WASHOE COUNTY

Integrity Communication Service

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: September 15, 2026

DATE: September 1, 2026

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Kat Oakley, AICP, Planning Manager, Community Services Department, 328-3628, koakley@washoecounty.gov

THROUGH: Kelly Mullin, AICP, Planning and Building Division Director, Community Services Department, 328-3619, kmullin@washoecounty.gov

SUBJECT: Recommendation to receive an update and provide direction to staff by confirming or modifying the priority order of actions to implement the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan. Topics for prioritization may include, but are not limited to: dark skies, public noticing, high energy and water uses, prioritized development areas, landscaping and irrigation code, standards related to emissions and resiliency, sensitive area environmental review standards, and Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment rules. (All Commission Districts.) FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

SUMMARY

The Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan sets the policy-level vision that guides future growth and development in the unincorporated County. When it was adopted in November 2023, the Board identified the first set of initiatives to begin implementation of the plan. That priority list was subsequently updated in 2024 and 2025.

This item is intended to: (1) provide an update on progress made thus far in 2026, and (2) seek Board direction on the priority order for the updated set of potential initiatives.

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

PREVIOUS ACTION

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

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

On October 21, 2025, the Board updated the prioritization list to move changes to equine business regulations to second on the priority list and to add changes to agritourism regulations, creation of a heat mitigation plan, update code provisions related to dark skies, and update code to address high energy and water uses.

AGENDA ITEM # _____

BACKGROUND

Adoption of the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan was the culmination of over three years of work with community members, partner agencies, elected/appointed officials, and other stakeholders. It provides a vision for how the unincorporated County will develop over the next 10-20 years. Implementing the master plan's vision will be a multi-year, labor-intensive endeavor.

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

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

Outside of master plan implementation, staff also continues to work on various "clean-up" amendments to Washoe County Code that are identified by continued use of the code or, in some cases, are responses to regional planning or state legislative changes. These amendments are generally small and uncontroversial in nature. It is important that these fixes are made to facilitate the code's continued usability. Staff will work on code clean up in parallel with master plan implementation as time allows.

With the current resources dedicated to master plan implementation, work on multiple implementation items is expected to occur at once. Generally, work would initiate on each item in the order in which it is prioritized, though items may take varied amounts of time based on complexity. Some items will be addressed over longer time frames, with timing based on availability of staff resources, coordination with other departments/agencies, or other factors. See *page 6* for a chart depicting approximate anticipated timelines for the proposed prioritized items.

UPDATE ON PRIORITIZED ITEMS

In October 2025, the Board confirmed the priority order of the items shown below. Significant work has been accomplished thus far in 2025 and 2026, and status updates are noted for each.

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

Status: Multiple housing-related code amendments were completed from 2024 to 2026. Most recently, adopted amendments created incentives for senior housing, smaller homes, and affordable/attainable housing; enabled mixed-use development in all commercial zones; and created standards supporting "starter home" and infill development. In total, six development code amendments related to housing were adopted since the last report to the Board. An additional development code amendment creating the structure for a fee waiver program in anticipation of available funds for that use is expected to be proposed by the end of the year. Staff also will provide a report to the Board at the appropriate time regarding the impact of the housing initiatives, in accordance with the Board's previous request. In total, though housing affordability continues to be a top concern and area of focus for the County, the development code amendments delineated by this item are now complete. It is recommended that this item now be removed from the priority list.

2. **Permitting requirements for equine businesses**
Overview: In October 2025, the Board moved this item to #2 on the priority list, seeking an assessment and update to permitting requirements for equine businesses.

Status: In January of 2026, staff initiated work on amending the development code as it relates to equine businesses. This work built on the research and public outreach report produced by a consultant in 2024, funded by $30,000 in special district funds from Chair Andriola. Iterative rounds of public outreach resulted in a development code amendment package that was introduced by the Board on August 25th and is anticipated to be heard at the September 15th Board meeting for adoption. Therefore, this item is complete, and it is recommended that it now be removed from the priority list.

