

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

TUESDAY

9:00 A.M.

APRIL 21, 2026

PRESENT:

Clara Andriola, Chair
Mariluz Garcia, Vice Chair
Alexis Hill, Commissioner
Michael Clark, Commissioner
Jeanne Herman, Commissioner

Janis Galassini, County Clerk
Kate Thomas, County Manager
Michael Large, Chief Deputy District Attorney

The Washoe County Board of Commissioners convened at 9:00 a.m. in 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:

26-0238 **AGENDA ITEM 3** Public Comment.

9:02 a.m. **Vice Chair Garcia arrived at the meeting**

Jill O’Leary provided a document, copies of which were distributed to the Board and placed on file with the Clerk. She indicated that a request for action regarding the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) compliant reconciliation of the County budget was distributed. She believed that the budget was not being reconciled and that actual dollars were being used for any categories, including but not limited to property tax (p-tax) revenue, payroll, investment income, and other State and federal grants subject to audit. She said that GAAP and GASB standards required agencies to report actual revenues and expenditures; however, she speculated that the County’s budget was reconciled with summaries or Board-approved dollars. She recalled that Commissioner Hill stated the need for transparency in State tax abatements and accountability for homelessness and other mental health-related programs. She said that Commissioner Hill’s remarks prompted her to review the County’s budget reporting. She felt it was clear from publicly available data that over the last decade, homelessness continued to rise with no additional shelter beds added and no report showing measurable mental health income following the closure of any treatment complex or the West Hills Behavioral Health Hospital reconstruction approved in 2022. She mentioned that while significant funding was approved for mental health-related processes, including competency cases handled by the jail, she supposed that no improved outcomes were reported. She pointed out that her request asked the County

Manager (CM) to use their authority over the Comptroller to ensure the budget was fully reconciled with actual dollars and transparently reported in compliance with GAAP and GASB requirements, while also asking the Commissioners to uphold the responsibility to ensure the CM they appointed required the compliance of an accurate reconciliation essential for fiscal integrity to meet State and federal requirements. She asserted that residents relied on the services the County provided.

26-0239 **AGENDA ITEM 4** STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP AND UPDATES TO THE BOARD (Workshop Item) - The purpose of the Strategic Planning Workshop is to provide the Board with information and receive guidance for unified vision of success and expected outcomes. Topics of discussion include: diversion of services, public education as a service diversion strategy, reimagining county hiring and recruitment, and financial strategy. (All Commission Districts.)

Chair Andriola said she had received positive feedback from the budget workshop and hoped to continue using similar opportunities to foster deeper transparency. She thanked the staff for organizing the workshop, acknowledging the significant effort involved and its benefits, and added that she looked forward to future workshops.

County Manager (CM) Kate Thomas mentioned that the workshop was based on input gathered from the Board, elected officials, and department heads to develop a strategic planning process. She noted that the workshop was the first of three workshops focused on developing immersive and progressive solutions for the County. She indicated that the Board and staff had discussed the five-year forecast, including projected expenditures and insufficient revenues to meet those expenditures if no changes were made. She highlighted a projected structural deficit around 2030, at which point revenues would not cover expenditures without necessary adjustments. She said the purpose of the strategy session was to identify what needed to change. She explained that, as an organization, a community service provider, and as a responsibility to the taxpayer, the workshop was intended to be a space where staff could creatively brainstorm. She stated that someone described the County as a net, built to catch people who had nowhere else to go, and that the County provided necessary services to those in need. She shared that, unfortunately, the County could not continue to expand its net and needed to be more strategic in addressing solutions to serve the community, to avoid a structural deficit. She introduced Kamryn Mock, the Principal Strategist from OnStrategy, who had assisted the County in navigating the process. She indicated that the process had been much more immersive, involving the Board, department heads, staff, and the community.

Ms. Mock conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Upstream/Preventative Services; Planning Process Overview; Agenda; Our Goal Today; Summary of Insights (1 of 2); Summary of Insights (2 of 2); Upstream.

Ms. Mock reviewed the slide titled *Planning Process Overview* and said there were four phases that had remained largely unchanged over the past several years. She indicated that the process had been slightly modified for the County based on

recommendations from the Raftelis Report, with Phase I focusing on the most critical planning items. She shared that the Board participated in initial interviews and that additional rounds were conducted with department heads and leadership to develop discussion topics. She explained that the workshops' format had changed and noted that there would be three workshops to discuss strategic topics, rather than one large all-day retreat. She stated that all information from the series of workshops would be shared with the goal team to develop actions to achieve the vision set by the Board. She mentioned that the team would present to the Board periodically for approvals and provide regular updates once the Strategic Plan was finalized.

Ms. Mock reviewed the slide titled *Agenda* and said the meeting's theme was shifting from proactive to reactive services. She shared that four topics would be presented and discussed, with a break following the *Diversion to Services* presentation. She reviewed the slide titled *Our Goal Today* and clarified that the current workshop would differ from previous ones. She mentioned that the discussion topics were intended to be thought-provoking and that no policies would be determined. She explained that the time would be used to brainstorm as a group on the topics that would be presented to the Board in the future. She mentioned that the information shared was intended to help participants understand the County's direction and path forward. She expressed that the workshop could inspire more transformative thinking and noted that many of the topics originated from departments with strong examples that could be applied more broadly. She said the workshop would help educate the community and other departments on the County's strategic direction and expectations.

Ms. Mock reviewed the slide titled *Summary of Insights (1 of 2)* and said that each of the three workshops had different themes, with subtopics to be discussed within each. She noted that eight topics were identified during the *gain insights* phase, and that the workshop discussions were derived directly from that input. She reviewed the slide titled *Summary of Insights (2 of 2)* and said it outlined the strategic topics and issues to be addressed in the upcoming workshops.

CM Thomas reviewed the slide titled *Upstream* and said that although she did not create its content, she felt it served as an effective visual. She thanked the behavioral health administrator for her insightful words and stated the slide helped clarify the County's goal of becoming more strategic. She added that rather than continuing to respond to every situation, the County should focus on preventing those circumstances.

CM Thomas announced that the next topic would be presented by Chief Medical Examiner Doctor (Dr.) Laura Knight, Assistant County Manager (ACM) Ryan Gustafson, Washoe County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) Assistant Sheriff Ryan Johnston, and Chief Judge Egan Walker.

Dr. Knight, Assistant County Manager (ACM) Ryan Gustafson, Assistant Sheriff Johnston, and Judge Egan Walker conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: *Diversion to Services*; *Discussion Flow* (slide 9); *Data-Informed Strategies* (3 slides); *What's Working?*; *What do we mean by diversion?*;

Children; Housing and Homeless; Vulnerable Populations; Justice System; What's up Next – Help Stay the Course; What's up Next – Level Up Existing Investments; What's up next?; Commission Direction (slide 22).

Dr. Knight shared the first slide titled *Data-Informed Strategies* and stated they would begin with data from the Medical Examiner (ME)'s Office on mortality. She noted it was background information to help the Board with their decision-making. She clarified that all of the data being presented represented Washoe County only. She noted that her office covered 19 counties, but that she was focused on Washoe County for the slides being presented. She described the graph shown on the slide, specifying that the blue line represented overall drug-related deaths in Washoe County, which rose steadily over several years. She stated it was a long trend that peaked in 2023. She was hopeful it would be the all-time peak for Washoe County and that it would continue to decline in the future. She described the orange line, representing fentanyl deaths, as the major driver of the peak and of the increasing trend from 2019 onwards. She noted that total drug-related deaths had not returned to the pre-fentanyl-era baseline, but that there had been a significant reduction since the peak. She felt this was not a statistical anomaly, but a real trend, though she did not have a reason why. She stated she had a large amount of data, but not a specific answer. She speculated it was a multifactorial issue, including all of the programs in the community, law enforcement efforts at reducing availability, and federal policies regulating how much supply was available across the Country.

Dr. Knight shared the second slide titled *Data-Informed Strategies* and explained that it showed the two trends from the previous slide, along with a new green line representing methamphetamine-related deaths. She noted that the slide demonstrated that along with fentanyl, methamphetamine had been a critical component of the overall trend as well. She added that over her 11 years of working in Washoe County, she recognized methamphetamine as the drug of choice in the community, despite the introduction of fentanyl. She clarified that many drug-related deaths involved more than one substance, and so when fentanyl was present, frequently methamphetamine was also present. She explained that, as the Commissioners might already know, when people bought methamphetamine or fentanyl, they did not know exactly what it contained. She added that often, the drugs were a mixture or were used together.

Dr. Knight shared the third slide titled *Data-Informed Strategies* and explained that it was more granular, showing the trends in quarters, broken out into two-quarter segments. She clarified that each point on the chart was showing two quarters of each year in order to provide a more detailed picture of how the overall decreasing trend was proceeding. She noted a leveling-off of the downward trend in fentanyl-related deaths, though not in the overall drug-related deaths. She felt the graph introduced more noise in the signal, but also told the story that stimulants, methamphetamines, and, to a lesser degree, cocaine, were on the rise in 2025. She reiterated that while fentanyl-related deaths were down, stimulants were becoming popular and cocaine was seeing a resurgence in the community.

Commissioner Hill asked about the national trend.

Dr. Knight explained that nationally, opioids were on the decline, particularly on the East Coast. She noted that the rise in use was earlier and more dramatic on the East Coast than in the Washoe County region. She mentioned that she had come from New York, and when she left approximately 15 years ago, they were experiencing a trend of fentanyl and heroin mixed together. She added that the trend had not arrived in the County's region until much later, so she felt it was lagging behind. She clarified that in her career she observed that drug trends started east and then moved west. She noted the exception that methamphetamine had never been as popular on the East Coast as on the West. She mentioned that it was somewhat popular in the Midwest, for a variety of reasons. She specified that the methamphetamine trend was different in the Washoe County region than in some other parts of the Country, and noted that it was still very high in the region.

Commissioner Hill wondered if it was due to the prevalence of shift work and people working a variety of different jobs in the area. She mentioned this was one theory she had heard from others discussing West Coast usage.

Dr. Knight agreed that methamphetamine could be used for productivity, but that she had not seen that specific trend in her casework while investigating deaths. She noted that addiction was multifactorial, and that while individuals might state productivity as a reason for use, it came back to substance abuse and encompassing factors related to that.

