernmental partnerships to advance regional priorities such as housing, homelessness, or infrastructure. What barriers did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?*

Mr. Doar said he had a history of success in fostering inter-governmental partnerships. He described that Gallatin County made significant progress in addressing mental health gaps in the area and created a regional housing coalition. He communicated that they established partnerships with the State of Montana, Bozeman Health, and the Cities of Bozeman and Belgrade. He disclosed that the partnerships came in waves and there were times when the county commissioners and the city commissioners of Bozeman did not get along and could not agree on anything. He commended the efforts of people he worked with, including the Deputy County Administrator, the City Manager, and the Assistant City Manager, who developed the partnerships on a staff level through a series of informal meetings. He said they clarified roles and alerted one another to potential issues through upfront and honest discourse. He thought that the good working relationships they built set the tone for additional partnerships with other agencies to deliver services. He summarized that the barriers were always funding and politics, and he viewed mental health as a particularly good example in that regard. He shared that the coalition established a mobile crisis team of professionals who would respond to 911 calls if somebody was in a mental health crisis. He said law enforcement was not always the appropriate response, especially for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. He recounted that there was disagreement among local agencies about where the psychiatric emergency services (PES) unit should be housed, and the fire department and sheriff's office were both contenders. He stated that politics were initially a barrier, but were resolved. He divulged that there were times when multiple agencies wanted to control mental health services and other times when nobody wanted to. He revealed that Bozeman Health stepped forward to run the PES, bolstered by funding arrangements with all of the partners. He predicted that the initiative would be successful long-term.

Chair Hill advised that the next question would have been asked by Vice Chair Herman, but in her absence, she asked Commissioner Andriola to pose the following questions: *Transparency and community confidence are foundational to effective local government. How have you effectively engaged the public in complex or potentially controversial decisions? What techniques do you use to communicate policy issues in ways that build understanding and trust?*

Mr. Doar outlined his belief that directness and transparency in the early stages of communication set the correct tone. He thought that explanations provided later in the process were not as effective. He acknowledged that issues could be complex and controversial. He commented that if an organization made a decision but did not invest sufficient work in the planning stages, citizens were likely to be frustrated. He determined that advance planning and work to build a consensus and explain the issues ahead of time mitigated some distrust. He queried whether that answered Commissioner Andriola's question, and she said it did, but she wondered if Chair Hill would permit her to ask a follow-up inquiry. Chair Hill said yes, and Commissioner Andriola asked Mr. Doar how he would communicate policy issues in ways that built understanding and trust. She commended his approach to proactive communication and asked him to provide examples of how he would do that. She observed that misinformation was sometimes a challenge, and perceptions of facts could vary.

Mr. Doar thanked Commissioner Andriola for her additional question. He described that after the COVID-19 (C19) pandemic, the legislature in Montana made some significant changes that affected local health officers and boards of health. He reported that the decision of the legislature was contentious, especially locally, because of the resultant dramatic changes to the operations of the health department and board of health. He summarized that the changes restricted how local governments could operate, without providing specific guidance. He opined that the new law was not written particularly well. He elaborated that the law required boards of health to be comprised of certain elected officials, but the details of the requirement were not sufficiently clear to jurisdictions. He said it was contentious and there were strong feelings on all sides, including the county commission and the City of Bozeman. He added that the City of Belgrade was not a part of the board of health but had reached a population limit where they needed to have a health department, which would necessitate an interlocal agreement with Gallatin County. He indicated that multiple agencies thought they should oversee the board of health, and a contingent of citizens did not want a board of health at all, based on how things were handled during C19. He explained that, to respond to the discord, county staff set up meetings with the editorial board of the paper. The Gallatin County communications coordinator created short video segments for each county commissioner to distribute on social media. He added that many town-hall style meetings and public engagement efforts were planned to inform area residents of how the new system differed from the old system, how it would meet the new legal requirements, and to answer questions. He concluded that not everybody was happy at the time, but they got to the end of it, and he thought time showed that the approach worked out well.

Commissioner Clark provided Mr. Doar with some information. He revealed that Washoe County, according to the Assessor, currently had more assessed value than it did at any other time in the history of the County, going back to 1861. He added that excellent returns were being seen on investments made by the Treasurer, and the County was making more money now than ever before. He mentioned that Washoe County also had some of the highest gasoline taxes in the State and the highest sales taxes; however, the County was insolvent. He asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan emphasizes fiscal sustainability and transparency. Provide an example of how you've navigated a challenging budget cycle or economic downturn. What specific tools or approaches did you use to preserve core services and public trust while maintaining long-term fiscal health?* Commissioner Clark added that the County had a budget of over \$1 billion, and he remarked that he gave Mr. Doar some background on what was really taking place.

Mr. Doar stated his appreciation for the question. He commented that he had never been through an unchallenging budget cycle. He recalled being a City Manager in Maine during the Great Recession. He observed that the economic downturn at that time was widespread rather than local or regional. He theorized that landscape made the hard decisions easier to navigate because everybody expected budget restrictions and could not point to nearby jurisdictions that appeared to be faring better. He advocated prioritizing communication and core services and restated his view of the role of commissioners as decision-makers and staff as the executors of those decisions. He acknowledged that county

commissioners sometimes disagreed on the definition of a core service, which he believed went to the heart of local government and the perspectives each Commissioner held about what role government should play in the everyday lives of residents. He admitted that it was difficult to present budgets at times because there was a lot of nuance that could be difficult to convey amidst large numbers. He summarized that he aimed to provide an amount of detail that was neither overwhelming nor insufficient. He reiterated that he was prone to providing more information than necessary, but he viewed that as a key component of transparency. He preferred to present budget information to county commissioners in ways that helped them make decisions in terms of programmatic areas rather than in terms of particular line items.

Commissioner Clark remarked that he was not trying to pose a trick question, but he pointed out the use of the word *downturn* and recalled having just provided four examples of how the County had more money than ever, which he did not view as an economic downturn. He surmised that indicated other problems, and usually meant more money was being spent than taken in. He supposed that part of the problem in the County was that over 90 percent of the budget of some departments was devoted to payroll.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County Manager plays an essential role in uniting diverse departments and providing strategic counsel to elected officials. Describe your approach to building strong, trust-based relationships with department heads and elected officials. Can you share an example of how you've successfully aligned differing priorities to achieve a common goal?*

Mr. Doar responded that his approach to building strong, trust-based relationships with department heads and elected officials was to develop friendships before they were needed during times of conflict. He outlined that he tried to meet people, understand where they were coming from, and be direct. He said that he appreciated the question about providing strategic counsel to elected officials and uniting diverse departments. He thought it was important for elected officials to understand that the county manager had to report to the county commission. He described that if the sheriff, for instance, was cross with the county commission, it did not change the existing reporting relationships, and he might be limited in what he could do to help the sheriff resolve their issue. He shared that he had taken that approach, and it worked well because it set expectations early. He supposed that some of the elected officials in Gallatin County did not like him very much, which he said was okay because he believed that most or all of them respected him. He recounted an example of successfully aligning different priorities between a new Gallatin County attorney and the Gallatin County Sheriff. He described that the new attorney was a Democrat, the sheriff was a Republican, and they did not agree on much regarding criminal justice. He identified that, despite their differing priorities, they had a common issue of insufficient staffing. He felt that aligning them was challenging when they were invested in their areas of difference, but possible when he helped them recognize their common goals of needing more staff and higher wages.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan identifies Vulnerable Populations as a key focus area. What is your*

*philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents? Share an example where you helped integrate services across departments or jurisdictions to deliver more equitable outcomes.*

Mr. Doar responded that outlining his philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents was difficult. He thought the government had an obligation to provide for the neediest people. He spoke about his efforts to improve service integration in mental health and cited the PES mobile crisis unit as an example. He described that various departments across multiple jurisdictions had a role in mobile crisis, and it took a lot of time and effort to coordinate everybody and get them to a level of comfort where they could engage in honest conversations about what needed to be done. He shared that the end result was successful, although he noted the PES had only been in operation for three years. He added that he worked with the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch to purchase a piece of property that would be used for youth in a mental health crisis. He said youth mental health was formerly a large gap in Gallatin County, and there had not been much emphasis on helping youth who were struggling with mental health issues. He explained that, due to the large size of the State of Montana and the way the population was spread out in rural communities, youth were often separated from their families and support networks. He summarized that he and his staff found success by working across jurisdictions and getting partners in place that wanted to engage in problem-solving, after which they worked out the details of the roles best suited for each organization.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions, which she noted would have been asked by Vice Chair Herman if she were in attendance: *Integrity and openness are critical attributes for this role. Describe a time when you faced an ethical dilemma or public integrity issue as a senior executive. How did you handle the situation, and what did you learn about leading with transparency?*

Mr. Doar responded that he appreciated the question. He shared that, as he reviewed the questions given to him in advance, the question was the one he found most difficult to provide a good example for. He thought ethical dilemmas often happened when people were faced with positions, questions, or situations for which they knew the right answer but contemplated doing the wrong thing. He could not recall having encountered many of those situations in his career. He shared that a former county commissioner he knew, who he described as a phenomenal public servant and one of the more ethical men he had ever met, ran into some trouble with the Yellowstone Club, which he defined as a private, wealthy skiing enclave. Mr. Doar outlined that a member of the Yellowstone Club invited the commissioner to ski. The commissioner accepted the invitation and went skiing, but it was later revealed that the individual who issued the invitation had a land use application scheduled for consideration by the county commission. Mr. Doar described that the commissioner was unaware of the land use application at the time when he accepted the skiing invitation, but the interaction was painted in a very negative light, regardless. Mr. Doar conceded that it was easy to see why the situation was viewed critically from the outside, but he reiterated that the commissioner was one of the more ethical people he had ever known. Mr. Doar said it was difficult for him to stay quiet and neutral rather than

reaching out to the media to offer his opinion. He said he learned to lead with transparency, and although his directness was not always taken well, it was part of his identity.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Doar and noted that he had a few more minutes if he wanted to make any closing statements.