3. **Code amendments relating to agritourism**
Overview: In October 2025, the Board directed staff to assess and amend the development code as it relates to agritourism businesses, removing barriers and more comprehensively addressing such uses. The American Planning Association defines agritourism as "any activity incidental to the operation of a farm that brings members of the public to the farm for educational, recreational, or retail purposes." (Source: www.planning.org/knowledgebase/agritourism). Agritourism commonly includes activities like farm tours, u-picks, educational workshops, and farm stands.

Status: In April 2026 staff began work on an ordinance defining and creating allowances for agritourism. The work also included reviewing and modifying provisions relating to on-site produce sales, or farm stands. After two rounds of public outreach, the proposed code amendments were heard and recommended for approval by the Planning Commission on September 1st. The ordinance is expected to be heard by the Board in October and November. Since this project is anticipated to be completed by the end of the year, it is recommended that it now be removed from the priority list.

4. **Heat mitigation plan**
Overview: Passed in the 2025 Legislative Session, AB 96 requires that Washoe County update its master plan to contain a heat mitigation plan that includes, "without limitation, access to public cooling spaces, public drinking water, cool building practices, shade over paved surfaces and other mitigation measures to address heat in the community."

There are multiple master plan implementation actions that relate to this requirement. In October 2025, this item was added as item #4 to the prioritization list.

Status: In 2026, staff started work on amendments to the Envision Washoe 2040 master plan to create a heat mitigation plan. In addition to conducting outreach to inform the plan, staff coordinated with the cities of Reno and Sparks, in addition to other agencies, to align heat mitigation planning and actions where possible. The resulting plan was approved by the Planning Commission on July 7th and adopted by the Board on August 25th. It is recommended that this item now be removed from the priority list.

5. Dark Skies

Overview: During creation of the Envision Washoe 2040 master plan, dark skies were recognized as highly important to residents across many areas of the County. As a result, development of an ordinance to minimize impacts of excess lighting while maintaining a safe level of visibility at night was established as a nearer-term implementation item within the master plan. Creation of such an ordinance would be expected to enhance existing code requirements on lighting, glare and reflectivity.

Status: Staff started work on the dark skies initiative in late summer 2026. The update process will include multiple rounds of public engagement and a citizen science sky quality survey mapping project. Work is expected to continue through the end of 2026 and into early 2027. With the completion of items #1-4, it is recommended that this item be moved to #1.

6. Public noticing

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

Status: Work on this item has recently begun and is anticipated to occur over the next several months. With the completion of items #1-4, it is recommended that this item be moved to #2.

7. High energy and water uses

Overview: Over recent years, across the country there has been an increased public interest in and concern about high energy and water uses such as data centers. This same public interest is present in Washoe County, catalyzed in part by the development of data centers in the City of Reno. The Regional Planning Governing Board (RPGB) directed the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency (TMRPA) to conduct public outreach and develop policy recommendations related to such uses. They have involved stakeholders, including Washoe County, while completing that work. Their recommendations are in the process of being finalized.

Status: Staff has not started work on this item, aside from participating in regional coordination efforts facilitated by TMRPA. With the finalization of TMRPA's

recommendations, it is anticipated that the three local jurisdictions will review their regulations and make changes as necessary to appropriately address high energy and water users such as data centers. It is therefore recommended that this item be moved to #3, with the understanding that the timing of staff work on the item may shift to take advantage of efficiencies created by a coordinated regional effort.

ITEMS TO PRIORITIZE

Due to significant progress made on prioritized implementation items in 2025 and 2026, staff is recommending the following items be considered for prioritization for 2027, based on Chapter 3 of Envision Washoe 2040, the updated Washoe County Strategic Plan, and Commissioner requests. The Board is asked to provide direction on whether (and where) to prioritize this work.