Vice Chair Garcia suggested it was only a few years prior when there was an alarming rate of youth overdoses in the school district, and she recalled it being in the news regularly. She asked if Dr. Knight had an update on that segment of the population.

Dr. Knight stated that she did not believe youth deaths were overrepresented in the population. She thought they had been traditionally over-represented in the survived-overdose categories, but thought that was not data they had. She clarified that it was data that Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) produced about individuals who went to the Emergency Room (ER) for overdoses and similar issues. She stated that their forensic epidemiologist started earlier that month, and that they would be producing more granular data with demographics on drug-related deaths in their next annual report. She mentioned some special reporting on drug-related deaths would also be included. She stated that they would supply copies of the report to the Board, and she felt they would be interested in the information.

Vice Chair Garcia shared that when the County interacted with clients interfacing with the CrossRoads programs, alcohol was a top factor in many of their stories and, while individuals were not dying from alcohol at similarly significant rates, she wondered if alcohol was still a major concern with the clients they were serving.

ACM Gustafson responded that yes, he thought what his team was observing was often co-occurring substance use, with alcohol use mixed with drug use. He noted that alcohol was still a significant factor due mainly to its accessibility, in addition to other factors. Dr. Knight agreed with his assessment.

Commissioner Clark asked if the County knew where the drugs were coming from. He noted as an example that there were no coca plants locally to produce cocaine and asked if it was primarily coming from California and the West Coast. He also asked if methamphetamine was being produced locally or if it was coming from other parts of the Country.

Assistant Sheriff Johnston responded that it was predominantly coming from Mexico before entering Interstate 80 (I-80), which they noted was one of the biggest corridors in the United States (US). He clarified that it came across the border from Mexico and then north through California. He noted that in law enforcement there was an adage that *If a car was going east, it was carrying narcotics. If it was going west, it was carrying money and firearms.* He stated this was generally true as far as narcotics transportation. He noted that law enforcement would obviously catch the narcotics traveling to the west, but that predominantly, it was everything from the West Coast coming through Washoe County.

Commissioner Clark noted that he saw WCSO vehicles parked on a regular basis and wondered if they were looking for license plates, had inside intelligence, or were simply hoping to get lucky and spot a transport.

Assistant Sheriff Johnston stated that it was a gambit in their High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HITDA) (High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), but that the WCSO had been top in their region over the last decade. He attributed that success to their experience, the programs they had been running, and training and succession planning that extended from their officers down to their K-9s. He also noted their collaboration with the State of Nevada and nationally, along with devices like license plate readers (LPRs). He mentioned that now they had tools like analysts and the Real-Time Information Center (RTIC), and that the analysts for their HITDA all collaborated on cases. He gave the example of a simple traffic stop initiated by patrol officers, with the information from that investigation sent to an analyst, who then examined whether there was a connection to known individuals, narcotics, money, or firearms, with those results then pushed out to the HITDA teams. He noted that the WCSO felt that nothing was more effective than having actual officers on the scene and stopping suspected vehicles to conduct investigations.

Commissioner Clark asked whether there was anything further the County could do to help the WCSO, or any tools they needed to intercept drug traffic, given that the trafficking was not confined to the region but continued along I-80 to its final destination, perhaps in Chicago or a similar destination.

Assistant Sheriff Johnston stated that leveraging technology was the strongest current tool available. He stated that information from LPRs and Flock cameras was invaluable, including knowing who was on their roads and which direction they were traveling. He stated the technology would truly push the WCSO into the next level.

Chair Andriola mentioned technology and referred to its cost savings, staff efficiency, and enhanced ability to apprehend suspects. She asked Dr. Knight, in light of

the workshop being proactive instead of reactive, what the Board could do to help with the downtrends or any other steps they may not have considered.

Dr. Knight stated that, regarding policy, she recommended continuing with the current plans and, despite observing a downtrend, not to pull back when new opportunities for programs or continued funding came before the Board. She referred to ACM Gustafson for the question about new ideas, as in her role she typically only saw the end of the process.

ACM Gustafson stated the upcoming slides would cover some of that information.

Chair Andriola thanked Dr. Knight and her staff, noting that they dealt with a number of serious and emotionally taxing matters and that, since the Board did not always hear about the work they were doing, she wanted Dr. Knight and her team to know the Board appreciated their hard work.

ACM Gustafson stated that a major part of the solution was discussing ways the County could engage in diversionary activities. He felt that the phrase *an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of the cure* represented what they were trying to do. He stated he was before the Board to discuss what his team was doing to improve the lives of community members by guiding and diverting individuals from negative to positive outcomes. He noted he had good news to share regarding people, cost avoidance, and plans for the future.

ACM Gustafson asked what was meant by *diversion*. He reiterated that it meant redirecting individuals from negative outcomes to positive outcomes for both the individual and the community. He noted that prevention and intervention strategies helped the individual in the future, in addition to saving the County money and resources, which he felt had been the theme of discussions in recent months. He shared the slide titled *Children* and stated he would begin with a focus on children, then relayed that in 2018, Washoe County first began investing in a clinical team to help families avoid deeper involvement in the child welfare system. He noted that they saw a 35 percent reduction in the number of children in their custody as a result, which was good news for children and families, as keeping them reunified was a key goal. He explained that, at the same time, it also allowed the County to avoid costs through caseload reduction, eliminating the need for additional child welfare staff, as they had seen in other States and regions due to ongoing caseload growth. He mentioned that Washoe County had not seen that growth due to a number of preventative efforts, specifically tied to clinical services and other infusion services. He mentioned that the County had taken over operations of the Children's Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) in July 2024, and that since then, there had been a 94 percent reduction in hospitalizations for the children and families they serve. He noted that this had allowed them to keep those families in their homes under a safety plan, working closely with clinical teams, instead of costly emergency room visits. Mr. Gustafson mentioned the impactful work of colleagues at Washoe County Juvenile Services (WCJS), where case management and targeted interventions had diverted 75 percent of referrals

from formal court processing, significantly reducing the workload across the juvenile justice system.

ACM Gustafson shared the slide titled *Housing and Homeless* and mentioned the issue of housing and support for unhoused individuals. He said they were starting to see significant results from the County's investments. He pointed out that County case managers and behavioral health teams facilitated 827 exits to permanent housing in 2025 and that, during the same period, the WCSO Hope Team worked to secure housing for an additional 177 individuals. He added that they had recently opened their Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Program, which consisted of 50 new permanent supportive housing units on the Cares Campus, paired with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Program, which he stated was evidence-based treatment aimed at meeting the needs of individuals with significant behavioral health challenges. He noted that 42 of the 50 units were currently filled and that there were 65 beds across those units. He stated that his team achieved significant cost and resource savings from wraparound services for those individuals, which kept them off the streets, out of jail, and out of hospitals.

Transitioning to senior citizens, ACM Gustafson shared the slide titled *Vulnerable Populations* and noted that the general theme he found after speaking with seniors was that they wanted to stay in their homes. To help with this, he explained that the Washoe County Senior Services Homemaker Program had led to a significant increase in keeping those seniors in their homes. He stated that over the past five years, they had increased their number of services from 181 to 417, which he described as significant. He stated that their public guardian team also worked diligently with referrals to explore appropriate solutions. He explained that approximately 60 percent of their cases ended up with a family guardian, while 40 percent were diverted to less restrictive alternatives, which magnified savings for the County across departments. He clarified that this meant the individuals did not have court cases or ongoing monitoring while also receiving support and maintaining their civil liberties. He stated that individuals in the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program (AOT) participated in civil court processes led by Judge Cynthia Lu at the Second Judicial District Court. He explained that the court collaborated with State partners to provide psychiatric services, intensive case management, and additional support, resulting in a 47 percent decrease in legal hold petitions and a 42 percent decrease in criminal cases following successful completion.

ACM Gustafson transitioned to innovative service models that met individuals where they were, and he shared the success of Northern Nevada Public Health (NNPH)'s shift to offering walk-in clinic hours. He explained that it was a more flexible and accessible approach to health care, resulting in a 126 percent increase in utilization, with individuals even receiving same-day testing and treatment.

Assistant Sheriff Johnston shared the slide titled *Justice System* and noted that, while his first slide was very busy, it demonstrated just how much was happening across the justice system. He explained that as they continued to divert individuals with behavioral health challenges from the juvenile and adult justice systems into behavioral health and social service systems, all in alignment with the Sequential Intercept Model

(SIM) framework, they began to see several outcomes. He detailed that their Mobile Outreach Safety Team (MOST), which he noted consisted of clinicians working with patrol units, was the first to see individuals in those cases. He stated they had responded to 187 calls for service last year, but that only eight percent of those calls resulted in transportation to the jail or the emergency room. He noted that the Washoe County, Reno, and Sparks Specialty Courts were making a meaningful impact through their treatment and therapeutic programs. He detailed that 432 individuals successfully completed their program, which improved lives and protected public safety. He noted that providing individuals with access to behavioral health treatment also benefited public safety, resulting in a 93 percent reduction in arrests among those diverted and housed. He explained that he was incredibly proud of the detention team and the work they were doing at the detention facility, noting that the Jail-Based Mental Health Unit (JBMHU) had achieved a 40 percent reduction in days spent in custody for participants.

Assistant Sheriff Johnston noted that the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program reduced recidivism by 36 percent, which he described as another example of an effective strategy. He explained the overall effect of the programs, from first interaction with a patrol officer and their MOST team on the streets, to specialty courts and other programs, and then the effort to ensure everyone in detention had the opportunity to work towards wellness. He believed that all of that together helped individuals while resulting in cost avoidance for the County and the community. This, he stated, was what it looked like to successfully invest in diversion and help people move forward to a better outcome.