Mr. Doar responded that he did not have a closing statement, but he expressed his appreciation for the time of the BCC and said it was wonderful to meet them all. He knew it would not be easy for them to make a decision, and he said there were some great candidates that he had gotten to know. He commented that he did not think the Commissioners would be wrong in choosing any candidate, but he admitted to having a biased opinion of which decision he thought they should make.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Doar and said the BCC appreciated his coming and would communicate their decision to him shortly.

Chair Hill explained to Ms. Laura Freed that the interview would last approximately 45 minutes and would include nine questions. She indicated that Ms. Freed would have five minutes to introduce herself to the BCC. Ms. Freed stated that she had been a public servant throughout her career in Nevada. She mentioned that in 2003, she joined the Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB), Fiscal Analysis Division, where she reviewed various State budgets for presentation and approval by the legislative finance committees. She said that she was promoted internally and subsequently supervised a team of fiscal program analysts. She noted that at the LCB, she learned valuable lessons about public budgeting, which included reviewing painful budget reductions when revenues fell below projections. She said that she had been through eight State budget cycles, where budgets were more scarce than abundant. She added that she was familiar with the fiscal environment in which the County found itself, where revenues did not meet expenditures. She hoped to work with the County's talented fiscal and budget staff to present policy options to the BCC and ensure that essential services for Washoe County residents continued. She shared that in 2014, she moved to the Executive Branch of the State government and served at both the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Governor's Finance Office. She added that at the DHHS within the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH), she oversaw the State's public health regulatory efforts. She indicated that before recreational cannabis became legal, her department was responsible for implementing medical cannabis establishments. She said that experience helped her appreciate contentious policy issues with multiple stakeholders and gave her insight into the practice of public health, which she felt translated to working with Northern Nevada Public Health (NNPH). She noted that at the Governor's Finance Office, she analyzed various aspects of the State's budget, led teams of newer analysts, and approached the work from the perspective of those who built the budget, rather than just those who critiqued it. She stated that she gained expertise in building cost assessments, reviewing cost allocation plans, and working with executive departments both as an advocate and, at times, in an oversight role to implement the budget priorities of former Governors Brian Sandoval and Steve Sisolak.

She shared that in 2020, six weeks before the C19 pandemic, she was appointed Director of the Department of Administration (DOA), which had 550 full-time employees (FTEs) and an annual operating budget of \$367 million. She stated that she believed the reason she was hired was to implement collective bargaining for State workers, following its passage in the 2019 Legislature, a goal she ultimately accomplished. She indicated that her first year was primarily focused on pandemic response and adjusting to a new way of working. She explained that during those years, she learned a great deal about practical problem-solving, from small tasks such as rethinking how information technology (IT) bills were presented, to participating in collective bargaining sessions. She gained an understanding of labor relations and worked with others on the Public Employees Benefits Program (PEBP) board, where she served as the chair and helped select plan designs in a constrained fiscal environment. She added that although she loved the job, it was very stressful. She mentioned that in 2023, she joined the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) as the Director of Administrative Services. She stated that the RTC was very different from her roles at the State and was much smaller, with only about 70 people and less fiscal instability than the State or other local partners. She believed that the regional perspective that the RTC had applied to planning transportation improvements and services translated well to the CM position. She stated that at the RTC, she was responsible for HR, IT, communications, and public outreach. She noted that she led a culture study that focused on the RTC's leadership in 2023. She shared that in 2024, the RTC conducted a compensation and classification study, which was something that had not been done at the agency in over a decade. She felt that those two projects reinforced that open and frequent communication was non-negotiable for a healthy agency culture. She added that the RTC had worked conscientiously and had become a better agency as a result. She explained that she applied for the County Manager position because she believed the County had reached a crossroads but also had a valuable roadmap in the form of the Raftelis report, which she noted outlined the relationship between the BCC and the Office of the County Manager (OCM).

Commissioner Clark asked if Ms. Freed had read the Raftelis report and inquired about her thoughts on the key takeaways.

Ms. Freed responded that she had read portions of the Raftelis report and found it to be strikingly candid, and applauded the consultant, the BCC, and the staff for following the facts. She indicated that she had seen other cultural studies that downplayed the results because they might be perceived as offensive.

Commissioner Clark stated that he, too, had that same impression. He expressed his appreciation that the experts had been able to interview various individuals to gain an understanding of what had been occurring within Washoe County.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *As County Manager, you serve at the pleasure of the Board. What is your philosophy for maintaining a productive and transparent relationship with five elected Commissioners who may hold diverse policy views? How do you balance being responsive to individual Commissioners while remaining faithful to the collective direction of the Board?*

Ms. Freed explained that during the recent meet-and-greet, she emphasized that frequent and clear communication was a cornerstone of operational excellence. She noted examples of continuous communication to stay connected with elected officials who were extremely busy. She said that she was accustomed to working with a wide range of policy perspectives from her time at the LCB. She indicated that the LCB consisted of nonpartisan central staff who were not paid for their political opinions but instead were required to ground their advice in law, regulation, and policy. She mentioned that she adhered to the principles of the articles of faith and believed that government services should be of the same quality regardless of political affiliation. She thought that the Raftelis report provided a framework for categorizing and prioritizing Commissioner business requests. She mentioned a conversation she had with Commissioner Clark at the meet-and-greet regarding how Commissioner requests would be prioritized by the CM. She explained she had posed a hypothetical question to Commissioner Clark about how he would react if his request was one of many other requests and would not be acted on immediately. She suggested that Commissioner Clark understood that his request would need to wait. She hoped that the BCC would meet the CM halfway in managing those requests. She indicated that the Raftelis report included developing a ranking system, which she felt was essential because staff time was just as valuable as a Commissioner's time. She explained the importance of keeping all lines of communication open to stay updated on incoming requests and ensure that everyone worked together efficiently.

Commissioner Clark thanked Ms. Freed for her answer and for sharing their conversation. He stated that if everyone were treated fairly and equally, he would wait his turn. He added that, over the past two years and 11 months, and despite making approximately 60 requests for items to be added to an agenda, he had been able to get only one or two items added. He said that he was hesitant to answer hypothetical questions, but since she brought the issue up twice, he wanted to ensure that their conversations were on the record. He stated that the Raftelis report clearly outlined that not all staff were treated equally when making requests.

Commissioner Clark commented that the Washoe County Assessor's Office had more assessed property value than at any time since 1861, and that the total continued to increase each year. He mentioned that the Washoe County Treasurer had done an excellent job making many investments that produced substantial dividends and generated significant income. He added that Washoe County had some of the highest sales tax rates in the State as well as some of the highest gas taxes in the Nation.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan emphasizes fiscal sustainability and transparency. Provide an example of how you've navigated a challenging budget cycle or economic downturn. What specific tools or approaches did you use to preserve core services and public trust while maintaining long-term fiscal health?*

Ms. Freed stated that she was familiar with budget cycles that lacked funding. She noted that, as mentioned in her opening remarks, during her time at the LCB and the Governor's Finance Office, there were more sessions without available money than

with it. She felt that public entities shared similar challenges when working with budgets and public service. She explained that she dealt with a similar issue while serving on the PEBP board, where projected excess reserves were used. She explained that actuarially determined reserves should not be used unless needed for rate stabilization. She indicated that excess reserves represented excess cash, which was used to forestall benefit cuts. She shared an example from the 2011 session when the PEBP had to transition from a preferred provider organization (PPO) plan to a high-deductible health plan. She stated that basic operating budgets focused on eliminating the easiest programs first. She believed that there was a responsibility to educate the community about the trade-offs and explain why some services might be lost. She said that there should also be discussions regarding available revenue sources and what was politically feasible. She mentioned that, in her 20 years of experience in Nevada's government, conversations about revenue were generally unpopular. She indicated that she had extensive experience making budget cuts.

