



Spanish Springs Citizen Advisory Board  
Minutes of the regular meeting of the Spanish Springs Citizen Advisory Board held on March 4, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Spanish Springs Library.

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

Present – Bonnie Billings, Bradley Young, Jason Evans, Brandon Partain, Shannon Martell

Absent – Renate York

## **2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

## **3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

## **4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF February 4, 2026**

Shannon Martell motioned to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2026, Spanish Springs CAB meeting. Brandon Partain seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

## **5. REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS**

There were no reports on requests for service from the previous CAB.

## **6. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES**

Bonnie Billings noted that while a written report from the fire department was included in the meeting packet, there was no written update from the Sheriff's Office. She explained that Spanish Springs residents value hearing updates from both the sheriff and fire department, and the group is working to change the process so that reports are consistently provided in writing for easier reference by the public.

Brett Taylor, Lead Community Partner for Truckee Meadows Fire & Rescue, said he would not review response statistics in detail since they were included in the packet but offered to help route any questions about calls or incidents in Spanish Springs to the appropriate staff. Speaking from the mitigation perspective, he also warned that the region's wet winter will likely lead to heavy grass growth and a potentially fast-moving grass fire season. He encouraged residents to begin clearing grass and cheatgrass around their homes now to reduce wildfire risk before conditions become hotter and more hazardous later in the summer.

## **7. COUNTY MANAGAER KATE THOMAS MEET& GREET**

Washoe County Manager Kate Thomas thanked attendees for participating in the meeting and emphasized the value of public input. She shared her background in local government, beginning her career in Southern California before moving to Northern Nevada, where she worked for the City of Reno, the Nevada Secretary of State's Office, and later returned to Reno as budget director and assistant city manager. In 2017 she joined Washoe County as Assistant County Manager and was later selected as County Manager. Thomas explained that the county manager serves as the chief executive responsible for carrying out the policy direction set by the Board of County Commissioners and overseeing the county's more than 3,000 employees, 26 departments, and roughly \$1 billion budget. She highlighted Washoe County's strong fiscal management and emphasized that her current focus is strengthening the organization internally supporting employees, maintaining fiscal responsibility, and preparing for potential economic shifts while continuing to deliver essential services to the community.

Joni Hammond explained that one of the most difficult parts of the County Manager's job is balancing the demands of overseeing 26 departments while also responding to unexpected issues that arise regularly, such as federal developments, personnel matters, citizen concerns, or media inquiries. She said the challenge is finding time to properly triage these issues and communicate them effectively to county leadership and staff. Despite the difficulty, she described the work as rewarding and noted that she understood the responsibilities of the role from years of observing and working within local government leadership.

When asked about her strategy for managing community expectations, Kate Thomas said she prioritizes transparency and open communication. She emphasized building trust by sharing information directly with employees and empowering department leaders to communicate effectively with their own teams rather than relying solely on the County Manager's Office. Thomas also noted that she has been encouraging more open dialogue among department heads to break down internal silos and share solutions to common challenges, an approach she said has been improving collaboration across the organization.

Kate Thomas said she would remain after the meeting to speak with anyone who had more specific questions. She also offered to share her business card, noting that although it still lists her as Assistant County Manager, the contact information remains the same.

## **8. FIRE ADAPTED NEVADA AND THE COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN**

Kelli Nevills, Fire Adapted Nevada Coordinator for the Nevada Division of Forestry, explained that Fire Adapted Nevada is a multi-agency partnership focused on helping communities prepare for wildfire through education, defensible space and community engagement. She said wildfire preparedness requires both prevention and long-term stewardship, including thinning vegetation, supporting forest restoration and taking responsibility for reducing risks around homes and neighborhoods. Nevills emphasized that wildfire risk is shaped not only by the likelihood of fire starting, but by how vulnerable homes and infrastructure are when a fire occurs. She warned that Nevada's dry climate, invasive grasses, wind, development in the wildland-urban interface and changing conditions are contributing to larger and faster-moving fires. She also stressed that embers, not just flames, are often what ignite homes, especially