ACM Gustafson shared the slide titled *What's up Next – Help Stay the Course* and described continuing the current efforts as the best course of action for the future. He detailed that their combination of clinicians, caseworkers, program staff working in human services programs, courts, juvenile justice systems, and the jail, was where the real results were driven. He noted that all the team members were essential to working successfully upstream. He explained that the investments in housing of all kinds continued to be a top priority to meet a significant need. He stated that therapeutic and treatment courts had a long track record of providing meaningful opportunities for participants to improve their lives, while simultaneously enhancing public safety. Regarding treatment measures, he noted that it was early in the County's journey to facilitate direct access to treatment, but that the work was already showing impressive results. He stated that this was the JBMHU and ACT paired with supportive housing at the Cares Campus, the MAT at the jail and in the community, along with Multisystemic therapy (MST) for children within the juvenile justice system and, when necessary and appropriate, AOT for individuals under involuntary civil commitment. He also mentioned the direct safety net of clinical services offered by NNPH. Mentioning the last section of the slide titled *Partners*, he stated that those collaborations were working. He announced that the County was leading or participating in multiple collaborations with a variety of partners because they could not be successful on their own. He specified that the collaborations were working to strengthen early interventions, enhance behavioral health response and assessment, and expand mental health training and resources. He felt the collaborations seemed to be working. He explained that they were seeing a reduction in the reliance of the juvenile

justice and child welfare systems for youth experiencing behavioral health crises. He specified that the SIM initiative and crisis response development, along with coalition facilitation and working on multidisciplinary teams, were making meaningful steps in improving outcomes for both children and adults. He noted it was important that they provided meaningful opportunities for stakeholders and the public to provide input and guidance. He mentioned the Opioid Settlement needs assessment and planning process, along with NNPH's community needs assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), as opportunities for the community to engage, and for the County to benefit from their wisdom.

Judge Walker shared the slide *What's up Next – Level Up Existing Investments* and stated that he wanted to build on two metaphors the Commissioners had heard that day from CM Thomas: one of people drowning in the Truckee River and one of safety nets. He stated that the County needed to keep the nets they currently had and move them upstream to catch people before they entered the metaphorical river, or at least catch them much sooner after they entered it. He explained that what the Commissioners were hearing about was movement from silos to synthesis across the system: behavioral health center, SIM, JBMHU, and the Crisis Response Team (CRT), with screening at all levels for all human beings. He stated that the number one reason he came before the Board was to ask for housing across systems, needs, treatment, and County-based treatment. He mentioned that, in both his and ACM Gustafson's careers, it was very surprising to think of the County as a mental health provider. But, he added, that was the type of change they needed to undertake.

Judge Walker joked that he was lucky to present last in the group presentation. He shared the slide *What's up next?* and stated he appreciated that opportunity because he was proud to live in Washoe County. He explained that he moved from California to Washoe County in late 1982, approximately 44 years ago. He mentioned that he had raised his family in Washoe County and that his entire career had been in northern Nevada, with the majority of it in Washoe County.

Judge Walker stated that from birth through death in someone's life, there were safety nets in the County at every stage. He explained that the County strove to meet people where they were, with their needs addressed when they needed them to be. He suggested there were few other counties Nationwide that did that, and noted he had been to many other counties through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. He stated that the resource Washoe County had in abundance was its people. He explained that if he or Judge Lu got a person out of jail, there was a Deputy Sheriff who would make sure that person had all their medications and clothes and had been fed, or if they had not been fed, the Deputy would get them a meal on their way to the Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS) campus, which he clarified was a State agency where there was a smooth transition to the establishment services at NNAMHS. Then, he added, the Deputy Sheriff and the NNAMHS staff took the individual over to the Cares Campus, where there were amazing case managers.

Judge Walker noted that the County's human capital was the reason they reduced recidivism in that population by 93 percent. He proposed that the County do more outreach to involve them in other agencies and at higher levels in the County. He stated that what was working in the Courts was not himself, but rather the Court Clerks, police on the streets, the public guardians, case managers, social workers, investigators in the Coroner's Office, line people at the school district, bus drivers, whether children had positive pro-social activities at the park near their home, and even the groundskeepers at the park. He described all of those individuals as part of the safety net. He suggested thousands of letters of thanks to the County's human capital, which he felt paid dividends he could not fully describe.

Judge Walker stated that quantifying the exact savings in numbers was difficult, but he was certain they reduced morbidity and mortality in the community, as well as the separation of children from their parents or into juvenile services and then into the prison system. He stated that it saved hundreds of millions of dollars and prevented the County's unmet needs costs from increasing. He reiterated that Washoe County policies worked. He shared the slide titled *What's up Next – Level Up Existing Investments* and encouraged the Board to continue investing in the system and instead of building new things, to improve existing investments, so that, in the metaphor of a net, rather than simply making the net bigger, they would shrink the gaps in the existing net so that fewer people slipped through, and also move the net further upstream in the process to make it more effective.

Judge Walker stated that was the end of the formal presentation but reiterated to the Commissioners that lives were being saved at all levels in the County and that their staff deserved thanks. He also reiterated that what made the courthouse work was not the 16 District Judges, but rather the 200 employees that kept the system working and the paperwork moving. He compared this to the WCSO and told the Commissioners that if they did not know the Detention Services Deputies at the WCSO or the line social workers, the Commissioners should, because those people were remarkable professionals.

Commissioner Hill was excited that the presentation showed that when the County invested in services, there were real outcomes they could celebrate. She felt it also showed the community that when the County invested in people, they would have real opportunities. She asked what was not working and suggested that the County did not have enough permanent supportive housing or treatment options. She stated that the Board understood what they could and could not control, but asked what it would look like if they had more resources to tackle challenges that were preventing them from achieving their goals.

CM Thomas confirmed that there were areas that needed improvement, such as caseworkers following someone once they were housed to ensure they remained housed, rather than adding staff to do so for budget reasons. She also mentioned trying to reduce the number of people being sheltered at the Cares Campus and wondered about shifting some of the caseworkers there or reassigning the number of cases each worker handled to better provide services to individuals who were housed, in order to keep them

housed. She clarified that it was not that the system was not working, nor that the County did everything perfectly, but that they did have staff committed to improving the things that were not working.

CM Thomas noted that it was not necessarily the County's responsibility, but that they took the lead on homeless services, in particular, the emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing. But, she explained, they continued to implore their city representatives to continue to focus on housing resources for the community, as the entire trajectory worked only as long as they had housing in which to place people and caseworkers to keep them there.

ACM Gustafson stated that after COVID-19 (C19), there was a 53 percent reduction in their foster care providers, and they had only seen a 5 percent increase since then. As a result, children had been lingering in shelters or receiving inappropriate levels of care. He mentioned that occasionally this was too high a level of care, as in a Department of Justice (DOJ) lawsuit, or too low a level of care, where children needed enhanced or increased treatment and were not receiving it. He explained that because they did not necessarily have the service array available, it placed increased pressure on the foster care community. He suggested looking at both the foster care community and the mental and behavioral health resources within the community at large. He mentioned the recent purchase of a closed hospital to address this issue and that they were excited about what that would look like over the next year, as it should provide beds for children who needed mental and behavioral health services, such as residential treatment, stabilization, intensive outpatient services, assessment services, and beyond. He stated they were trying to be proactive and address the issues as a community, too. He noted that across the age spectrum, there were places for improvement, such as their waitlist for senior homemakers. He agreed with Judge Walker's assessment that people were the key resources for these improvements.

Commissioner Hill noted they heard that more foster families were needed, but also that those families needed resources once children were placed in their home. She stated that both she and Vice Chair Garcia knew firsthand how difficult it could be and shared that she had been on a wait list for months to find a speech pathologist for her daughter, which she found unacceptable. She agreed that the casework and transition to housing made total sense, and they needed to continue supporting that. She requested more information on specific gaps in the mental and behavioral health resources at a later point. She commended the teams that worked on homelessness and housing. She noted they had, on average, over 68 people per month housed. She mentioned that they were the only part of the State to have grown in workforce and affordable housing. She commended the Cities of Reno and Sparks for doing as much as they could with the resources they had. She asked how the County had doubled the housing capacity for the Cares Campus, which was previously around 30 people a month.

ACM Gustafson stated that it was a concerted effort across programs, including between homeless outreach teams, getting PSH onboarded, working with partners, and setting up another building on campus to provide additional housing units.

He stated it was helpful to partner with community housing providers to determine where volume was and where available units were, and to leverage all that as efficiently as possible.

Judge Walker referred to the statistics from Juvenile Services and the Human Services Agency (HSA), and advised that they keep in mind that if a child was removed from the care, custody, and control of their family, they then ended up in the foster care system or child delinquency system, which made it four to seven times more likely the child would end up in prison as an adult. He suggested that one way to avoid needing those beds and the money spent on juvenile services and human services was to avoid those removals of children. He described the move to provide wraparound services at the HSA that ACM Gustafson and his predecessors had made as a genius choice. Judge Walker stated that this resulted in fewer children being removed from their parents. He noted that children did better with their parents, even if those parents had significant challenges. He clarified that there were remarkable foster families, and that foster-to-adoption was wonderful for children, but outside of that, children did better with their families of origin. This, he explained, was what he meant by the metaphor of upstream nets. Judge Walker stated that Washoe County's juvenile probation department was a nationally leading department and suggested that the Commissioners should continue funding it to serve as a net to reduce the number of children who would need to be placed downstream.

Chair Andriola mentioned that, having spent ten years with foster children, even though a situation could seem heart-wrenching from the outside looking in, for the children, it was the family they knew and loved, which was a tie one could not replicate.

ACM Gustafson stated that when he came to the County in 2017, the County was removing nearly 1,000 children a year from their homes. He added that in the previous fiscal year, the number was approximately 300.

Chair Andriola stated that in 2015, she witnessed the Kids Kottage being full, sometimes to the point of seemingly overflowing, and the capacity had gone from overflowing to almost negligible in the time since. So, she felt, it was important for the presenters to have shared where the resources were needed.

Vice Chair Garcia expressed appreciation for the slide that showed the continuum of people, housing courts, and treatment partners. She noted it was clear there were a number of systemic issues the County faced, along with the State of Nevada, including a shortage of mental health providers. She clarified that this was not only about recruiting and training providers, but also about retaining them. She stated the job was very tough, from a street-level case manager to a highly certified and trained clinician. She expressed that it kept her awake at night because the County could provide the best ecosystem for the system to work, but it would not succeed without those key personnel to drive outcomes. She noted there was training space in their new facility and was excited to hear more about those efforts, but that the County would have to rely on its regional partners to help, as the County could not do it all. She wondered how to frame the matter for constituents. She shared that, for an easy metric to illustrate the power of being

proactive versus reactive, she often cited the cost of keeping an inmate in jail per day. She stated that Undersheriff Corey Solferino appeared before the Board in December, when he stated that full services ranged from \$500 to \$800 per day. She asked where else in the County's services they could show something that would resonate with constituents. She felt the question did not need to be answered that day, but that, overall, they needed to be better storytellers who could quantify their outcomes rather than simply rely on the jail metric. She suggested tying youth services to high school graduation rate outcomes as an example and encouraged staff to look through different lenses so that, when talking to constituents at the grocery store, they had quick stories to refer to and make abstract concepts concrete.