Commissioner Clark explained that the question was not intended to be a trick. He commented that Washoe County's financial situation was the opposite of the fiscal cycles in which the State lacked incoming funding. He shared that his prior financial background included lending billions of dollars and serving as a former Assessor. He noted that when an organization had more income than ever before and was not financially stable, there were issues that needed to be fixed. He indicated that he would continue to ask questions until the problem was corrected.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County is a large, service-driven organization that values innovation, integrity, and collaboration. What steps would you take in your first year to assess organizational culture and employee morale? How would you build a high-performing, accountable, and motivated workforce across multiple departments?*

**10:19 a.m. Commissioner Clark left the meeting**

Ms. Freed shared that research on executive effectiveness in the private sector indicated that it took approximately 60 days for a new leader to begin adding value. She felt that similar research for the public sector was not as clear, and conducting an analysis would be beneficial. She mentioned that she was familiar with the STAR model, which she said stood for *startup, turnaround, realignment, and sustaining success*. She believed that the first 60 to 90 days in a job should be used to evaluate the type of organization the position would involve. She explained that the County was a stable organization, but if there was turnover, it could be due to a setback and might require a reset. She mentioned that realignment occurred when an agency's business processes did not align with its policy goals, and sustaining success meant maintaining that success. She felt it was essential to understand the types of systems being used, the organization's structure, and its plans. She believed that meant talking to employees to learn what they liked and disliked, which she had done in her previous positions. She noted that she did not have the opportunity to get to know all 550 people in the DOA, but she was familiar with a large portion of them. She believed it was powerful to ask employees about their jobs and find out what they cared about, and it was the first step in building a high-performing

organization. She added that building trust as a leader meant letting employees know that management cared about what happened to them within the organization. She stated that she cared about the policy priorities of the BCC just as much as she cared about the 3,100 people who worked for the County.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *Establishing long-term objectives is key to strategic planning; however, when you are taking on a new role, short-term objectives can be equally as important. If you are selected as County Manager, please describe your plans and key objectives for the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job.*

Ms. Freed continued from a prior comment, which noted that the first 30 days should be spent listening. She thought it would be essential to meet with each Commissioner, the CM staff, and department heads. She believed that working in the field to gain a sense of culture was important. She noted that within the first 60 days, she should become familiar with the Strategic Plan and its priorities. She reviewed a previous meeting regarding updates on progress and noted that she would need time to fully understand the Strategic Plan and each County department's key performance indicators (KPIs). She stated that by the 90-day mark, and guided by the Raftelis report, that plans for the strategic planning process should be implemented. She indicated that one of the recommendations in the Raftelis report was to conduct a multi-year strategic planning process. She suggested that staff needed to start identifying consultants who could assist the BCC and the Office of the County Manager (OCM) in implementing a robust, multi-year strategic planning process.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County's success depends on regional collaboration with Reno, Sparks, state agencies, and neighboring jurisdictions. Describe your experience fostering intergovernmental partnerships to advance regional priorities such as housing, homelessness, or infrastructure. What barriers did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?*

Ms. Freed shared that the RTC worked collaboratively in the planning process with all the local governments, as well as the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT). She hoped that her colleagues at the RTC had made the cities and the County feel like they had a voice in the region's transportation future. She explained an example from her time as Director of the DPA where she recalled that the airport authority had been expanding its property using federal funds. She noted that the State rented a portion of the property from the airport authority for its Reno fleet services operation. She explained that the public works staff and the fleet manager came to her upset after the airport authority told them that they would need to relocate their office within 30 days. She said that she worked with the head of the airport authority to understand what information had been shared and negotiated an arrangement that could prolong the move. She indicated that the quick move would have created difficulty in finding a suitable commercial property for the fleet. She felt that the barriers were reasonably easy to resolve by having a conversation and clarifying the facts. She added that many misunderstandings could be resolved by having a discussion.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Transparency and community confidence are foundational to effective local government. How have you effectively engaged the public in complex or potentially controversial decisions? What techniques do you use to communicate policy issues in ways that build understanding and trust?*

Ms. Freed explained that communications and outreach for the RTC was a strategic goal for the fiscal year (FY), which focused on telling the story of community benefit. She agreed with Commissioner Clark's earlier comment that there was a dedicated gas tax and that people wanted to know how they would benefit from those funds. She said that the Executive Director of the RTC spoke to community groups, the downtown business partnership, the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN), the Chamber of Commerce, and the realtors' association about the planning that the RTC was engaged in, and what the fuel tax dollars provide the public versus what sales tax dollars provide in the transit realm. She noted that the RTC had tried to maintain a more active social media presence and hoped they had been successful. She credited the communications staff and added that small pop-up events seemed to work better than formal project meetings. She stated that presentations were given to the Truckee Meadows Bicycle Alliance, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), and the Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) to promote free bus rides for students of all ages. She emphasized the importance of speaking in terms that were easily understood, which she believed helped build understanding and trust.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County Manager plays an essential role in uniting diverse departments and providing strategic counsel to elected officials. Describe your approach to building strong, trust-based relationships with department heads and elected officials. Can you share an example of how you've successfully aligned differing priorities to achieve a common goal?*

Ms. Freed shared an example that involved the State's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project. She explained that during the Sandoval administration, the State began a long-overdue effort to revamp its ERP project. She mentioned that the project at that time was known as SMART 21, and said the State retained an integrator and selected the software. She explained that the governance structure included a steering committee comprised of representatives from various departments, as well as an executive sponsorship committee. She added that the executive sponsors included the Director of the Governor's Finance Office, the State Controller, and the Director of Administration. She noted that by the time she was appointed Administration Director, the project had been underway for several years. She stated that the integration and building modules were well underway when things began to go wrong, as often happened with enterprise-level IT projects. She indicated that various departments, which included constitutional agencies, had conducted testing and were dissatisfied with the results, which impacted deadlines. She stated that the executive committee felt they had been misled. She shared that the director of the Governor's Finance Office likely wanted to continue that same path, while Ms. Freed and the controller did not. She said that she sent a weekly email to the Governor's Office liaison about the emergent issue but felt no one had paid attention. She mentioned that

millions of dollars had been invested in the project. She added that the contract with the integrator was ultimately canceled, which led to numerous recriminations and unhappy people because they had to revert to the old system, which required significant work and was unstable. She stated that the next governor scrapped the project entirely and chose a different ERP, which she felt was the right choice. She thought that what was learned was that in large-scale IT, organizational change management could not be a check-the-box exercise and should be an integral part of the process. She stated that if agencies were involved in integration, there had to be staff to backfill positions. She noted the State lacked that. She felt that Governor Joe Lombardo had addressed those issues. She believed that strong communication and support at the highest levels, along with executive buy-in, were essential to achieving success.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan identifies Vulnerable Populations as a key focus area. What is your philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents? Share an example where you helped integrate services across departments or jurisdictions to deliver more equitable outcomes.*

Ms. Freed believed that, as a region, everyone needed to work together to support vulnerable populations. She shared that she had more expertise in budgets than in human services, although she had experience working with human services at the LCB. She mentioned a program called Early Intervention Services (EIS), which was part of human services. She explained that during a budget cycle, a decision was made to privatize services rather than rely on State EIS clinics. She noted that children with developmental delays could receive services from a private provider. She indicated that the submitted budget calculated an overall cost per child without accounting for the overhead of the State EIS clinics. She said that the budget had been calculated by multiplying the per-child cost by the number of children expected to participate in EIS. She stated that the previous approach would not work and added that while a private provider rate could be paid, a different rate would need to be paid to State EIS clinics to serve all the children. She explained that approximately \$2 million had to be added back to the EIS budget to meet the per-child cost. She acknowledged the importance of funding supportive services.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *Integrity and openness are critical attributes for this role. Describe a time when you faced an ethical dilemma or public integrity issue as a senior executive. How did you handle the situation, and what did you learn about leading with transparency?*

Ms. Freed mentioned that in late 2024 or early 2025, a ProPublica article was published about NZero, which tracked carbon emissions for various agencies. She indicated that the State was one of NZero's clients. She explained that there was a grant from the State Energy Office to track carbon emissions in State-owned buildings, advancing the former Governor's climate goals. She noted that the pilot project did not yield useful information, and the article described how the Energy Office staff felt about the program. She mentioned that the program had been a significant priority of the former Governor, and he wanted to provide additional funding to expand carbon monitoring. She

said that there had been some contact between the former Governor, his staff, and NZero that might have compromised the competitive bid process under the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 333. She stated that, with her approval, her staff sent an email to the Governor's Office stating that discussions should not occur outside of a procurement process because it could jeopardize the bid. She noted that the Governor's staff was not happy to receive that email, but she stood by her message. She acknowledged the efforts of the former Deputy Director of Administration for helping to create a list of what would contribute to the former Governor's climate goals. She suggested that those initiatives did not necessarily require a competitive bid but reiterated that she stood her ground to ensure compliance with State law.