in the first five feet around structures where combustible mulch, debris, unscreened vents and vegetation can allow fire to spread quickly. She challenged common misconceptions that certain roof types, siding materials or locations automatically protect homes from wildfire, saying mitigation remains essential in every type of neighborhood. Nevills noted that wildfire is also becoming an insurance issue, with more Nevada homes facing elevated risk, policy cancellations and denials. She said the true cost of wildfire goes far beyond suppression and property loss, affecting health, infrastructure, water systems, businesses and long-term community recovery. Nevills said mitigation is more cost-effective than recovery and encouraged communities to become Firewise USA communities as a practical way to reduce risk. She explained that the process can begin with as few as eight homes, a small committee, a wildfire risk assessment and a simple three-year action plan. She said her team and local partners are available to help communities through that process and to support efforts that make homes and neighborhoods more survivable and resilient.

Brett Taylor said the county and its partners are developing a new Community Wildfire Protection Plan, a countywide effort involving local governments, state and federal agencies, utilities and emergency management partners to identify the areas that are most at risk for wildfire and prioritize the most effective mitigation projects. He said the plan is intended to create a coordinated, long-term action strategy across jurisdictions rather than having agencies work separately and noted that public input will be a key part of the process through surveys and community outreach as the plan moves toward completion this fall. Taylor also encouraged residents to start small when it comes to wildfire mitigation by first addressing risks on their own property and then working outward with neighbors. He emphasized that community-wide action is essential because fires can spread from home to home, and he urged residents to take advantage of available risk assessments and Firewise USA resources. He noted that mitigation can also affect insurance outcomes, as insurers are increasingly looking at wildfire risk and may be more likely to cancel policies for properties that have not taken steps to reduce hazards.

Bonnie Billings commented that she appreciated the collaboration with insurance companies, noting that many communities near wooded areas are experiencing rising insurance rates. She suggested inviting the presenters back for a future meeting, possibly in July alongside discussions about GoBag and Smart911, to encourage neighbors to get involved in wildfire preparedness efforts. Kelli Nevills responded that she serves on the Department of Insurance Wildfire Working Group and is working with the state to promote recognition of Firewise communities and educate insurance agents about wildfire mitigation. She explained that in some cases homeowners have been able to keep or reinstate their insurance policies after completing defensible space improvements and submitting Firewise documentation. Nevills added that Fire Adapted Nevada is also helping train insurance agents, so they better understand wildfire risk and mitigation practices.

Bonnie Billings announced an upcoming regional fire services study community input session and encouraged residents to attend. The meeting will take place Thursday, March 19 at 6 p.m. at the Northern Nevada Public Health conference rooms on Ninth Street. She noted that flyers with additional information were available at the front table and thanked attendees for participating.

Joni Hammond asked whether the wildfire preparedness presentation could be provided to neighborhood groups such as HOA meetings, noting that it could be helpful for many

communities. Kelli Nevills confirmed that she is available to give presentations to HOA and community groups and added that Firewise recognition can also help reduce insurance costs for HOAs that participate.

Paul Augustini asked whether having small plants located a few feet from a stucco home posed a wildfire risk. The response explained that the risk depends on the type of vegetation and the surrounding environment. While some plants are more fire-resistant, nothing is completely fireproof, and wildfire risk also depends on nearby fuels, surrounding development, and wind direction. The speaker noted that these factors are best evaluated through a site-specific inspection to determine the level of risk and recommended mitigation steps.

Laurie Squartsoff asked whether using sheep or goats to graze cheatgrass along rural areas such as Pyramid Highway could be an effective wildfire mitigation strategy. Brett Taylor responded that targeted grazing can be a useful tool, but it requires consistent, long-term funding because the vegetation grows back each year. He noted that large-scale grazing projects can be expensive and may even contribute to cheatgrass growth if not managed continuously. Taylor said grazing may be more practical on a smaller scale, such as around individual properties, but residents should keep in mind that goats will likely eat other plants and landscaping as well.