CM Thomas added that as they shifted into that mindset, they also needed to define metrics and collect data to articulate each story. She agreed with Vice Chair Garcia that when they needed to explain to the community that the programs were working, they should tell them a dollar amount saved, a number of hours saved, and other facts.

Chair Andriola shared her final point: that collaborations were important to avoid Washoe County being responsible for everything. She highlighted the recent partnership between the Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) as a good collaboration, noting that they were the only County in the entire State of Nevada to have it. She explained that the VSOs went to the Senior Center two days a week, and then alternated the other two days at the Cares Campus. She stated that between January 12 and the end of February, this equated to \$300,000 in identified benefits for eligible veterans. She expressed that this was helping not only with immediate needs but also in the long term, by transitioning people from the Cares Campus to permanent housing and into a productive life. She referred to ACM Gustafson's metric that 427 seniors were served at the Cares Campus, of whom 51 were veterans. She suggested multiplying those numbers over the years and imagining the County closing the loops in the net.

Chair Andriola suggested to ACM Gustafson that there was a lot of misinformation regarding the Cares Campus costs, essentially that they were helping many people from out of State with cost numbers that were not accurate, and requested clarification.

ACM Gustafson stated that staff had been conducting a deeper dive on a quarterly basis to review the numbers. He explained that in the previous quarter, 600 new participants entered their programs, with about 15 percent coming from outside Washoe County. He stated that the vast majority being served were from Washoe County, with approximately 100 people coming from outside the County, and most of those still coming from within Nevada, with a large portion of those 100 coming from Las Vegas. For out-of-state individuals, he noted that most were from California, accounting for 15 to 16 percent of those coming from outside the community. He reiterated that 85 percent of the individuals being served on the Cares Campus were from Washoe County.

Chair Andriola joked that they should call themselves the Washoe County silo busters and that they could thank the SIM for a major part of that. She suggested that

all the Commissioners agreed to stay on the current course and to also look at resources and technology to be more efficient. She pointed out the HSA newsletter that went out in April, which included many of the statistics and information that had been shared. She felt the County was committed to sharing facts and information, which people could access. She stated that suggestions based on the information were always welcome.

Commissioner Clark asked ACM Gustafson how much one individual per day at the Cares Campus cost. ACM Gustafson thought it was around \$71 a day. Chair Andriola compared to the number to the \$500 a day for jail. Commissioner Clark specified that he was comparing that number to the estimated number of people from outside Washoe County that were being served. Commissioner Hill noted that one could not get a motel room in town for that price, because the motel room also had the room tax added, and that it was incredible what the County team was doing with so few resources.

Chair Andriola reiterated the need to thank all the staff they did not see every day for doing the heavy lifting.

10:05 a.m. **The Board recessed.**

10:15 a.m. **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Washoe County Regional Animal Services (WCRAS) Director Shyanne Schull, Washoe County Public Administrator Nicole Klitzke, Public Guardian Tracey Bowles, and ACM David Solaro conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Public Education as a Service Diversion Strategy; Discussion Flow; Knowledge is Power; Serving Smarter: Community-Based Solutions; Pathways to Reunification; Power in Proactivity; Public Administrator Why Diversion Matters; Public Administrator How Education Helps; Guardianship Is Overused and Often Preventable; How Education Helps Divert or Prevent Unnecessary Guardianship; Power of Education; Commission Direction

CM Thomas stated that the presenters' departments worked outside of the human service realm and incurred significant costs. She noted that there were many points to consider, such as job duties, staffing, and infrastructure, which would be discussed during a future workshop. She mentioned that the goal of the workshops was to highlight various departments that typically would not present at the regular Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meetings.

ACM Solaro said the discussion focused on public education as a diversion strategy, related successes, and steps some departments were taking to change the narrative around when services were provided and how the community supported itself. He introduced the speakers and noted that they were not regular presenters during BCC meetings.

ACM Solaro reviewed the slide titled *Knowledge is Power* and said the focus was on education, with examples of different ways to provide services to reduce the

need for them in the future. He mentioned that many departments worked proactively to anticipate citizens' service needs, which reduced government bureaucracy, but he believed that was not enough. He said that while citizens made everyday choices, they were often unaware of simple actions that could benefit future generations. He said the County aimed to reduce the government's role as a safety net. He stated that the Envision Washoe County 2040 Master Plan, adopted by Washoe County, included an entire section in which community feedback was collected, and part of that feedback was that citizens wanted to be resilient. He thought that many defined resiliency as overcoming challenges, adapting and recovering, having multifaceted strengths, and ensuring longevity. He believed that those steps could be achieved if the County provided education so the community could be empowered to make its own decisions. He indicated that making good decisions to help themselves in the future would prevent the County from having to provide services. He suggested that it would alleviate overwhelming stress and would allow departments to focus on their core missions to help those in need. He mentioned that the community wanted to be resilient and provide for their families, but might be unsure where to begin finding the appropriate resources. He stated that the presentation aimed to provide education to community members.

Ms. Schull reviewed the slide titled *Serving Smarter: Community-Based Solutions* and said she was happy to share some of the proactive principles the WCRAS had implemented over the years. She thought most people would be aware that the County could not build enough space to meet all the community's needs, including the animal shelter. She shared that it was unlikely that a larger shelter could be built, that enough staff could be hired, or that more animals could be impounded. Alternatively, she wondered how the County could be more efficient with its current resources and how the community could be educated to help. She indicated that many of the WCRAS's services were proactive and added that many programs were in place to help prevent animals from entering shelters, such as spaying, neutering, and affordable vaccines. She said that much of their work was geared toward education and proactivity, but she would focus on lost-and-found animals. She stated that it was scientifically proven that one in three pets would become lost at some point in their lifetime. She felt that was empowering data for the community to know and understand, because most people likely thought it would never happen to them. She clarified that losing a pet could happen to anyone. She said that it was incumbent on the WCRAS to help the community understand the risks, how the community could help, and what the WCRAS could do to provide the tools and resources to help the community be proactive.

Ms. Schull shared that she despised the terms *dog catcher* and *dog pound* and noted that the industry had worked hard over the last 20 years to transition from those terms to *animal services officer* and *animal shelter* or *animal resource center*. She mentioned that animal services officers were out in the community as professionals and resource providers to engage with the community. She said that the WCRAS did not want to impound animals and preferred that they stay at home, where they belonged. She shared that there were proactive programs that supported lost-and-found services through actionable steps. She felt that the programs would equip the community with tools and resources, as well as tips to prevent pets from escaping. She explained that oftentimes,

when officers responded to a call for a loose animal, it was not that the pet owner was irresponsible or neglecting their pet, but that they might not necessarily have the resources or the knowledge to keep their pet contained. She thought that many people might not realize that if pets were not spayed or neutered, they were more likely to roam, dig under or climb over fences, or chew the fence to escape the yard. She mentioned that the information was common knowledge among staff, who shared it with the community to help them understand the easy steps they could take to keep those pets contained. She emphasized the importance of securing fences and gates when children returned to school in the fall or late summer, as fences were often left open, leading to an uptick in loose animals.

Ms. Schull emphasized the importance of having current photos of pets to help get pets reunited if they became separated. She said that a quick and easy step to help a pet be reunited was to create a contact in one's phone with their pet's photo, microchip number, and any other identifying information, with easily accessible information if the pet was lost. She noted that WCRAS's website included tools and resources on what to do if someone lost or found a pet. She thought it was easier for the community to be self-serving and reminded people that when filing a lost report, they should add a photo of their pet to the website. She said the goal was for the shelter not to be the place every lost pet had to go and added that animals did not belong in the system but with their families.

Ms. Schull reviewed the slide titled *Pathways to Reunification* and said she wanted to share programs that had been implemented successfully through education and proactivity. She noted that free microchips had been available in the community since 2011 and added that the BCC approved the free program at that time. She stated that just under 40,000 dogs and cats had been microchipped since 2011. She mentioned that in the last five years, 11,667 dogs and cats had been microchipped, and that the WCRAS had returned just over 9,600 of them via microchip. She said that although the program was successful, some people still needed to be convinced to use it. She noted that some individuals believed the microchip might contain a tracker, but clarified that it was a permanent identification (ID) tool to help reunite pets with their owners. She believed that external ID was equally important as the permanently implanted microchip, and also helped get animals who were lost back home. She explained that most good Samaritans did not have a microchip scanner readily available. She said that if a pet had an external ID, it would hopefully empower the community to reunite the pet without contacting the WCRAS. She stated that the shelter had a tag engraver obtained through a grant, enabling Washoe County residents to make free personalized pet ID tags. She shared that the self-serving, lost-and-found reporting system made it easy for people to report their lost pet or to know what to do when they came across one. She explained that statistics showed that pets did not wander more than half a mile from home, so keeping the pet in the neighborhood and walking door to door to see if someone knew who the pet owner was often proved very beneficial.

Ms. Schull said that if a dog was wearing a tag, the back of the tag had a phone number to contact the hotline, which provided information to help the owner hopefully get the animal reunited. She indicated that since joining the current vendor, DocuPet, for licensing, approximately 200 pets per year never made it into the shelter and

were directly reunited in the field via their tags. She explained that there were 20 free, self-serving microchip scanning stations throughout Washoe County. She added that there were microchip scanning stations at each Pet Station store, every Truckee Meadows Fire Station, and at Options Veterinary Care. She mentioned that the microchip stations were set up to be self-service, so if an individual found a dog or a cat, they could scan the pet, and there were prompts to direct them on how to contact the company to put them in touch with the owner. She said that, unfortunately, there was no tangible way to know how many of those pets were reunified, because there was no way to track that statistic.

Ms. Schull reviewed the slide titled *Power in Proactivity* and said the tangible results of proactive programs and community education were reflected in the outcomes. She felt that many results could be attributed to the shelter diversion. She explained that both the human and pet populations in the community had increased over the past five years. She noted that in 2021, there were about 251,000 dogs and cats, compared to an estimated 266,000 currently. She suggested that, as one might expect, there would be higher call volumes and more animals needing shelter. She mentioned that while calls for service had increased, the number of animals coming into the shelter had decreased by 13.5 percent. She said that could be attributed to the empowerment given to the community to reunite pets rather than bring them to animal services. She indicated that there had been savings in resources by not impounding and sheltering animals, and by caring for them until they could be adopted or returned to their owners. She shared that the community had been self-sufficient and that the \$176,000 shown on the slide was a conservative estimate of savings from animals diverted from the shelter. She stated that, generally, there were higher savings for animals that were returned in the field and never entered the shelter by way of microchip or ID. She believed that leading with education would not only solve current problems but would also prevent future issues by equipping the community with the tools and knowledge needed to create a lasting impact, stronger partnerships, and better outcomes for people and pets.