Chair Hill offered Ms. Freed the opportunity to provide any closing words. Ms. Freed thanked the Board for the opportunity and added that she was honored to be among the final candidates.

**10:40 a.m.**     **The Board recessed.**

**10:52 a.m.**     **The Board reconvened, with Commissioner Clark absent.**

Chair Hill stated that the BCC would hear from the third candidate, Mr. Tyler Stone. She noted that his interview would last 45 minutes, which would include nine questions. She explained that the Board would like Mr. Stone to take the first five minutes of his interview to introduce himself to the BCC.

Mr. Stone thanked the Board and the other elected officials in attendance. He introduced himself as the current Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Wasco County, located in north-central Oregon. He reported that he had been in that position for nearly 20 years, which he had never expected, though he considered Wasco County a great place to work. He recalled having shared the previous night that he moved from the Seattle, Washington, area to accept his current position and raise his family on a wheat and cattle ranch, which he described as a wonderful opportunity. He noted that he and his family had been a part of their local community throughout those 20 years.

Mr. Stone reported that he held two undergraduate degrees, one in science and another in business, as well as a master's degree in public administration. He explained that he had spent approximately ten years at the beginning of his career in HR roles in several different organizations, including a large corporate retail company and a landscape nursery product corporation that serviced the campuses of Microsoft and Boeing. He recalled transitioning to the medical field following those positions. He noted that he had worked for two multi-specialty medical clinics. He explained that his last position was in Seattle, where he followed a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to focus on organizational development work and practice management. He noted that he had managed an oncology practice and infusion center for a large multi-specialty medical clinic called Minor and James Medical. He elaborated that he had served as a Baldrige National Quality Award examiner during his tenure at Minor and James Medical, which involved reviewing organizations against the national quality criteria framework and observing several high-

performing organizations across various sectors. He noted that there were differing processes in the private and public sectors.

Mr. Stone recalled that he then accepted his position at Wasco County when he and his wife had decided to move back to a rural community to raise their children on a farm. He opined that Wasco County was in a transitional period when he began his position, as there was a shift in Wasco County's governance format from one overseen by a judge to one based on commissioners. He reported that he had been hired as the Director of Administrative Services with the intention of transferring into the CAO position once the leadership transitions were completed. He explained that Wasco County was experiencing a budget deficit when he began his position, leading to very emotional meetings. He stated that the staff successfully navigated those issues after working on process improvements associated with potential approaches and guidance on the financial challenges. He reported that the staff reduced Wasco County's \$2 million budget deficit, enabling the organization to pay down its Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) liability by approximately \$12 million and build reserves for challenging cyclical times. He opined that one of the most important factors he associated with that success was a positive organizational culture, as maintaining a good standing in that regard meant having high-performing individuals in effective teams. He reported that the organizational culture of Wasco County was recognized by the National Association of Counties (NACo) in its leadership training documents. He believed that Wasco County was likely one of the best-performing rural governments in Oregon, noting that the organization's leadership team was very active at the state and national levels. He thought people wanted to hear the expertise of Wasco County staff.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Stone and asked the following pre-approved question: *As County Manager, you serve at the pleasure of the Board. What is your philosophy for maintaining a productive and transparent relationship with five elected Commissioners who may hold diverse policy views? How do you balance being responsive to individual Commissioners while remaining faithful to the collective direction of the Board?*

Chair Hill additionally asked if Mr. Stone could briefly discuss the Raftelis report when responding to her previous questions, as that would be helpful for the Board.

Mr. Stone opined that any relationship with a board was primarily about communication and the ability to work through an organization's challenges, problems, and successes. He explained that even if everyone within the Board had differing views, their problems were essentially the same. He emphasized the importance of coming together to work through issues and accepting diverse perspectives to reach consensus on many of the problems they faced. He viewed the role of CM as providing the necessary information so that the Board could understand the intricacies of the policies being developed, as it would be difficult for them to reach agreements without those details. He explained that those efforts would require regularly scheduled meetings with each Commissioner individually to encourage them to speak with the leadership of different departments. He acknowledged that many CMs did not like such discussions to be held,

but he stressed that the department heads were the organization's experts and should be the ones providing the BCC with firsthand information. He appreciated the opportunity for such direct engagement to examine issues thoroughly. He noted that after the data was gathered from the department heads, his job would be to support any decisions made by the Board and to continue efforts towards implementation, without his personal opinion influencing the process.

Mr. Stone referred to the Raftelis report and acknowledged that a substantial amount of work remained to be done on the matter. He encouraged that time be dedicated to processing the information in the report before communicating the details to individual departments across the organization so that conversations could begin about the implications in each area. He likened the County's operations to managing 17 to 30 unique and independent businesses within one facility, noting that what might be appropriate for one department might not be suitable for another. He stressed the necessity of discussing the report's findings and determining the next steps for the County. He pointed out that the Raftelis report included substantial content about the BCC itself, emphasizing that the findings were not just about the departments managed by the Board but also the Commissioners themselves.

**11:02 a.m. Commissioner Clark returned to the meeting.**

Commissioner Andriola stated that it was nice to meet Mr. Stone the night prior. She asked the following pre-approved question: *Washoe County is a large, service-driven organization that values innovation, integrity, and collaboration. What steps would you take in your first year to assess organizational culture and employee morale? How would you build a high-performing, accountable, and motivated workforce across multiple departments?*

Mr. Stone explained that when starting in a new position, people typically entered the workplace without prior knowledge, which he thought made it even more important to take the time to understand the different departments and their unique challenges. He envisioned holding full meetings with department heads within the short one-year time period Commissioner Andriola mentioned. He noted that he would want to understand the opinions of the Board to determine if their thoughts aligned with what was communicated by the departmental leadership. He described his intention to utilize several available tools, such as employee surveys and training, to support the departments with their unique needs. He referred to the second part of the question related to how he would build a high-performing, accountable, and motivated workforce across multiple departments. He recalled having spent substantial time in his current role developing the organization's culture. He reported that each year, staff at Wasco County took three days to visit a location with no cellular service to dedicate time towards getting to know one another personally. He noted that time was also given to implementing the proven tools available to them. He thought he had mentioned the night prior that Wasco County had gone through a process where they applied the principles outlined in the book titled *Good to Great* by James C. Collins. He explained that the staff had discussed the meaning of specific concepts introduced in the book, which prompted questions about what it meant

to hire the right employees and create momentum for change and cultural movement. He noted that *Good to Great* detailed practices associated with management. He reported that Wasco County staff had also reviewed the teachings of the book *The Art of Possibility* by Benjamin Zander and Rosamund Stone Zander within the context of their organization. He explained that they reviewed the book to envision what the organization might look like at different points in the future. He noted that the book began in a classroom setting and asked the reader to consider what would need to happen for their organization to receive an A grade at the end of the school year. He explained that people could then write down their ideas to provide suggestions and ideas that would help the organization progress forward.

Mr. Stone opined that the last consideration for every organization was how it could develop its strategic plan. He mentioned that the one thing he had not seen while reviewing the County's Strategic Plan was what measures were in place to evaluate the progress being made. He described the Strategic Plan as very ambitious and questioned whether all of the listed goals could be achieved within the year, or whether it might take two or five years. He emphasized the importance of measuring the County's successes within those timeframes and identifying areas that required effort to achieve improvements.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Stone and asked the following pre-approved question: *Establishing long-term objectives is key to strategic planning; however, when you are taking on a new role, short-term objectives can be equally as important. If you are selected as County Manager, please describe your plans and key objectives for the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job.*

Mr. Stone referred to his previous comments and explained that it was necessary to spend time getting to know the County, staff across different departments, various stakeholders, organizations that provided co-production services, State and municipal agencies, and the regional entities formed by the County to offer such services. He emphasized the need for individuals to thoroughly understand everything available to them. He explained that he had listened to a substantial number of BCC meetings and news reports on the County. He stated that one of his immediate actions as CM would be to work directly with the finance department in an attempt to understand the current budget deficit and identify ways to address any gaps within the budget, as he believed the matter was time sensitive. He explained that if what he had seen about the budget was true, the County's budget deficit would no longer be manageable after five years due to its substantial size. He noted the need to identify how to address the deficit both currently and within the next 12 months to change the trend. He opined that the values for revenue and expenses should remain balanced, not overlapping or outweighing one another. He stressed that action needed to be taken in that regard within the following one or two years in order to find a solution that would help the County recover from the deficit, as he believed that the issue would compound over time. He thought that nobody could afford for the situation to continue worsening.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved question: *Washoe County's success depends on regional collaboration with Reno, Sparks, state agencies, and neighboring jurisdictions. Describe your experience fostering intergovernmental*

*partnerships to advance regional priorities such as housing, homelessness, or infrastructure. What barriers did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?*

Mr. Stone explained that Wasco County currently had many intergovernmental agreements and acknowledged that Washoe County might instead label those as interlocal agreements. He reported that Wasco County had previously overseen public health matters independently but had transitioned those services to a public health system managed by three counties. He stated that the intergovernmental agreement for public health comprised Wasco County and the counties located directly to the east and west of it. He explained that the public health system he had described was an independent entity with a governing board consisting of county commissioners and private individuals, which had since been responsible for providing public health services to those regions. He reported that the same process was done for behavioral health services in that region. He explained that the three counties stopped providing the services directly and transitioned them to a separate collective entity. He recalled having spent the previous year and a half facilitating collaboration between staff from those behavioral health services and Wasco County's leadership team to help the collective entity achieve financial solvency. He explained that Wasco County embedded its leadership team within that entity's personnel, as it had been facing substantial budget issues and a poor professional culture. He noted that those measures were taken to assist that entity with operating properly until it achieved organizational stability. He stated that the entity had since returned to standard operations and that the changes had been effective. He hoped the entity's funding would remain stable in the future.

