



# WASHOE COUNTY

Integrity Communication Service

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## STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: August 18, 2020

**DATE:** July 28, 2020

**TO:** Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Dave Solaro, Arch., P.E., Assistant County Manager  
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**THROUGH:** Eric Brown, County Manager

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation to accept a presentation on Citizen Advisory Boards and related or supplemental community engagement resources such as the 3-1-1- program within unincorporated Washoe County, confirm board vision for engagement, and provide direction to staff to pursue one of three options for Advisory Boards and related supplemental community engagement resources which may include 1.) expand the Managers Office Communications Team to create a comprehensive community engagement program as a supplemental or additional community engagement resource to the CABs, or; 2.) expand the existing CAB program to include items that are not development related, or; 3.) continue with the existing program with no changes. (All Commission Districts.)

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### SUMMARY

At numerous Board of County Commissioners (Board) meetings, Commissioners have requested further discussion related to the Washoe County CAB program. As Washoe County has gone through a change in leadership, obtaining insight from the new County Manager was necessary prior to bringing this item to the Board for review and discussion. This item requests direction from the Board including confirmation of shared vision and one of three programmatic changes.

Strategic Objective supported by this item: Stewardship of our community.

### PREVIOUS ACTION

On January 23, 2018 – The Board acknowledged an update and provided direction to staff on changes to the Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) program to change the meeting dates of CAB's and provide additional structural changes for facilitating discussions relevant to development items at the CAB's.

On June 27, 2017 – The Board acknowledged an update and gave direction to staff on changes to the Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) program.

AGENDA ITEM # \_\_\_\_\_

On August 9, 2016 – The Board approved dissolving the West Truckee Meadows and the Verdi Township CAB, and creating the West Truckee Meadows/ Verdi Township CAB.

On June, 28, 2016 - Board acknowledged an update and gave direction to staff. No action on this item.

On February 9, 2016 – The Board acknowledged an update and directed staff to take necessary steps to start the Gerlach/Empire CAB as soon as possible in 2016.

On October 27, 2015 – The Board acknowledged an update and took no action on this item.

On June 9, 2015 – The Board approved updated by-laws to reflect the approved CAB structure and redefined purpose for FY 2015-2016.

On May 12, 2015 – The Board approved revised resolutions for each CAB and updated the standard CAB structure for program changes and a community forum program.

On April 14, 2015 – The Board provided direction to staff on the CAB program structure.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Washoe County Board of County Commissioners are permitted to create advisory boards per state law (NRS 244.1945). The Board created the Citizen Advisory Board Program which consists of nine citizen boards that represent distinct geographic areas across unincorporated Washoe County. The Citizen Advisory Boards are advisory to decision making boards in the County including Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.

The current CABs were recreated on April 13, 2013, per direction of the Board of County Commissioners after an extensive outreach and revitalization process called the Citizen Involvement Revitalization Project (CIRP). The CIRP was initiated by the Board due to concerns that the CAB program was not efficiently soliciting feedback due to:

- Reduction in participation by advisory board members (in 2012 nine of the fourteen CABs received three or fewer applications for vacant positions).
- Reduced participation in traditional CAB meetings by the general community (in 2007, 94 percent of CAB meetings had fewer than 15 people in attendance, including members of the CAB and county staff).
- CABs had a high administrative costs associated with managing the appointed advisory boards and staff resources (CAB meetings were estimated to cost \$4,484 for each meeting held).

As can be seen with the previous actions section of this staff report, and continued requests from the Board related to CAB structure and value, the program re-initiated in 2013 and modified most recently in January of 2018 is still not meeting the expectations of the community or the Board.

With the much iteration of CABs in the past, the County has provided additional support to our citizens outside of a CAB setting. When combined with the current CAB structure, to understand and gather community feedback on development projects, the current outreach programs provide a diverse set of opportunities for Washoe County to provide information, gather feedback, and be responsive to our citizens. Below is a list of current

citizen support areas that have been created in response to requests of the citizens and elected officials for connecting with our community.

***Current outreach and engagement programs and metrics***

**Washoe311:** Centralized communication citizen information center offering a single resource for residents to receive information regarding regional services, receive emergency information (ie. COVID-19 testing information), obtain information Washoe County services, and to share concerns with elected officials and staff. Washoe311 is available 24-hrs a day using an afterhours call service. Unique to central service centers, Washoe311 also has a direct accountability to Commissioners to ensure that they understand residents' concerns.