Ms. Klitzke reviewed the slide titled *Public Administrator Why Diversion Matters* and reported that in 2025, the Public Administrator's Office received over 340 referrals, of which only 52 had estate plans in place, allowing the office to identify the qualified individual chosen by the decedent to administer their final affairs. She noted that in 2026, 116 referrals were received, and only 17 of those had estate plans in place. She explained that estate plans allowed staff to turn over the decedent's affairs to the person that the decedent chose to handle them, which lessened the burden on the Public Administrator's Office. She shared that educating the public on wills and trusts could reduce and streamline most preventable cases, and ensure resources were focused on residents who truly had no one else to act on their behalf. She mentioned that even when the Public Administrator's Office stepped in, cases with estate planning in place offered benefits such as easier asset location, clearly defined beneficiaries, and less time spent on investigations. She commented that the Public Administrator's Office could provide practical advice to constituents, such as what to do with wills or trusts and how to store them to make them easier for their loved ones to locate, to avoid unnecessary delays. She added that her office could also share cautionary scenarios to show people exactly what would happen when there was no estate plan in place, and the importance of having one.

She shared that the Public Administrator's Office could not provide legal advice and suggested that, in the future, there may be opportunities to partner with other County departments to convey important information to constituents.

Ms. Bowles reviewed the slide titled *Public Administrator How Education Helps* and said the theme for services provided in the community for both animals and people was the need for future planning and education. She thought that other County departments had experienced similar trends, with workloads increasing while staffing levels remained unchanged. She explained that it required departments to be more proactive in continuing their work effectively and to utilize diverse skills and tools. She noted that education helped raise awareness of guardianship, estate planning, and pet protection.

Ms. Bowles reviewed the slide titled *Guardianship Is Overused and Often Preventable* and said that guardianship was often misunderstood. She mentioned that most people were referred to guardianship by a banker or a doctor, who knew little about guardianship and likely saw it as a way to access an account or to obtain a medical consent form. She explained that guardianship was far more involved than that and added that it was a restriction of a person's civil liberties and constitutional rights. She clarified that instead of looking at it as a tool to get something accomplished for an institution or a system, it should be viewed as a tool to protect or support an individual, and it should only be used if no other option was available. She described guardianship as a costly and complex legal process, and noted that when families disagreed, litigation could be involved. She said that guardianship did not solve all problems in the community and did not fill resource gaps, even though many people looked to it to do so. She believed that if staff could provide education, it could both reduce referrals to the office and give people in the community options to solve problems independently, retain their rights, and have the family members they want involved continue to be involved in their lives.

Ms. Bowles reviewed the slide titled *How Education Helps Divert or Prevent Unnecessary Guardianship* and said one of the areas of focus for education was to ensure that people understood what guardianship was. She shared that guardianship was a process that could limit a person's rights and liberties and was established for decision-making purposes. She emphasized the importance of helping community partners understand guardianship so they could communicate with community members seeking systems or organizations to solve specific problems. She said that while guardianship was a tool that could be used, it certainly was not a panacea for all the problems. She remarked that education about what capacity looked like and what limited capacity looked like was important. She indicated that the State of Nevada had done some really great work by codifying supported decision-making into law, unlike in many other states. She mentioned that Nevada had a lockbox where power of attorney (POA) and guardianship nominations could be filed and were accessible to medical providers in the community. She felt that the job of the Public Guardian's Office was not only to assist with guardianship, but also to educate the community on available tools to empower community members. She emphasized the importance of understanding the limitations of guardianship, noting that although a public guardian could help make decisions, they could not prevent people from

making poor ones. She suggested that families were concerned about serving as guardians because they believed it meant controlling their loved one, which they did not want. She clarified that controlling a person was not the public guardian's job. She believed that other services were available so that, if someone made a poor decision, those services could help them make better decisions in the future. She noted that staff often discussed guardianship with organizations that served the same populations, such as hospitals, Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority Health (REMSA Health), homeless services, and Northern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services (NNAMHS), to help educate not only about what guardianship was, but also about the least restrictive alternatives. She explained that planning for who would make decisions when someone could not do so did not start when someone was in a hospital or referred to guardianship. She clarified that those decisions needed to be made early in estate planning. She believed there were opportunities to talk to people about advanced planning for themselves or their families, and that it was important to start that process early, when individuals were first encountered in places such as hospitals, jails, and shelters.

Ms. Bowles reviewed the slide titled *Power of Education* and said that the Washoe County multidisciplinary team meeting was hosted by the State of Nevada Adult Protective Services Organization. She noted that her staff did not like it when she attended the meeting because she returned to the office with a stack of new guardianship referral cases. She felt that proactive steps had been taken by inviting public and private partners to attend the meeting to submit referrals, rather than contacting her office directly. She explained that the group included people from Washoe County, multiple County departments, multiple State agencies, private partners, hospitals, REMSA Health, and Medicaid. She commented that she had educated many organizations about guardianship and the less restrictive alternatives. She noted that private partners who provided the less restrictive alternatives were invited to join the group to provide information and, if their caseload allowed, to offer services. She felt that the group recognized that guardianship should be a last resort and that, if needed, family and friends should be selected as guardians, since they were the most familiar with the person. She shared that since she did not know each person she was appointed as guardian to, she thought it put her in a very different position to make those decisions. She explained that the group had been able to redirect services to individuals' homes, which reduced the number of difficult guardianship referrals her office received. She noted that there was protection within that group and a statute that made discussions confidential, which she felt protected the individuals whose cases were discussed amongst the group. She shared a recent example in which, after discussing options with a family who had a mentally ill son, it became clear that guardianship should not be the first choice and that there were less restrictive alternatives. She shared that after educating the family, they chose the less restrictive alternative, recognizing that the option might not work forever, but it allowed the individual, who had just turned 18, to keep his rights intact and make decisions while his family supported him. She reiterated the importance of using community education to share available tools, information, and support for individuals. She suggested that services were provided in the County that individuals could likely handle on their own.

ACM Solaro requested a Board discussion to define their vision of success in empowering the community to take care of themselves rather than relying on the government. He indicated that there were situations in which the County provided services on an emergency basis, which then led to day-to-day services that the community expected the government to provide. He shared that the County lacked available resources and added that if the community could be empowered to help itself, the County could determine how to assist where possible. He thought there were likely many services that could be self-serving rather than diverting many resources to decision-making for one person. He thought a point of discussion was how the County could help educate its citizens to be more self-sufficient. He stated that based on survey results, the community had asked for the government to be less involved. He asked the Board what their vision was for creating strategic programs within Washoe County.

Commissioner Hill asked the Public Administrator whether members of the public could be referred to estate attorneys rather than directed to the County.

Ms. Klitzke remarked that some cases would be referred to someone else, but it would depend on the family. She explained that after the Public Administrator's Office received a referral from the Medical Examiner's (ME) Office, they would contact the family, and oftentimes the families decided not to proceed. She noted that when families chose not to involve the government, those families would contact private attorneys, and the Public Administrator's Office would release the case. She shared a current case where the decedent had been living in his home with his stepdaughter. She mentioned that, since there was no will in place, the stepdaughter was being forced to leave her home. She said that, since there was no will, the Public Administrator's Office would need to determine what to do with the home. She indicated that, due to a lack of funding, her office was unable to conduct research to identify the decedent's living family members. She explained that once the home was sold, those funds could be used to locate family members and then send the profit from that sale to the family. She stated that when a will was in place, the named administrator or trustees would be contacted and assets would be turned over to them.

Commissioner Hill wondered whether there was an opportunity for the Board to advocate at the State level to make it easier for individuals to create their own wills. Ms. Klitzke mentioned that she would love to see legislation that would allow wills to be stored in a lockbox, as previously noted by Ms. Bowles. She stated that the option was currently limited to medical directives for living wills but did not extend to all wills or trusts.

Commissioner Hill thought that could be a future Bill Draft Request (BDR). She said that she empathized with the presenters and acknowledged the difficulty of their work. She suggested that, for their offices to be effective, staff needed to be active in the community by making connections and building relationships with community members and groups, which she believed could be exhausting. She shared her admiration for the work being done. She explained that the presentations left her better informed to advocate and communicate with the community about available resources and possible alternatives.

She expressed excitement about the microchip scanners, which she felt would reduce the number of lost pets, and asked whether the scanners were located indoors.

Ms. Schull said that the self-serving microchip stations were located indoors and protected from the elements. She added that instructions were provided to make them easy for the public to use. Commissioner Hill shared that she had previously dropped off lost dogs at the after-hours drop box and wondered whether there was an outdoor scanner that would allow the public to contact someone. Ms. Schull replied that there was not. She mentioned that a microchip scanner was available in the shelter's night drop boxes, but it would not be useful to citizens because the access code was not shared publicly and was intended only for law enforcement partners and emergency veterinary hospitals. She mentioned that the WCRAS staff were on duty until 10:00 p.m. daily and were available to scan microchips. Commissioner Hill thanked Ms. Schull for the hard work.

Vice Chair Garcia acknowledged that some of the presenters had been employed by the County for many years and thanked them for their service. She suggested that roles evolved as the populations increased. She indicated that many County departments maintained websites with frequently asked questions (FAQs) and asked how information was communicated to the public.

Ms. Bowles mentioned that she had requested to work with the Communications Department to leverage her messaging on a larger platform, which she hoped to accomplish over the coming months. She shared that she served on the State of Nevada Guardianship Commission and had also helped establish the Nevada Network, a network of National Guardianship Association members across Nevada working together. She mentioned that her office operated as a public service agency, responding to public inquiries about guardianship and providing the necessary information.

Ms. Klitzke shared that her office was not public-facing and that members of the public did not contact her office for assistance after someone had passed away. She noted that her office did not provide wills or trust services, which was why it was seeking to partner with other departments that could engage with the public and assist with those programs.