Mr. Stone referred to the question regarding barriers to intergovernmental partnerships and remarked that funding was a constant impediment. He stated that an organization that had money at one point in time might not have it the next day. He noted that funding fluctuated, which explained the potential need for an organization to take initiative on a situational basis to provide support during those fluctuations or allow another entity to do so instead. He described that collaborative effort as a relationship and emphasized the importance of maintaining it. He stressed the importance of those relationships, as they offered an opportunity for support to be given during instances where an entity might otherwise not have the funds available independently to do what was necessary. He reiterated that overcoming those issues relied on having relationships that operated on the concept where one entity contributed in one area, while another provided support elsewhere.

Mr. Stone stated that Wasco County was currently conducting wildfire response recovery efforts. He reported that the second-worst wildland fire in Oregon's history occurred approximately four months prior, and Wasco County had lost 76 homes within its disadvantaged community. He explained that Wasco County had since initiated incident command efforts and outlined the related tasks for those matters. He disclosed that he was the incident command lead for that region. He stated that the community of Wasco County had come forward to support the organization's efforts by performing wildlife recovery services. He reported that he had the behavioral and public health entities, as well as individual service clubs, operating continually since the incident. He noted that Wasco

County sought expertise from the State of Oregon and the federal government to identify what would be needed to recover the damaged areas and homes, which he acknowledged was a slow process. He indicated that the events following the wildland fire had caused him to realize the extent of the challenges that could potentially arise. He noted that as a community service agency, Wasco County endeavored to deconstruct barriers, such as reducing permitting times.

Mr. Stone explained that a National Scenic Area surrounded Wasco County with its own set of governing regulations. He reported that Wasco County regularly collaborated with several indigenous tribes located in that region. He reiterated that Wasco County did a considerable amount of regional work for public and behavioral health services. He attributed the ability to provide those services regionally despite the rural location of the entities to the idea that no single organization could do everything alone. He emphasized the necessity of all agencies within the region collaborating to provide services.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Stone and noted that Commissioner Andriola would read Vice Chair Herman's interview question. Commissioner Andriola recited the following pre-approved question: *Transparency and community confidence are foundational to effective local government. How have you effectively engaged the public in complex or potentially controversial decisions? What techniques do you use to communicate policy issues in ways that build understanding and trust?*

Mr. Stone answered that Wasco County's public meetings assisted in that engagement, due to the nature of the organization being a governmental entity. He noted that Wasco County also used a variety of other tools, such as work sessions and stakeholder meetings, when more detailed information was needed. He explained that Wasco County's governing board tried to prioritize conducting at least one meeting each quarter in different communities. He elaborated that the governing board would travel an hour south to hold a joint meeting with the Antelope City Council in the evening, ensuring that board members could connect and communicate with rural residents in particular. He explained that the needs of residents in the southern end of Wasco County were drastically different from those in the northern portion. He stated that the governing board of Wasco County took the time to visit and meet with city councils and smaller, unincorporated areas rather than being unaware of their local issues.

Commissioner Clark remarked that it was nice to meet Mr. Stone the previous night. He expressed appreciation that Mr. Stone talked about the County's finances during his earlier answer, as the matter was very important to the citizens and the Board. He asked whether Mr. Stone had read the Raftelis report, and Mr. Stone confirmed that he had. Commissioner Clark asked Mr. Stone what his thoughts were regarding the report. Mr. Stone responded that he thought the report included a lot of good information. He noted that the Board needed to work on relationships, communication, and understanding each other's needs. He opined that the portion of the report that outlined the County's strategic direction and management systems would be critical for the next CM. Mr. Stone asked Commissioner Clark which part of the report he wanted him to discuss.

Commissioner Clark explained that he wanted to know how Mr. Stone thought the new CM might utilize the information from the Raftelis report to facilitate a smoother transition and identify areas that could need improvement. He asked whether Mr. Stone agreed with the recommendations in the staff report and whether he would be able to implement some of the suggested improvements.

Mr. Stone explained that he did not flag everything within the report, but he noted that certain recommendations stood out to him. He stated that communication between the Board and staff was very important, as the BCC provided the organization with strategic direction. He noted that the CM would impact that direction by moving processes forward.

Commissioner Clark explained that he wanted to verify Mr. Stone's awareness of the County's situation and to ensure that all candidates were informed about some of the matters that experts had identified after reviewing data and interviewing staff. He stated that it was important that Mr. Stone had read the report and understood its content. Commissioner Clark noted that he would ask Mr. Stone his pre-approved interview question in the way he had framed it for the previous candidates, so everybody would have a fair opportunity to answer. He explained that, according to the Assessor, Washoe County currently had more properties and value on the tax roll than it had since 1861 and the number had continued to increase over the last four to six years. He stated that there was building happening everywhere around the County. He acknowledged that Washoe County had a different tax base and structure than Wasco County in Oregon or anywhere else. He elaborated that there was an increasing amount of property entering the tax rolls as 100 percent taxable, and the Assessor reported that Washoe County had more assessed value than ever before in the County's history. He noted that the Treasurer told the Board that, due to his wise investments, the County had more funds invested and more return on investments than ever. Commissioner Clark reported that the County had some of the highest gas taxes and sales taxes in the Country and the State, which generated substantial income. He referred to Mr. Stone's previous remarks about investigating the County's finances. He opined that something needed to be addressed, given that the County currently had the most funds in its history but was still experiencing issues.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan emphasizes fiscal sustainability and transparency. Provide an example of how you've navigated a challenging budget cycle or economic downturn. What specific tools or approaches did you use to preserve core services and public trust while maintaining long-term fiscal health?*

Mr. Stone noted that he would describe a period in Wasco County's past to explain how the organization recently paid for benefits, as the organization was not currently experiencing financial distress. He explained that Wasco County had since built up the necessary fiscal reserves to handle fluctuations in the revenue cycle, but he disclosed that the organization did not have those funds available when he first began addressing the finances. He stated that governments were notoriously good at spending substantial amounts of money, so if funds were available to those entities, they would naturally spend

them. He opined that such action was both right and wrong, as spending the money meant the agencies were providing services; however, spending could be problematic if there had not been any planning for an economic downturn. He recalled that early in his tenure at Wasco County, staff closely investigated the organization's budget, particularly considering the amount of money each department generated annually. He stated that because governments were good at budgeting to spend all of the money they generated, staff recognized that if Wasco County left money unspent, those funds could be considered as revenue that could be saved and remain unused.