- **Prioritized development areas**
  Based on the 2026 Board strategic plan workshops, the FY 27-29 strategic plan is anticipated to include an initiative to identify prioritized development areas and incentivize housing development in those areas, in order to increase housing affordability and reduce long-term infrastructure maintenance costs. The concept of prioritized development areas touches and is supported by nearly every aspect of Envision Washoe 2040, including policies related to the conservation of natural resources, increasing walkability, supporting housing, and more. This initiative, if confirmed by the Board, will involve significant work from the long-range planning team and will be ongoing, involving coordination across many departments within the County. It is therefore recommended that this initiative be prioritized as #4, with the understanding that work will occur on an ongoing basis in parallel with other action items for the next three-plus fiscal years.

- **Landscaping and irrigation code update**
  Chapter 3 of Envision Washoe 2040 directs the County to "adopt water conservation incentives and ordinances that encourage residents to use conservation devices, low-water landscaping, and efficient irrigation" as on ongoing and immediate action item. Staff has identified several other action items that could be addressed by amending the landscaping and irrigation code of Article 412, including amendments to address tree canopy coverage for heat mitigation and to better align with wildland urban interface (WUI) hazard ignition zone best practices for wildfire adaptation. It is recommended that this initiative be prioritized as #5.

- **Standards related to emissions and resiliency**
  The ongoing and immediate action items in Chapter 3 of Envision Washoe 2040 also includes an item to, "review and amend the development and architectural standards with the goal of reducing emissions and increasing resiliency." This action item directs the County to look at how the built environment can be better prepared for the many natural hazards we face, including extreme heat and wildfire. Given the recent history of wildfires in the suburban and rural areas of the County and the recent adoption of the heat mitigation plan, it is recommended that this initiative be prioritized as #6.

- **Sensitive area environmental review standards**
  The public outreach for Envision Washoe 2040 revealed strong support for the conservation of natural resources, which was one of four "cross-cutting themes" and a

topic that appears in many implementation action items. Multiple ongoing and immediate action items relate to improving the consideration of natural resources in development review, which could encompass enhanced consideration of water bodies, wetlands, wildlife habitat, development constraints, and more. In order to incorporate as many related implementation action items as possible, staff recommends conducting a comprehensive review of the development code as it relates to natural resources and making modifications as needed to adequately consider those resources. It is recommended that this initiative be prioritized as #7, with the understanding that the scope of this review may require a longer project timeline.

- **Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment Rules**
  Chair Andriola has requested that the Board consider for prioritization an update to the rules for those appointed to the Planning Commission or Board of Adjustment relating to provisions that govern leaves of absence. It is recommended that the Board consider whether they would recommend prioritization of this item and, if so, in what position it should be prioritized.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The chart below shows the anticipated timeline for 2027 for work on the implementation items as recommended in this staff report. Not all items are expected to be completed within a year; however, it is anticipated that work will begin on all items in that timeframe. Some items may also include multiple sets of code amendments brought to the Board, depending on the level of complexity. Timelines shown are approximate in nature and subject to change. Lighter colors and the "-" symbol represent lower levels of activity, at the beginning or end of a project or over a longer basis for those initiatives that will be completed over multiple years in coordination with others.

2027 Anticipated Implementation Timeline

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2028
Dark Skies	—	-											
Public Noticing	—	—	-										
High Energy and Water Uses	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-					
Prioritized Development Areas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	—	—	—	—	—	—
Landscaping and Irrigation Code Update		-	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-			
Emissions and Resiliency Standards				-	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-	
Sensitive Area Environmental Review Standards									-	—	—	—	—

Key: - = lower levels of work, — = higher levels of work

RECOMMENDED UPDATED PRIORITY ORDER

Based upon the information above, and considering the Board's previously set priorities as well as Chapter 3 of Envision Washoe 2040, the following updated priority order is recommended:

1. Dark Skies
2. Public Noticing
3. High Energy and Water Uses
4. Prioritized Development Areas
5. Landscaping and Irrigation Code Update
6. Emissions and Resiliency Standards
7. Sensitive Area Environmental Review Standards

And the following item, if recommended by the Board in a position recommended by the Board:

- Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment Rules

FISCAL IMPACT

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

RECOMMENDATION

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

POSSIBLE MOTION

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

> "Move to confirm [or modify as follows _____] the proposed priority order of actions to implement the Envision Washoe 2040 Master Plan."

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