*Washoe311 Highlights:*

- **Washoe311 Total Monthly requests from Jan – June 2020 : 24,181**  
(Compared to 2019 total for the year: 14,807)
- **Washoe311 Top 3 requests during this timeframe: 1) COVID-19 2) Absentee/Mail Ballots 3) Voter Registration**

**Video Content/Press Conferences and Media Relations/Virtual Town**

**Halls/Broadcast of Public meetings:** Since January of 2020 the use of the WCTV studio, live meetings, press conferences and informational videos has been vital to keeping our citizens informed.

*Highlights from January to June 2020:*

- **Public Meetings Broadcast from Commission Chambers - 49**
- **Live Broadcast Time - 138 Hrs**
- **COVID-19 Press Conferences - 9**
- **COVID-19 Virtual Town Halls - 6**
- **Live Primary Election Coverage - Morning and Evening Update**
- **Informational Videos Produced - 14**
- **Media Inquiries: 156 (not including press conferences)**

**Online Resources:** WashoeCounty.us Feedbackify, social media, video services, our online feedback tools supplement in person communication for topics of interest to the community including animal services code amendments, regional planning, area plans, short-term rentals and marijuana code creation and amendments.

**Website total traffic:** 184,909 unique users, 784,800 page visits

**Feedbackify:** complaints, compliments, inquiries and suggestions: 571

**Social Media: Twitter - 1,099,000 Impressions, Facebook - reach of 762,884 people**

**Employee engagement** – New Sharepoint Site, *Inside Washoe* was launched in January 2020, and is now used as an interactive and information sharing point of reference particularly as more than half of the workforce is working remotely.

- **We are averaging 6,000 visits per month on Inside Washoe**

***Roadmap to a solution:***

Washoe County staff has met individually with each Board member to gather information to better understand what a CAB is expected to accomplish. A compilation of information from the five commissioners is attached as attachment A.

The information gathered from the individual meetings provides the following Board vision for a CAB program:

*To create an opportunity to discuss with and engage residents in community issues without jurisdictional limitations and to clarify or address misinformation in the community.*

- The value to elected officials is the opportunity to look at complex or “wicked” community questions with an additional lens. This complements data-based decision-making by further identifying/clarifying complex issues addressed at a policy level.
- The opportunity for community participants is to learn more about the role of and what they should expect from local government, obtain information on how to address service level requests, and share conditions/concerns of their community environment that are limiting their quality of life.
- The value to staff and leadership is the ability to test assumptions in data-driven decision-making, better understand implications of decisions on community environment and possibility for success/unintended consequences, identify trending community issues, clarify misinformation and role of local government verses community, and address community requests for service.

To implement the confirmed vision of the Board of County Commissioners, staff has developed three program options including:

1. Expand the Managers Office communications team to create a comprehensive community engagement program, or;
2. Expand the existing CAB program within Community Services Department to include items that are not development related, or;
3. Continue with the existing program with no changes.

Key discussion questions needed to be answered as a Board include:

1. Does the board have a preference on having a structured advisory board that must adhere to open meeting law as a mechanism to provide feedback policies?
2. Does the Board have a preference on meeting frequency or schedule (on demand or prescheduled meetings)?
3. Does the board have a preference on virtual, online or in person meetings?
4. Does the Board requires consistent tools for engagement across districts or individualized by community?
5. Does the board have a preference on topical meetings or standard, routine format on all issues?

6. Are board members in support of participating in other local topical meetings/events or required as attendees for County meetings?

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The current CAB program within the Community Services Department has a budget of \$131,312.54. It is anticipated that any work to expand the current program will have an impact to the budget. This impact will need to be identified and properly budgeted through the yearly budget process. The Options associated with this staff report vary from no additional budget to a potential increase in budget needs estimated at \$280,400.00.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that The Board of County Commissioners expand the current Manager's Office Communications Team to create a comprehensive community engagement program as a supplemental or additional community engagement resource to the CABs, and provide initial feedback on discussion topics.

**POSSIBLE MOTION**

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation, a possible motion would be: "Move to create a comprehensive community engagement program as a supplemental or additional community engagement resource to the CABs as recommended by staff with the following direction..."