Chair Andriola echoed her thanks to the presenters for the updates that were provided. She emphasized the importance of workshops because she believed they provided in-depth information to the public. She thought there were opportunities to share communications, such as at the Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) meetings, and added that it would be helpful to include FAQs in the CAB packets. She noted that although she could not provide all of the answers right away, there were tools available. She recognized that the staff was looking to leverage partnerships to not add another layer of cost. She shared her support for providing all the statistics to law enforcement and fire at the CAB meetings, which were directly related to each community. She noted that the information was provided in a packet and included hyperlinks for the various departments. She acknowledged that the WCRAS had attended the CAB meeting in Spanish Springs but felt there were other opportunities. She said that communication was important, and

oftentimes, important information could be shared that the public might not be aware of. She emphasized the importance of thinking creatively and being proactive versus reactive. She thanked the presenters and acknowledged that most of what was being shared was likely not known to the community.

Chair Andriola indicated that there were many difficult conversations with families regarding estate planning that most would try to avoid. She shared a personal story about when her family met with an estate attorney, who said such meetings were not typically held with the children. She believed it was important for the children to hear the information directly from the attorney. She mentioned that although the topic could be difficult to discuss, she believed it was important to be proactive and prepared for something many did not necessarily want to face. She suggested that more County departments take advantage of opportunities to share information and use the CAB meeting packets to include hyperlinks. She acknowledged that CM Thomas had likely heard many times that the County needed to improve how it shared information and the critical role of staff in communication.

Chair Andriola thanked the presenters and their staff and hoped to continue seeing more topics shared that did not typically get discussed. She invited the presenters to attend CAB meetings to share their important information. She acknowledged that society was one of pictures and headlines, and that no one took the time to read. She suggested that County departments prepare short videos covering FAQs and other important information. She emphasized the success of the Washoe County Checkbook, noting how many people accessed the information and used the video and tutorial. She expressed her appreciation for the presenters and thanked them and their teams for the valuable information they shared.

CM Thomas indicated that the next topic would be reimagining County hiring and recruitment.

11:02 a.m. **The Board recessed.**

11:04 a.m. **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Chair Andriola believed that the County's lack of turnover was a testament to Human Resources' (HRs) hard work. She noted that the presentations covered only a small portion of what all County departments did. She expressed excitement about hearing the HR presentation. CM Thomas indicated that the County's performance began with the staff. She recalled that the strategic plan was built based on the budget process. She hoped that everyone understood that the budget plan supported strategic development to ensure resources in the future. She reported that employees were the County's highest cost; therefore, she had created a set of goals related to operational excellence, culture, and workforce. She thought it was important to prioritize recruitment, retention, and stability to foster a positive internal environment. She wanted the County to be an employer of choice that focused on culture, effective communication, employee wellness, and quality

public service, while fostering a fair and safe workplace. She speculated that the only way to achieve her goals was for everyone to work together.

Chief HR Officer Patricia Hurley, HR Division Director Julie Paholke, and Senior HR Business Partner Indu Moore conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Reimagining County Hiring & Recruitment; Discussion Flow (slide 36), Strengthening Recruitment to Deliver on County Priorities; Enhancing Recruitment to Strengthen Workforce Alignment; Recruitment Process Overview; Minimum Qualifications – a collaborative process; Screening Process; Examination & Referral Process; Hiring Process Evolution; Leveraging NeoGov for Efficiency; Unproctored Testing; Soft Skill Exams; Impacts in Last 5 Years (2 slides); What's Next?; Partnering with Community; Commission Direction (slide 51).

Ms. Hurley read from the *Discussion Flow* slide and stated that strengthening recruitment was important because it directly impacted the County's ability to hire, attract, and provide quality service to the community, as well as enhance Washoe County's reputation as an employer of choice. She believed the County needed to attract and retain the right people the first time, meaning recruiting top candidates who not only met the experience and training requirements but also possessed critical soft skills that drove success. She said that the skills needed included communication, accountability, adaptability, problem-solving, and customer service. She opined that, with the previously stated skills, there was an opportunity to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency in the recruitment process while aligning hiring with the County's mission and service expectations. She noted that the County wanted to build a healthy, productive workforce and a positive organizational culture while meeting community needs. She said that Washoe County's recruitment practices used a balanced approach to hiring by researching minimum qualifications as a baseline while also considering power and soft skills. She felt those skills were the differentiators that set the applicant apart. She explained that by enhancing the recruitment process and improving candidate evaluations and selection models with consistent department-wide standards, efficiencies were created in the hiring process.

Ms. Paholke read from the *Recruitment Process Overview* slide and noted that the recruitment process began when a department notified HR of a vacancy. She said that if an eligible candidate list was ready, HR would provide it to the department to begin the interview process. She explained that if no eligible process list was available, HR worked with the department regarding a recruitment plan that included minimum qualifications, job description, ideal candidate, and timeline. She said that once the candidates applied, HR screened them to understand who qualified for the testing process. She indicated that the minimum time for HR to recruit was 10 days due to collective bargaining unit agreements. She relayed that once the recruitment plan was decided, the merit system required by Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) required the County to test for positions, due to Washoe County having a population of over 100,000 individuals. She clarified that not every position received a test; however, there were Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Department of Labor (DOL) requirements that the recruitment and selection process be job-related.

Ms. Moore referred to the *Minimum Qualifications – a collaborative process* slide and reiterated that once HR was notified of a vacancy, they worked with the hiring department to develop the recruitment plan. She said the recruitment process between HR and the hiring department was collaborative. She explained that if the position was a new classification, such as a new class specification or job description that included the development of minimum qualifications, HR relied on departments for their technical subject-matter expertise. She noted that if the position was an existing classification, HR reviewed the class specification and minimum qualifications to make any necessary updates. She said that HR worked with the department to determine what they were looking for in their ideal candidate, such as key skills and qualifications needed for success, and what may have been missed in previous recruitments. She indicated that HR researched the position using O*NET OnLine, a database of occupational information organized by the DOL. She said that HR researched comparable jobs in other cities and county jurisdictions. She reported that most minimum qualifications included an equivalency statement that broadened the qualifications, such as stating that if a degree was required and an applicant did not have one, HR would accept additional work experience to substitute for the degree.

Ms. Moore read from the slide titled *Screening Process*. She noted that when an applicant submitted an online application, the HR Business Partner screened it, and, if unsure whether the applicant met the minimum qualifications, the HR Business Partner partnered with the department's subject-matter expert for input and feedback. She said that once a determination was made based on the application, the candidate was notified via email. She mentioned that if an applicant was disqualified, their notice would advise them of the appeal process and inform them that they could submit an appeal with clarifying information to demonstrate why they met the minimum qualifications. She referred to the *Examination & Referral Process* slide and stated that, once the appeal process concluded, qualified candidates were invited to participate in the examination. She indicated that if HR received fewer than 20 candidates, the exam was waived; otherwise, the exam could be administered remotely, or a performance exam could be held to test candidates on job-simulated exercises. She said that once the exams were scored, a ranked, eligible list consisting of both internal and external candidates would be created, and the top-ranked candidates would be referred to the department for an interview.

Ms. Paholke referenced the *Hiring Process Evolution* slide and noted that HR had made significant changes to the recruitment process since 2020, including transitioning to NeoGov, an online recruitment system specifically for the public sector. She said that in 2021, HR implemented computer-based testing, replacing the Scantron testing the County had used previously. She recalled that in 2022, HR developed the Washoe County Handbook using the merit code to consolidate all recruitment-related materials, enabling greater efficiency and flexibility. She said that an example of merit code from the 1970s was when, regardless of whether a candidate qualified or not, they were provided with seven days' notice to appeal, test, or interview; however, there was more access to technology now compared to having to rely on the United States Postal Service (USPS). She explained that with more technology, timelines were shorter, allowing HR to process more quickly. She said that in 2023, HR launched an unproctored remote testing process that allowed candidates to take the exam via a link. She pointed out that

candidates from all over the Country were now able to take the exam. She said that in 2024, HR changed the recruitment frequency because many departments used clerical series classifications. Instead of waiting for the department to say they needed a position filled, she indicated that HR recruited regularly for the position without needing to be alerted by the department for testing. She asserted that the new supervisory exam was designed to focus on supervisory concepts and soft skills. She said that in 2026, HR moved from an analyst role to a business partner role so that HR could work with departments before vacancies, while still assisting with interviews and candidate selection.

Ms. Paholke read from the *Leveraging NeoGov for Efficiency* slide. She indicated that there were many technological advances to the recruitment system, including the ability to text applicants, interview self-screening that allowed departments to schedule interviews, and online testing that helped HR expedite the process by getting results out and creating the list quickly using NeoGov. She said that NeoGov was affiliated with GovernmentJobs.com. She reported that HR researched where candidates heard about County jobs because they believed that it was important to know where to advertise. She said that the highest number of candidates, 32 percent, found the job posting via GovernmentJobs.com.

Ms. Moore referenced the *Unproctored Testing* slide and noted that in 2023, HR moved to unproctored remote testing with a new exam vendor. She said that some benefits of unproctored remote testing included increased accessibility for candidates because they no longer needed to take time off work to take the exams. She believed that with the new testing service, HR could reach a broader pool of out-of-state candidates who did not have to travel to take the exam or interview. She asserted that HR identified a significant improvement in candidate attrition rates, attributing it to candidates not having to take time off work. She said there was an increase in efficiency, including better use of staff resources, cost savings for departments, and a quicker turnaround of eligible lists to the hiring department. She mentioned that the remote testing model enabled progressive advancement for the County by eliminating the need for pencils and Scantrons, which aligned the County with industry standards. She reported that the testing received positive feedback from both hiring departments and candidates because candidates enjoyed a more efficient, convenient process, while hiring departments interviewed candidates more quickly.

Ms. Moore read from the slide titled *Soft Skill Exams* and explained that in 2023, HR implemented a newly designed professional-level exam, administered remotely, with an increased focus on assessing candidates' soft skills. She recalled that HR created technical, job-specific exams for certain recruitments, and since the minimum qualifications were already assessed, applicants were only tested on their technical and soft skills. She believed that the new process removed repeated evaluations. She reported that the new process was more efficient, as the professional-level exam could be used across multiple positions. She said that the applicant did not have to take the exam for different recruitments within a set period, as the professional-level exam could be used for entry-level to mid-level recruitments to assess soft skills such as basic reasoning, situational judgment, conflict resolution, customer service, and interpersonal skills. She pointed out

that in 2025, HR developed a new supervisory-level exam, administered remotely, which assessed broader supervisory concepts, including the soft skills needed to be an effective supervisor.