Mr. Stone recalled that the Wasco County staff reviewed all of the money being repeatedly circulated and then promised to invest a large portion of it into a substantial contingency fund. He noted that doing so allowed Wasco County staff to handle any situations that might arise while giving the organization's departments confidence that the county could support them. He explained that the contingency fund enabled Wasco County to move forward with less budgeted money and ultimately made enough funds available to begin building its strategic reserves and paying down the organization's PERS liability. He reported that as Wasco County paid down its PERS liability, more money was added back to the organization's budget because it was no longer paying rates of 20 to 25 percent for the liability, but rather approximately 12 to 13 percent. He opined that those savings represented real and meaningful money for the organization, representing savings that would only be made once and thus could not be immediately used or spent. He explained that Wasco County staff utilized those savings in a very targeted way, allowing them to be reinvested and reducing costs in other areas, such as the Unfunded Actuarial Liability (UAL) associated with PERS, which he had mentioned previously. He recalled that Wasco County also reassessed the organization's statutory core services to gain a better understanding of them. He noted that Wasco County staff approached their reassessment by focusing on delivering the statutory core services excellently before addressing all of the other potential services it could provide and identifying how the organization might want to invest its revenue into them. He acknowledged that Washoe County spanned a large area and had a substantial budget, and he was interested to see whether it had similar opportunities to the ones he noticed in Wasco County. He acknowledged that the strategies he had outlined previously represented a difficult decision for staff and for all of the organization's departments, as everyone wanted to retain the funding they had. He emphasized that despite those challenges, the primary goal was to avoid a situation where the organization lacked necessary funds and consequently had to make significantly impactful decisions. He indicated that such a possibility, along with ensuring flexibility to steer resources where they were needed, demonstrated why keeping some funds available was always necessary to allow for the targeted use of the budget.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County Manager plays an essential role in uniting diverse departments and providing strategic counsel to elected officials. Describe your approach to building strong, trust-based relationships with department heads and elected officials. Can you share an example of how you've successfully aligned differing priorities to achieve a common goal?*

Mr. Stone noted that his job as CM was not to run individual departments, but rather to remove barriers so that the experts within each department could direct their operations, which is what the organization hired them to do. He explained that the leadership in each department possessed a skill set related to their respective areas of work and excelled in those areas. He elaborated that, as the CM, his job would be to eliminate the obstacles preventing them from operating their departments effectively. He described the traditional budget cycle for government as one in which everyone would create a budget annually and spend those funds by the end of the year. He noted that typically any remaining funds would be swept into the following year's budget, where the process would repeat. He explained that instead of sweeping funds over in that way, Wasco County had implemented a strategy four years prior that would instead roll the money saved from a department's staff turnover or unfilled positions back into what the organization called a *flex account* within each department, which returned that revenue directly to the departments, allowing them to make decisions on the direction and priorities uniquely important to each of them. He explained that such a strategy made funds available in each of the departments, which enabled them to make decisions and do what they needed to, rather than requiring each department head to come to him as the CM to get approval, argue their reasoning, and set themselves up against other departments in the agency to compete for resources. He noted that the strategy he had described would ensure that department leadership had resources available within their independent budget to advance their team's priorities through accounting and management.

Mr. Stone recalled that it was initially very challenging for the organization to relinquish some of the control it had over those resources by allowing the experts in the departments to manage them instead. He opined that a beneficial component of that strategy was that the flex accounts he had mentioned operated similarly to personal savings or checking accounts, which would only have a certain amount of money placed into them, and that would be all that was available to spend. He noted that having the flex accounts operate in that manner meant that Wasco County's departments became accountable for the revenue they generated and then spent, which he described as an incredible change for the organization. He described an example of that change by reporting that Wasco County's Sheriff's Office had been able to add a new K-9 unit and unarmed aerial vehicles (UAVs) to their fleet through that strategy. He opined that such purchases would have never made it through Wasco County's previous budget process because those expenses would have been halted at the CM or the county commission level. He explained that, since the Wasco County Sheriff's Office had been granted the authority through the new process and had the funds available in their budget, they could currently invest in the infrastructure they needed, such as UAVs, if they deemed them to be an essential part of their job. He acknowledged that Wasco County's strategy had the limitation that departmental leadership knew they needed to be able to manage their budget. He reiterated that his job as CM was to remove barriers, but added that he was also responsible for implementing precautions. He elaborated that department heads understood that when they made a departmental investment, such as for a new UAV program, the program needed to be sustainable because they would experience both the benefits and challenges associated with the budget strategy. He explained that if the program turned out to be unsustainable, the departmental leadership would be forced to decide within their department where they

would have to cut back accordingly. He stated that the new approach had helped build relationships and trust within the organization's finance and government cycle, which had proven to be invaluable. He reported that Wasco County's Sheriff's Office had particularly appreciated the new strategy. He emphasized that all the other departments were also pleased with it, because it allowed them to focus on what was uniquely important to them without competing with other departments.

Mr. Stone described another caveat of Wasco County's budget strategy by providing an example regarding the allocation of resources to a department such as the sheriff's office, which consumed 33 percent of Wasco County's General Fund. He explained that the department would know it would receive 33 percent of that fund and would expect to get a 3 percent increase after new assessments were made following the addition of new properties to the tax rolls. He noted that from a strategic perspective, the department could then plan its finances accordingly. He reported that, as CM, he would take certain expenses, such as a \$6 million payment to the jail, directly out of the general fund, which would subsequently reduce the available budget. He explained that in such a case, the sheriff's office would still receive the 33 percent he mentioned previously. However, the actual amount of money they would receive would be reduced proportionally to the money available in the general fund, especially if there was a strategic initiative that needed funding. He noted that the approach he had described had shaped what had become Wasco County's budgeting process, which then prompted discussions about the organization's priorities for its strategic initiatives, the related costs of achieving such goals, and the potential impacts of those initiatives on individual departments. He opined that it was a very unique budgeting message and reported that it had been very well received.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan identifies Vulnerable Populations as a key focus area. What is your philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents? Share an example where you helped integrate services across departments or jurisdictions to deliver more equitable outcomes.*

Mr. Stone explained that the first part of his philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents was to identify those specific needs in order to better understand the root causes that created the issue. He explained that once an individual knew those factors, they could then start working towards solutions. He stated that his example in Wasco County occurred after the State of Oregon conducted a statewide survey of all behavioral health needs across Oregon. He elaborated that the study was on tier-one treatment and had included factors such as hospitalization, crisis intervention, housing, secure residential treatment, and non-secure residential treatment. He reported that the State of Oregon conducted a variety of those services throughout Oregon. He explained that his region, located in the northern area of the state, received a rating of zero in every column, indicating that it had no services and had been in a constant state of crisis. He noted that Wasco County responded by forming a citizen coalition of residents to address the issues. He elaborated that they had concluded it was necessary to account for behavioral health needs, ranging from intensive treatment to providing a place for those seeking someone to talk to. He recalled that after identifying the specific needs of the region and

the primary cause of the issue in their area, Wasco County staff proceeded to begin determining how they could meet those needs. He noted that behavioral health service needs were a significant challenge in Oregon, which was why the State of Oregon had invested a substantial amount of money towards addressing the issue. He explained that staff at Wasco County had spent the previous two years writing grants and had raised \$18 million. He noted that the concept of those efforts was related to the region's need for a resolution center, which was initially planned to offer secure residential treatment, non-secure residential treatment, substance use disorder treatment, crisis intervention, and crisis teams all operating out of one central facility. He elaborated that those plans were made in partnership with the collective behavioral health entity he had mentioned, which would also oversee the operation of that resolution center. He noted that the entity was created through an intergovernmental agreement comprised of three counties with support from Wasco County's Sheriff's Department, jail, hospital, and a number of additional stakeholders. He reported that those organizations were currently working through plans that would allow the construction of the resolution center, with a suitable piece of property owned by Wasco County having already been identified for the facility.

Chair Hill indicated that she would ask the following pre-approved questions on behalf of Vice Chair Herman: *Integrity and openness are critical attributes for this role. Describe a time when you faced an ethical dilemma or public integrity issue as a senior executive. How did you handle the situation, and what did you learn about leading with transparency?*

Mr. Stone stated that the question was difficult as it reminded him of many unpleasant memories. He explained that Wasco County had an employee and elected official who had certain challenges with staff. He disclosed that the employee began using the power of their office to intimidate other staff members, including Mr. Stone. He opined that the impacted individuals could not take action against the employee in question, and Wasco County instead filed a bar complaint to address the abuse of power and other issues. He opined that being in such a situation with another elected official was an exceptionally difficult scenario to be involved in. He suggested that the matter could have been easily deprioritized or ignored, but Wasco County chose not to do so. He reiterated the difficulty of that situation. He referred to the mention of leading with transparency and opined that the response from Wasco County following the incident demonstrated that the organization was willing to confront challenging scenarios directly, discuss issues, and take action on them. He was unsure if the Board wanted a more detailed response. Chair Hill replied that his example was great and thanked him. She noted that he had answered the final question and inquired whether he had final thoughts to convey to the Board.

Mr. Stone noted that he liked the position of CM and wished to be the Board's selected candidate. He opined that Washoe County had a great team of staff members and recalled that everyone he had spoken to the previous night had significant tenure and seniority within the organization. He thought that those factors proved a lot about the County as an organization. He noted that if all of the staff had only been employed with Washoe County for a year or six months, he would have felt doubtful. He recalled that everyone he met from the organization seemed happy with where they worked, and he

commended the Board. He explained that regardless of whether he was chosen for the role, he believed the BCC had taken the proper steps by having Raftelis create its report and by starting conversations on the matter. He thought those discussions would be difficult, but he opined that the organization had the fortitude to make it through them. He wished the Board luck, and Chair Hill thanked him for his comments and his time.