Betty Thiessen said she recently moved into a small senior community that uses xeriscaping but is concerned about a nearby fenced corridor behind the neighborhood that appears to be covered with tumbleweeds and other vegetation that could burn. Brett Taylor responded that the first step is for Truckee Meadows Fire and its Wildland Division to review the area and determine the level of risk and appropriate mitigation options. He explained that the agency cannot simply clear the area without proper authorization and that most mitigation work is funded through grants or contracts. After evaluating the site, staff can determine whether the work can be handled with existing resources or if additional funding or a grant application is needed.

## **9. BOARD AND COMMISSION OPENINGS**

There were no board and commission openings announced.

## **10. NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB**

Candee Ramos introduced the WashoeCounty.gov website and highlighted the “Your Government” and “Get Involved” sections as key resources for residents who want to participate in county activities. She explained that the page includes information on contacting commissioners, upcoming neighborhood development meetings, Citizens Advisory Board agendas and volunteer opportunities such as CERT and CASA. Ramos also demonstrated the Neighborhood Development Hub, which allows residents to learn about development proposals and zoning discussions early in the process through an interactive map and meeting listings. She noted that residents can provide feedback through the Community Input Portal, including a Spanish Springs-specific page, and can sign up for email notifications so they receive updates about meetings and community engagement opportunities directly in their inbox.

## **11. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

## **12. CAB MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS/REQUESTS**

Bonnie Billings reminds attendees about the Dignity Index and encouraged everyone to read and apply it in their own behavior. She explained that it can help people keep conversations respectful, especially when discussions with friends, family, or church groups become emotional. She then shared announcements about upcoming Community Advisory Panel (CAP) meeting agendas. In April, representatives from RTC and NDOT will attend together, which residents have requested before, so both agencies can address transportation issues at the same time instead of shifting responsibility between each other. For May, the meeting will focus on outdoor recreation and natural attractions. She mentioned that a similar presentation the previous year from a neighboring tribal group was very well received. She explained that the June meeting will be a problem-based session with role playing. Board members will be assigned roles to simulate how a project goes through the Planning Commission process. One participant, Brad, will play the role of a project applicant seeking approval. The purpose of the exercise is to help the community understand the legal and procedural complexity involved when the Planning Commission approves or denies development projects. She noted that this topic is especially relevant for residents in Spanish Springs, where many development projects raise concerns about infrastructure and traffic. She encourages people to spread the word and attend the meetings.

## **13. COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/ UPDATES**

Commissioner Andriola shared several community updates. She announced that the Nevada State Fair will return from June 11 to June 13. She explained that the fairgrounds property, historically tied to agriculture and originally deeded in 1867, was recently returned to the Nevada Department of Agriculture through legislation. The fair itself began in 1874 and ran annually until 2010. Its return will include events such as the Nevada Junior Livestock Show, University of Nevada Reno Extension 4-H State Expo, the Governor's Sale of Champions, a farmers market pavilion, and junior bull riding. She also mentions that Washoe County and the Nevada Division of Insurance recently hosted a community forum about insurance and wildfire risk on February 24, 2026, which is available to watch on YouTube. In addition, she explains that Washoe County is reviewing and updating the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) bylaws. A public engagement process will begin in April so residents across the county can review the proposed bylaws and provide feedback over several weeks. District maps for the five county commissioners will also be updated and aligned with their respective districts before going through the Board of County Commissioners approval process. Finally, she thanks the CAB chair and vice chair for their work over the past year and a half to improve internal processes that support CAB meetings and community engagement, recognizing the efforts of staff and county leadership who help make the meetings possible.

ADJOURNMENT - The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 pm.