Ms. Hurley read from the first slide titled *Impacts in Last 5 Years* and believed that leveraging technology had been impactful. She said that the Technology Services (TS) team had worked closely with HR and NeoGov. She reported that the County received an average of 11,500 applications per year, over the past five years, with 32 percent of candidates finding the position on GovernmentJobs.com, 27 percent hearing about the job from the County's website, and 1,100 being referred by County employees. She noted that the recruitment process used to take three to four weeks but now only takes a couple of days. She said that class specifications were still being updated in case there was a change in the vacancy. She asserted that the County's retention rate was excellent, with the vacancy and turnover rates remaining strong over the past five years. She clarified that there was turnover, but that it was due to staff being promoted rather than leaving the County. She said the vacancy rates remained strong because positions were being filled internally. She referred to the second slide titled *Impacts in the Last 5 Years* and pointed out the *Vacancy Rate* graph, which showed that vacancy rates had decreased.

Ms. Moore referred to the *What's Next?* slide and expressed excitement for the upcoming and continued improvements to the recruitment and selection process. She reported that HR recently reached out to Clark County to learn more about their recruitment selection process because they were bound to the same merit process as the County. She said that HR initiated a pilot program with NeoGov to screen applications and rank candidates. She explained that the candidate names would be provided to departments for interviews, with the interviews serving as the exam, and that the candidates would be ranked and scored to select the top candidate. She said that HR placed increased focus on using various NeoGov tools to improve efficiency, as NeoGov adapted to users' needs and requests and continually created new tools to enhance processing. She noted that HR collaborated with TS to create an internal services group to gather feedback on persistent problems in the recruitment and selection process, thereby better assisting the County in identifying gaps. She said that HR was also developing a pulse survey to provide to new employees during new-employee orientation to gather feedback on their experiences during both the recruitment and onboarding processes. She said approximately 13 percent of the workforce was eligible to retire over the next five years, prompting HR to place greater focus on succession planning and mentorship opportunities for employees. She relayed that HR had also partnered with colleges regarding job fairs and internships for County departments. She said that by including departments at the job fair, interested candidates could speak directly with subject-matter experts.

Ms. Hurley read from the *Partnering with Community* slide and indicated that HR hosts internal and external resume-writing and interview-skills training a few times a year. She said that the internal class would be available in April, June, and September that year. She recalled that in 2022, HR hosted 15 sessions. She recalled past conversations with Ms. Bowles, who had asked why the sessions were only held internally. She said that HR, in partnership with the community and the HSA, held a session in March for graduates

and interns interested in becoming caseworkers. She said that after the sessions, the attendees could apply to the County because they had a better understanding of the system and the recruitment process. She announced that a public session would be held on May 28 for anyone interested.

CM Thomas indicated that, during the almost nine years she had been with the County, she had never received a complete, immersive explanation of how the County hired employees. She expressed appreciation toward the HR staff for explaining the process. She said that the staff looked to the Board as leaders and policymakers, and while the Board did not work individually with all levels of the organization, she, as the CM, did. She explained that the County wanted to know what the Board felt Washoe County employees exemplified and what they would like to see from staff. She recalled that transparency was the Board's highest priority and felt that gathering information during the workshop was essential.

Vice Chair Garcia indicated that losing institutional knowledge was a significant loss for the County because departments had to wait and waste money until the next great person was hired. She asked whether staff were required to share projected retirement dates and if HR was researching employees who had been with the County for roughly 30 years. Ms. Paholke said that staff were not required to share projected retirement dates; however, many did. She reported that 13 percent of staff were eligible projected retirees. Ms. Hurley said that HR was working with TS to develop a workforce development tool that predicted whether someone was likely to retire based on years of service and age. She noted that when using the tool, nearly all facility technicians were close to retirement, which allowed the department to plan and be more proactive in recruitment. She relayed that the minimum notice HR had received of a retirement was two weeks; however, most employees provided more advance notice.

Vice Chair Garcia indicated that there were 26 open positions. She believed there were difficult positions to fill, such as registered nurse positions in Juvenile Services. She asked whether HR did anything for positions that were frequently opened. Ms. Hurley believed that frequent position openings were a reason for the classification and compensation study and enabled the County to better understand what they could do with the current compensation market. She said that it was difficult to compete with the private sector's nursing pay. She explained that the Juvenile Services nurse was a straight-to-hire position because, as a nurse, the individual would already be licensed and would not need testing. She recalled that the County had registered nurses and hoped they could contract with the jail for the Juvenile Services position. She said that when a position was challenging to fill, they asked the department to reconsider the minimum qualifications because sometimes looking for an enthusiastic individual who could be trained was beneficial. She pointed out that the building official position was difficult to fill, but the minimum qualifications were reconsidered to attract a wider pool of candidates, allowing a great individual to be placed in the position and trained.

Vice Chair Garcia asked if the County performed exit surveys. Ms. Hurley indicated that CM Thomas would discuss the topic later; however, HR was researching

technology to upgrade onboarding and offboarding processes. She said that departments attempted to get exit surveys, but they were not performed as frequently as HR desired. Vice Chair Garcia thanked Ms. Hurley for the presentation.

Commissioner Hill expressed excitement about the County's use of artificial intelligence (AI); however, she said the County must properly document how it would differ from manual review of resumes and cover letters, and whether it would open the County to a broader pool of applicants. She believed there was always an inherent bias toward male and female candidates, or toward those from different parts of the community. She hoped that AI would help the County hire more diverse people. She asked whether AI would have diverse applications, as she had been reading about AI's negative characteristics and speculated that AI could be inherently biased. She said she wanted to ensure the County was thoughtful in its use of AI and understood that accountability was essential to determine whether it was meeting the County's goals. She felt that the County reflecting the Clark County model was great. She said that it was important for individuals interested in becoming future supervisors to participate in the Washoe County Leadership Academy (WCLA) because it fostered relationships across departments, supported a culture of learning, and provided mentorship. She expressed gratitude for HR's work in the community at job fairs and events. She said that HR put a lot of effort into ensuring the County was prominent in the community. She opined that it was important to have new people working for the County to give everyone the opportunity to be part of the organization.

Chair Andriola asserted that soft skills had a direct correlation to building the County's culture. She asked how soft skills could be customized and whether HR was using them as an evaluation criterion, a technical job characteristic, or a qualification for the position. She opined that individuals could not be taught kindness and collaboration. Ms. Paholke indicated that HR worked with departments on their interview processes and recalled that, in most cases, the questions focused on soft skills to better understand the applicant. She said that performance demonstrations were also used to determine whether the applicant could handle situations that could arise in their job. Chair Andriola indicated that soft skills were customizable within each department, such as critical thinking. She believed that certain positions would benefit from power skills more than other jobs. She felt there was an overarching cultural expectation within the organization for truthfulness and honesty.

Chair Andriola asked whether HR could measure how it could evolve the County's exit strategy for employees. Ms. Hurley said the process was under development and that the final product lacked performance management. She explained that HR had paused the performance management research since they were undergoing a possible technology upgrade. She indicated that HR was researching a coaching model that included one-on-one feedback and the use of software to allow individuals to provide comments between coaching sessions. She said that the exit strategy was the missing link and that there was offboarding software being researched so that HR could utilize technology to bridge gaps. She reported that the process had phases, including working through a SAP upgrade. She asserted that the Board would receive updates. Chair Andriola expressed

excitement about the upgrades, noting that everyone wanted a high-performance team and to foster a customer-service-based culture.

Chair Andriola asked about the timeline for the upgrades. Ms. Hurley reported that HR anticipated a two to three-month timeline. Chair Andriola indicated that she was unsure whether the Board had given HR any strategic direction. Ms. Hurley said that she believed the Board informed HR that they liked what they saw and urged HR to continue with their plans, but to correct her if her assumption was wrong. Chair Andriola agreed and believed that accountability was important and that HR met the expectations set. She recalled the Raftelis Report and believed it was an opportunity to better understand the County's expectations for its employees.

Vice Chair Garcia said she recalled hearing that the job market was becoming more difficult for younger individuals. She emphasized the importance of job fairs at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) and the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), as well as internship programs. She said there was a strong sense of urgency and anxiety about changes in employment due to the AI landscape.

Commissioner Hill added that her career mentor always said the best way to hire someone was to determine whether they could do the job. She expressed concern that AI would only pull keywords from resumes and cover letters, leaving out qualified candidates. She wanted candidates to feel that the County cared about them and addressed their concerns, despite the County's underfunding and limited resources. She said that it was important to hire people who were kind and could perform the fundamental services the County provided. She opined that a large part of a supervisory role was being willing to hire and train individuals.

Chair Andriola indicated that the County had evolved to AI and said that there was a time when a member of staff had to perform every part of recruitment. She believed there were good people who might not have made the final cut of the recruitment process because of automation. She asserted that the County was evolving with new technologies but wondered how AI would be used. She expressed interest in having a *how can I help you* culture rather than a *what do you need* culture. She speculated that the County had great employees who cared about customer service. She thanked HR for the presentation and believed the Board learned a lot. She looked forward to future HR updates.

CM Thomas stated that the final portion of the workshop would showcase current operations conducted with limited resources.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Abbe Yacoben and Budget Division Director Lori Cooke conducted a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Financial Strategy; What do we mean by financial strategy? Why is it critical to serving the taxpayer?; Financial Strategy; Six Elements of the Budget Bedrock; Foundations of fiscal stability and operational continuity; How do these guardrails help us achieve our vision?; Bringing it All Together.

Ms. Yacoben mentioned that the presentation contained no new information and explained that the Board was being asked to review it from a more comprehensive perspective to guide daily operations and achieve a long-term vision.

Ms. Yacoben reviewed the slide titled *What do we mean by financial strategy? Why is it critical to serving the taxpayer?* and said the goals were to optimize County resources, maximize services, operate efficiently within the County's budget, and responsibly manage finite resources to avoid overburdening taxpayers. She described the framework as foundational to the County's financial stability and long-term success. She indicated that finance staff would closely follow discussions throughout the current and upcoming workshops, as the Board-established priorities would guide the work of approximately 3,100 County employees. She mentioned there was long-term resource management, and that part of the presentation would show that in the five-year forecast, there would be financial difficulties in the County. She stated that developing a financial strategy could be beneficial for making recommendations that would accommodate financial limitations. She noted that during an economic downturn or difficult times, the County should not take a step back, but instead move forward to help taxpayers and the community. She said that long-term resource management was critical, and she felt that the Board had the foundation in place to achieve it. She indicated that, given financial constraints, there was limited ability to raise taxes in Nevada, and although some states could, they would not because it would not be affordable to taxpayers. She explained that it was important to know when to expand, when to hold the line, and when to contract. She felt it was the finance team's responsibility to equip the Board to make those decisions. She noted that the items chosen for the slide were among the most important.