Chair Hill indicated that Ms. Kate Thomas had five minutes to introduce herself to the BCC. Ms. Thomas identified herself as the interim County Manager (ICM) and the Assistant County Manager (ACM). She believed she had a breadth of experience, noting that she had been a public servant since 1997, progressively taking on increased levels of responsibility. She recalled that she had worked for the City of Reno before serving as the Deputy Secretary of State under the Secretary of State (SOS). She then returned to the City of Reno as the Budget Director, eventually becoming the Assistant City Manager before being hired by the County in 2017 as the ACM. She felt that her career was built on consistently increasing levels of responsibility, scope, and scale, while being involved in projects, providing direct oversight, and working with staff. She explained that she was proud to be a member of Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful (KTMB), High Sierra Industries (HSI), and the Assistance League 1701 Group. She stated that she had experience with the Sierra Arts Foundation and served as the Chair of the Nevada Department of Indigent Defense Services (DIDS). She asserted that she worked to strengthen nonprofits through capacity building and mentioned that a community reinvestment team worked diligently to ensure nonprofits could effectively serve the community. She stated that she had lived in unincorporated Washoe County for 22 years and relayed that her sister and parents were both in the area. She opined that she was deeply integrated into the community and had been married for 26 years with two sons. She believed she had a good working relationship with the BCC, as well as with other boards in the area. She stated that she had worked with the congressional delegation and noted that the CM should consistently emphasize that everyone within the local government structure was there to serve the community, with the community at the center of the County's purpose.

Commissioner Clark asked if Ms. Thomas had read the Raftelis report and inquired about her thoughts on the key takeaways.

Ms. Thomas explained that the purpose of the Raftelis report was to provide clarity regarding roles and alignment within the Office of the County Manager (OCM). She said that the OCM served the Board and the citizens and that allowing for recommendations and best practices from other jurisdictions was important. She believed that the report demonstrated how the OCM could work professionally with the Board to set the tone for the organization and provide a foundation for a better and cohesive framework that served the community. Commissioner Clark asked Ms. Thomas if she was willing to adopt the changes recommended in the Raftelis report, as he believed that change was something the County should strive for. Ms. Thomas agreed and explained that she did not agree with every recommendation in the report; however, it provided a framework for making better changes. Commissioner Clark said he believed it was essential to consider recommendations when a paid study occurred.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *As County Manager, you serve at the pleasure of the Board. What is your philosophy for maintaining a productive and transparent relationship with five elected Commissioners who may hold diverse policy views? How do you balance being responsive to individual Commissioners while remaining faithful to the collective direction of the Board?*

Ms. Thomas believed that the heart of the answer lay in communication and that a culture of communication was paramount. She thought that understanding the roles each person served was important. She expressed that she recognized the roles the Board had as policymakers for the region due to the people's votes. She said that balancing responsiveness to individual Commissioners was essential to the role of CM, while meeting, discussing, and prioritizing goals. She pointed out that Boards and personalities changed over the years; however, the goal of serving the community would remain the same. She believed that transparency and trust were at the core of maintaining professional relationships with the Commissioners, as there would inevitably be disagreements. Commissioner Clark thought that there had been a significant change in the County since June and thanked Ms. Thomas for her work. He said he understood that not all his wishes would be implemented; however, he appreciated being treated fairly.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County is a large, service-driven organization that values innovation, integrity, and collaboration. What steps would you take in your first year to assess organizational culture and employee morale? How would you build a high-performing, accountable, and motivated workforce across multiple departments?*

Ms. Thomas explained that culture was at the heart of her beliefs and stated that an organization was comprised of individuals who performed the work as set forth by the Board through its policies. She thought that culture involved having an employee workforce that was engaged and performed in innovative ways to deliver services to the community. She felt that the County was on a good trajectory for success due to clear lines of communication between employee associations, department heads, elected officials, and the Board. She speculated that if there was two-way communication to understand gaps in morale and how to address those issues, concerns could be addressed. She thought that it would be beneficial to hire motivated people who could be inspired, rather than skilled people who lacked motivation. She expressed a desire to see the County as an organization of excellence that hired, attracted, and retained a talented workforce to deliver services.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *Establishing long-term objectives is key to strategic planning; however, when you are taking on a new role, short-term objectives can be equally as important. If you are selected as County Manager, please describe your plans and key objectives for the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job.*

Ms. Thomas explained that she was already performing the CM job. She noted that in the short term, she wanted to focus on keeping the Board's strategic objectives on track, as an existing framework was in place. She believed it was essential to prioritize areas such as seniors, behavioral health, and fiscal responsibility. She mentioned that, in

the long term, she wanted to shift the focus to strategy to ensure outcomes yielded the highest results. She recalled discussions pertaining to the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM), which she believed had paid dividends for the organization, as it enabled the region to follow a framework that had been proven effective in other jurisdictions. That framework not only helped individuals but also facilitated efficient and strategic work. She asserted that the County had performed significant work in the short term, such as creating two emergency shelters during C19. She said that the County had helped people who were at their lowest and that it was time to start investigating how to shut down or minimize the inflow of individuals in the system. She indicated that although there was a lot to do, she believed the County was up for the task. She said that long-term objectives would benefit the entire community because they represented the most strategic use of resources.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *Washoe County's success depends on regional collaboration with Reno, Sparks, state agencies, and neighboring jurisdictions. Describe your experience fostering intergovernmental partnerships to advance regional priorities such as housing, homelessness, or infrastructure. What barriers did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?*

Ms. Thomas felt fortunate to have good relationships across the region and into Southern Nevada. She believed that it would be essential to work together and have conversations regarding situations happening in the area to solve issues and make advancements. She felt that housing and homelessness were critical issues and that cities needed to commit to providing housing so that it was readily available. She opined that if intergovernmental relationships were not good, progress would be deficient. She noted that moving from silos to systems was one aspect of the SIM that she enjoyed. She recalled that individuals from out-of-town agencies commended the County for their collaboration with other cities. She said that the Board had good relationships across the County with elected counterparts, which she speculated benefited all. She believed that collaborating with regional partners on issues such as housing, homelessness, and infrastructure would continue progress.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Transparency and community confidence are foundational to effective local government. How have you effectively engaged the public in complex or potentially controversial decisions? What techniques do you use to communicate policy issues in ways that build understanding and trust?*

Ms. Thomas noted that her commitment to transparency began when she took the role of ICM. She believed that she was committed to the Board and that significant work had been performed regarding public records requests (PRRs). She mentioned the board brief contained clear communication regarding Board issues of significance across the County, and that information was being relayed regarding vulnerable populations and services. She felt that engaging the public was key to success and opined that if the public felt the County was not being transparent, then she believed the County was not being transparent. She asserted that the court of public opinion was strong in the region. She thought that transparency would need to be the focus of the organization if the County were

to understand what the public wanted. She relayed that confidential issues were not open to the public, but things that could be made transparent should be, in order to gain the public's trust. She said that there were many potentially controversial decisions that were contemplated, and the risk needed to be weighed. She speculated that not everyone would agree with the Board's decisions; however, if the public understood where and why the decisions were made, it could help build trust.

Commissioner Clark stated that the Assessor indicated that there was more new value on the rolls each year and more assessed value in the County than ever before. He noted that the Treasurer had made significant investments and was generating more revenue for the County than ever before. He said that the County had some of the highest gas and sales taxes in the Nation. Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan emphasizes fiscal sustainability and transparency. Provide an example of how you've navigated a challenging budget cycle or economic downturn. What specific tools or approaches did you use to preserve core services and public trust while maintaining long-term fiscal health?*

Ms. Thomas expressed that she was unfortunately part of a nearly 20-person layoff at the SOS, which occurred during the economic downturn. She explained that the economic recession hit the business licensing revenue source hard and that laying off individuals in the capital city, Reno, and Las Vegas was one of the worst days in her professional career. She said that the SOS was able to maintain the core functions of the office, but she hoped never to have to go through a situation like that again. She noted that while the layoffs were brutal, the SOS was able to retain some staff and assisted them in remaining focused by communicating effectively. She said that clear communication, including indicating why and what the SOS was doing, was important during those times because the remaining staff had to perform their roles and be responsible for their departments. She opined that when times were tough, sometimes the best innovations and recommendations could come from the workforce, so it was best to listen to them. She believed that the County had the benefit of being fiscally solid in the short-term, but she was unsure what the long-term outlook would look like. She asserted that the County had strong fiscal policies to stand behind and that there were increases in revenue to get through the difficult period. She stated that performing freezes and layoffs without a prior announcement would erode employee trust. She said that the organization needed to work collectively to bring forward concepts. She recalled that the County was utilizing cross-departmental innovation to prepare for difficult times, which she thought would be successful. She understood that the Board was facing difficult situations due to the economy and that 80 percent of the budget was for the workforce; however, the workforce was how services were provided. She said that revenues were growing, but some were hampered by State provisions regarding property taxes. She believed that there was a structural imbalance regarding how revenues came into the community, but there were costs associated with providing services.

Commissioner Clark noted that employees had many solutions to problems. He opined that if someone were to go into a factory, the managers would not fully understand the work the employees had to perform. He noted that property tax was a

popular topic and that the 3 percent cap only applied to owner-occupied properties, whereas non-owner-occupied properties were subject to an 8 percent cap. He believed that spending was the problem, not income. He said that the first person to get laid off is the last employee hired, and he thought that everyone should be made aware of that when interviewing. He asserted that Ms. Thomas mentioned 80 percent of the budget was allocated to the workforce; however, he had heard that 92 percent of the Assessor's budget was allocated to the workforce, and that 80 percent would be preferable.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County Manager plays an essential role in uniting diverse departments and providing strategic counsel to elected officials. Describe your approach to building strong, trust-based relationships with department heads and elected officials. Can you share an example of how you've successfully aligned differing priorities to achieve a common goal?*

Ms. Thomas emphasized that effective communication and active listening were essential. She noted that trust-based relationships stemmed not just from meetings, but also from listening and planning solutions. She thought that the County was unique because the elected officials set policy for the organization and community, while other elected department heads set policies within their offices and managed whole departments. She believed that understanding the operating standards of each department helped navigate how best to provide solutions while aligning differing priorities to achieve a common goal. She stated that internal services across the organization had experienced discrepancies, and while some individuals were satisfied with the policies, others were not. She speculated that having a discussion to align each goal and understanding internal services could progress forward. She mentioned looking forward to providing departments with tools to address challenging situations, especially during the difficult times ahead. She informed that she had quarterly meetings with the elected department heads, as well as monthly meetings with department heads and the elected officials to discuss not only new programs and policies but also concerns and information to help solve issues together. She said that one department could have an idea that would assist another, which made communication essential in problem-solving and becoming a united County.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *The County's Strategic Plan identifies Vulnerable Populations as a key focus area. What is your philosophy on addressing the needs of vulnerable residents? Share an example where you helped integrate services across departments or jurisdictions to deliver more equitable outcomes.*

Ms. Thomas recalled being summoned to a judge's chamber because they were witnessing generations of individuals coming through the court. She stated that a team of community stakeholders and business professionals was assembled to develop a solution. She reported that the team created the SIM due to the inability to address regional vulnerable populations and people cycling through the court system. She stated that the Board had made the strategic decision to hire a behavioral health administrator who could begin work on creating the framework of the SIM, engaging regional law enforcement partners, judges, courts, defenders, District Attorneys (DAs), providers, and nonprofit

organizations to integrate services across departments and the region. She felt that the County was headed towards efficiency in delivering services and doing more with less staff. She expressed that she never thought opening a behavioral health hospital would be on her list of accomplishments, and she hoped it would be completed within the next few years to help support the SIM and the community. She said that she was willing to pivot and take the risk to retool situations.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *Integrity and openness are critical attributes for this role. Describe a time when you faced an ethical dilemma or public integrity issue as a senior executive. How did you handle the situation, and what did you learn about leading with transparency?*

Ms. Thomas recalled that her integrity had been publicly questioned in the past. She believed it was vital for her to know who she was as a person and to hold honesty, openness, and ethical standards as core values, both as an individual and as a community member, coworker, and leader. She asserted that if ethics were ever questioned or if she were asked to do something that was not aboveboard, then it was time to reconsider and change what was being asked. She said that she was in a situation early in her career where an individual was gracious enough to let her step away from a project she did not feel ethically aligned with. She speculated that it was important to hold her head high and do what was right. She said that she learned to be transparent and rely on her word to persevere because people would say anything they wished. She thought that it was essential to focus on what was meaningful for the region and the organization.

Chair Hill offered Ms. Thomas the opportunity to provide any closing words. Ms. Thomas stated that, given her experience as the ICM, her in-depth knowledge of County operations, and her established relationships with the Board, staff, and community, it would be an honor to continue working for the County in any capacity.

On the call for public comment, Mr. Earstin Whitten noted that he was in support of Ms. Thomas as the next CM. He believed that Ms. Thomas had many vital qualities that could improve the County's progress. He believed that it was essential to be flexible and focus on what was important as a leader with multiple priorities across different jurisdictions. He said that collaborating with the community and the Board was key and recalled that Ms. Thomas had emphasized the importance of effective communication. He speculated that Ms. Thomas would be the one to continue organizational success effectively. He pointed out that Commissioner Clark saw progress with Ms. Thomas as ICM. He asserted that understanding communal issues was critical and working on those concerns was paramount to the County. He recommended Ms. Thomas as the appointed CM.

Ms. Trista Gomez found the CM position, the County's desired culture, short-term outcomes, and how the candidates answered questions to be interesting. She recalled that one of the candidates had referred to empowering experts and department heads to address concerns, which she appreciated. She believed that collaboration was essential between State agencies, local agencies, nonprofits, and residents. She thought it

was imperative to connect with the population so that their concerns could be addressed. She believed that a CM who could provide concise answers and speak intelligently would be beneficial to the County. She expressed surprise at a candidate whose county was small, but said she was impressed by his ability to articulate answers both specifically and broadly, while providing examples related to different issues and outcomes from his county. She opined that being able to collaborate with residents was a huge accomplishment that she would like the County to adopt. She asserted that Ms. Thomas had institutional knowledge; however, there were continued issues from the previous seven years that Ms. Thomas had been involved in. She expressed interest in having someone new for the CM position who would deliver excellent results and could address a broader range of resident issues.

Mr. Todd Bailey indicated that he was part of the group, Nevada Accountability, and that the most critical job of the Board was to hire or fire the CM. He opined that vulnerable populations had grown due to budgetary decisions made over the previous five years. He speculated that the County could not pretend to care about vulnerable populations while making affordability a problem. He asserted that a new CM would not necessarily make the OCM more fair towards the Board. He believed that the hiring of a new CM presented an opportunity for a fresh start and engagement in discussions regarding water, land, energy sources, robotics, data centers, and visions for the future. He wondered what the Commissioners envisioned the County would be in five years and speculated that the Board had 12 months to fix any issues.

Chair Hill indicated that the Board would recess before proceeding with deliberations.

**12:27 p.m.**     **The Board recessed.**

**12:40 p.m.**     **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Chair Hill thanked the team involved with organizing the recruitment. She expressed appreciation towards Park Ranger Gabriel Barbato, District Park Manager Andy Brown, Park Ranger Brandon Faber, County Clerk Jan Galassini, Media and Communications Program Manager Bethany Drysdale, Program Assistant Sally Johnston, Communications Director Nancy Leuenhagen, Office Specialist Nancy Ramirez-Partida, Media and Communications Program Manager Candee Ramos, Assistant County Manager (ACM) David Solaro, Office Specialist Michelle Schneider, Executive Assistant to the County Manager Diane St. Jacques, Chief Deputy District Attorney (CDDA) Michael Large, Senior Human Resources (HR) Analyst Alicia Agrella, HR Analyst II Jessica Guitierrez, HR Specialist II Christie Hubbard, Director of HR Patricia Hurley, HR Manager Cole McBride, Senior HR Analyst Indu Moore, HR Manager Julie Paholke, HR Analyst II Alma Parel, and HR Specialist II Stephanie Wallace. She said that the Board was lucky to have a great team.

Ms. Galassini read the Commissioners' votes aloud, naming Ms. Kate Thomas as the selected candidate. Chair Hill noted that the group of candidates was great

and brought different expertise and passions to the process. She thanked the candidates for supporting the County, their communities, and for being public servants. Chair Hill indicated she would need a formal motion to appoint Ms. Thomas as County Manager (CM).

On motion by Commissioner Garcia, seconded by Commissioner Andriola, which motion duly carried on a 4-0 vote, with Vice Chair Herman absent, it was ordered that Ms. Kate Thomas be appointed to fill the County Manager vacancy.

**25-0766      AGENDA ITEM 6 Public Comment.**

Ms. Susan Walls emphasized the importance of not letting the hard days win. She noted that during her 45-year career in leadership and management, she had the opportunity to sit on both sides of the recruitment process. She felt that not every situation or candidate would be perfect and that there was room for individual and organizational improvement. She said that she trusted that the Commissioners made the best decision and thanked them for their diligence during the recruitment, interview, and selection processes. She speculated that the best days had yet to come and looked forward to the experience.

**25-0767      AGENDA ITEM 7 Announcements/Reports.**

There were no announcements or reports.

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**12:47 p.m.** There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

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**ALEXIS HILL**, Chair  
Washoe County Commission

ATTEST:

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**JANIS GALASSINI**, County Clerk and  
Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners

*Minutes Prepared by:*  
*Lizzie Tietjen, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Jessica Melka, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Brooke Koerner, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Heather Gage, Deputy County Clerk*