Ms. Yacoben said that the Board would establish deliberate budgeting priorities during the May and June workshops. She shared that the finance team would follow the directions and determine how to translate those priorities into budget allocations that supported the Board's vision. She mentioned that revenue diversification was important because it provided safeguards during economic downturns. Having multiple revenue sources, she explained, allowed the County to rely on other sources if one declined, whereas depending heavily on a single major revenue source would create financial risk. She noted that diversified revenue sources helped ensure taxpayers were charged appropriately through a balance of taxes, user fees, and rates. She emphasized the importance of avoiding overcharging in one area and undercharging in another.

Ms. Yacoben described transparency and trust as ensuring the public understood that the way they were being charged was efficient and fair. She stated that intentional risk management was not often discussed, both locally and Nationwide, but was becoming more common through the professional organization, the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). She shared that in-depth discussions had begun regarding how to mitigate risk, when to do so, and how to communicate that information to the Board so that informed risk-taking decisions could be made. She indicated that 20 years ago, an insurance policy could be purchased and the risk transferred to the private sector, but that was no longer possible. She suggested that during the June workshop, there would be more conversations about risk, and that risk should be discussed collaboratively to understand

Board expectations and how to proceed. She mentioned that while buying an insurance policy was not very flashy and the taxpayer did not see the immediate results, she emphasized the importance of being transparent about why it was being done.

Ms. Yacoben shared that the Finance Department was proud of the transparency provided through the Washoe County Checkbook, which was released in 2025. She explained that although the information had already been available, the Washoe County Checkbook allowed taxpayers to more easily download and create portable document format (PDF) and Excel files. She noted that Budget 101 was offered in 2025 and would be offered again in the summer of 2026.

Ms. Yacoben reviewed the slide titled *Financial Strategy* and said it was critical to make strategic decisions, noting that 3,100 employees were ready to execute those decisions. She highlighted that the slide reflected the high-level, strategic planning and visioning goals for the next five to seven years. She added that it also showed the tactical moves used to achieve the goals. She clarified that the chart was important because it indicated that everyone needed to provide input to achieve the goals, and that it was not just a financial framework. She mentioned the sanitation fund as an example, noting that it involved setting rates and determining the risk environment. She explained that there might be long-term unfunded liabilities that many departments were aware of and could inform the Finance Department. She emphasized the importance of the finance framework, which created discipline, because the public needed additional services, but the County had limited resources. She believed that if the Board was equipped with the proper resources and knowledge of the five-year forecast, it would help determine which priorities could be completed. She restated that additional topics would be discussed during future workshops in May and June.

Ms. Cooke reviewed the slide titled *Six Elements of the Budget Bedrock* and said the six elements were not new but had evolved over time. She indicated the County had maintained a Strategic Plan for decades and recalled that a former CM, who also served as Strategic Planning Manager, had helped develop the original plan. She noted that the Strategic Plan had changed over the years due to shifts in initiatives, focus areas, milestones, and population growth, although its overall intent had remained consistent. She added that strategic planning also involved developing and updating processes based on input from the Raftelis Report and then incorporating those updates into the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Cooke said that developing a service baseline was extremely important for understanding the services provided and the level at which they were delivered. She shared examples of how the baseline was determined and added information about how departments were working to provide those service baselines within the parameters of their current funding, which she thought might not be enough to sustain services. She noted that the County had very robust financial policies, which were listed in the budget book. She shared an example of where changes to the fund balance policy were presented to determine what to do if the balance was higher or lower than the policy. She mentioned that triggers were developed for those situations. She mentioned that setting boundaries with long-term financial planning and forecasting included having policy boundaries and an overlay. She

stated that developing public engagement capacity was not new. She mentioned that how the public was engaged, the tools that were available, and the frequency had all been priorities. She shared that it was important for the public to be engaged and understand. She said that building networks with outside organizations was important. She noted that there were very few interdepartmental initiatives within the County that could succeed independently.

Ms. Cooke reviewed the slide titled *Foundations of fiscal stability and operational continuity* and said it reflected the County's financial policies, which could be found in the budget book. She shared that the highlighted policies on the slide were specifically related to fiscal sustainability. She explained that resource allocation provided guidance on the use of excess resources and stated that discretionary funds were allocated in alignment with the Board's strategic priorities. She noted that, for the annual operating budget, there was a policy stating that ongoing revenue supported ongoing expenditures, and that ongoing expenditures supported ongoing revenues. She also discussed financial reserves, stating that the County's fund balance policy targeted reserves between 10 and 17 percent. She explained that NRS established a minimum General Fund reserve requirement to support financial stabilization. She added that the County maintained several Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Funds and noted that many of the related financial policies overlapped. She stated that the financial policies remained open for discussion and emphasized that they formed part of the County's foundational fiscal framework.

Ms. Yacoben reviewed the slide titled *How do these guardrails help us achieve our vision?* and said that the guardrails and all the points she and Ms. Cooke shared helped form a framework. She suggested that no single policy, on its own, could provide the guidance the Board needed to make the proper decision to ensure sustainability and to deliver appropriate service levels. She noted that the guardrails framed long-term decision-making, and the long-term forecast enabled the Board to anticipate future conditions and set priorities based on the outcomes of the three strategic discussions. She added that staff could then execute tactical duties. She mentioned that finite resources required a disciplined approach. She believed that discipline was required to be efficient and effective with the taxpayer's dollar. She shared that key performance indicators and data measures were used to evaluate project effectiveness and determine whether resources should be reallocated. She indicated that the goal was to establish the foundation to help the Board make decisions effectively, efficiently, and in a timely manner. She stated that the County was committed to serving taxpayers with quality, reliable, and uninterrupted public service. She said that to be successful in those areas, the County needed a long-term vision, a Strategic Plan, and a financial foundation to achieve the Board's vision, while maintaining continuity of the bedrock and foundational services.

Ms. Yacoben reviewed the slide titled *Bringing it All Together* and said significant work was underway. She thanked diversion services staff for helping provide services to the most vulnerable population before they entered the justice system, noting that this benefited both individuals and the County by improving efficiency and outcomes. She mentioned that citizen self-service tools empowered taxpayers to access services when

needed rather than waiting, and that educational resources helped residents make informed decisions. She emphasized the importance of hiring and retaining the best and brightest to serve the taxpayer as effectively and efficiently as possible. She said that the County's financial strategies provided guidance for addressing the upcoming financial forecast. She announced that the next strategic planning workshop, scheduled for May 19, would focus on growth, housing, and infrastructure, while the June 2 workshop would address County operations and risk.

Chair Andriola asked which awards Washoe County had received for following the required procedures and maintaining legal compliance. She suggested that the County had received various awards and recognitions over many years. Ms. Yacoben stated that the County had received the annual Comprehensive Financial Report Award from the GFOA, which recognized the County's best-practice format and the format used to present its financial statements. Chair Andriola emphasized the importance of adhering to those requirements. Ms. Yacoben said that external auditors reviewed the financial statements and issued their opinions. She noted that Ms. Cooke had referenced the GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, which recognized the format the County used to present its budget. Ms. Cooke said the County received awards in 2023 and 2024. She noted that during the recession, the County did not submit applications because there was insufficient Finance staff to prepare the documents. She added that whenever the County submitted materials, it met all requirements and criteria. Chair Andriola felt it was important to highlight both the recognition and the County's ability to overcome challenges. She thanked everyone and acknowledged that the County was transitioning to a priority-based budgeting system. She emphasized the importance of helping the public understand how the County evaluated priorities without compromising the essential services required and expected.

Commissioner Clark said he had taken a census at the start of the meeting and noted that 44 people were in attendance, including 6 citizens, with the remainder comprising elected officials and staff. He thought the meeting was very important and covered a lot of information, but he believed the County needed to better advertise such meetings. He emphasized the importance of helping the community understand the County's financial situation, whether online or in person. He explained that it was important to identify preventive measures and address problems before they escalated. He asked how many seniors were currently on the homemaker wait list and how long applicants typically waited to receive assistance. He referenced previously shared information, indicating that housing approximately 100 people at the Cares Campus at an estimated cost of \$71 per person, per day would total about \$7,100 per day, \$213,000 per month, and approximately \$2.5 million annually. He noted that the information represented a significant yearly expense and requested that staff further examine the matter. He indicated that the County employed a Public Information Officer (PIO) and suggested issuing press releases and public notifications when workshops were scheduled to help local media outlets inform the public. In addition, he proposed creating pre-recorded video presentations from each department to be shared at CAB meetings to help residents better understand the functions of County departments.

Chair Andriola thanked the team and said a great deal of information had been presented, which she hoped was helpful for everyone. She expressed her appreciation for the staff who she felt made the County great, and thanked them for their hard work. She reminded the public that during the May workshop, the final budget, along with housing, infrastructure, and growth, would be discussed, and that the June workshop would focus on data governance and cybersecurity. She indicated that CM Thomas had reviewed national expectations and standards, as well as measures to prevent such incidents.

26-0240 **AGENDA ITEM 5** Public Comment.

Terry Brooks read an original poem regarding discrimination and disability.

Susan Walls reported that she had recently found out about the workshop and noted that she almost did not attend. She opined that she may have overlooked an email about the meeting. She said she was a relatively new resident of Washoe County and felt it was her responsibility to know when meetings were scheduled and educate herself. She expressed appreciation for the County’s communication and transparency. She believed that there were many methods of communication, and knowing where to go to receive information was important. She urged the public not to overlook the Washoe County Library System (WCLS) as a resource for assistance. She explained that, in addition to social media, the Washoe County website, Citizens Advisory Boards (CABs), City of Reno, and Neighborhood Advisory Boards (NABs) were great resources.

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12:15 p.m. There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

CLARA ANDRIOLA, Chair
Washoe County Commission

ATTEST:

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
Andrew Garnand, Deputy County Clerk