



Gerlach/Empire Citizens Advisory Board
Minutes of the regular meeting of the Gerlach/Empire Citizens Advisory Board held on February 12, 2026, at 6:00 P.M.
at Gerlach Community Center, 410 Cottonwood, Gerlach, NV 89412

1. CALL TO ORDER/ DETERMINATION OF QUORUM –

Present – Russell Bierle, Kristy Evans, Schatzi Gambrell, Brandy Wilbur, Carl Copek

Absent - Elizabeth Shoemaker

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –

Brian Wadsworth, Democratic candidate for Washoe County Commissioner District 5, announced he will host a town hall from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 28, at Bruno's in Gerlach. Wadsworth said the event will provide an opportunity to meet residents, hear about local issues and discuss how to work collaboratively to support the Gerlach community and Washoe County if elected.

4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF January 8, 2026

Carl Copek motioned to approve the minutes of the January 8, 2026, Gerlach/Empire CAB meeting. Kristy Evans seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

5. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES –

Washoe County Sheriff's Office

Deputy Crews reported that recent calls for service have primarily involved broken-down vehicles in remote areas and individuals wandering. Overall, he said activity in the area has remained manageable and under control.

Royal Ambulance

JohnRey Hassan reported a steady year for Royal Ambulance in Gerlach, with 10 incidents to date, resulting in five patients treated and released and five ground transports, including one that day. Service has remained fully staffed and operational. A Royal-owned ambulance designated for Gerlach will be placed into full-time service in the coming weeks following final modifications and state inspection, becoming the primary unit for the area. An EMS training day for staff and local volunteers is scheduled for March 25.

Russel Bierle asked what time the EMS training would be on the 25th. Hassan answered that it would be an all-day thing and would begin around 9am and go until approximately 5pm.

Gerlach Volunteer Firefighters

Greg Nielson announced that the fire department is officially operational after receiving sign-off from Truckee Meadows. He said the team is excited to be fully in service and ready to respond alongside

law enforcement and other partners. Nielson added that the department will focus on recruitment, community collaboration and fire safety efforts, and welcomed input from residents on how the department can best serve the community.

Kristy Evans asked what the department's new status allows them to respond to and how volunteer recruitment is progressing. Greg Nielson explained that he and Russell are certified Firefighter II and can lead initial response efforts until Truckee Meadows and other mutual aid partners arrive. With only two certified members currently, the department is limited in scope but able to perform exterior fire suppression, vehicle extrication and protect neighboring structures, but not conduct interior structural firefighting except in life-threatening emergencies. He said several community members are in various stages of completing Truckee Meadows' structured volunteer training program, with at least one fully qualified and others more than halfway through. Regarding volunteer status, Nielson clarified that as a volunteer department, members are not contractually obligated to respond but operate under a strong ethical commitment to serve. They respond locally and regionally as available, but during large-scale incidents, they ensure coverage remains in Gerlach rather than committing all personnel out of town for extended deployments.

6. ARTRAIL UPDATE

Gabrielle Enfield provided an update on the Washoe County Art Trail project, which includes a completed public art installation at Crystal Peak Park and a proposed new installation and trailhead in Gerlach. After pandemic delays, efforts to identify a Gerlach site have resumed, with the Gerlach GID-owned "Gateway" property near State Route 447 identified as a potential location. A community meeting held on Oct. 29 drew strong participation and general enthusiasm, though residents raised questions about cultural resource protection, wet playa conditions, parking capacity, maintenance responsibilities and visitor impacts, particularly during Burning Man. While there was broad support for restoring the water tower, concerns were noted about designating it as the official trailhead due to space and parking limitations. Following the meeting, the Gerlach GID supported moving forward with a Washoe County-funded feasibility study of the Gateway property. Wood Rodgers will begin a 10-week preliminary engineering, environmental and geotechnical assessment to evaluate developing approximately 1–2 acres for parking, signage, art installation and future trail connectivity. The study will include conceptual scenarios and cost estimates, with results expected to return to the GID in June, potentially preceded by another community meeting.

Russell Bierle asked about grant timelines and whether delays could jeopardize funding. Gabrielle Enfield explained that Phase 1 including parking, signage and the art installation will be funded through state and local fiscal recovery funds and must be spent by the end of December. She said the project is manageable within that timeframe but will require moving quickly. Bierle also asked what would happen if significant historic artifacts were discovered and the site proved unfeasible. Enfield said funds could potentially be repurposed, but after years of searching, no alternative Gerlach sites are currently identified. She confirmed that selection of the art piece will occur in parallel with the engineering feasibility study and will include public input before a final installation is chosen.

Kristy Evans expressed support for the project's progress and asked about the approval process and timeline, noting the importance of making timely decisions to preserve funding. Gabrielle Enfield confirmed that because the Gateway property is owned by the Gerlach GID, the GID Board of Trustees must approve its use. Rather than placing the land in a trust, which would be costly and complex, the project would move forward through an interlocal agreement between Washoe County and the GID, similar to a past agreement for improvements at the community park. The agreement would apply only to the specific 1–2-acre portion identified for development, with the GID retaining

ownership and overall control. Enfield outlined a tentative timeline: engineering scenarios and cost estimates are expected in late April, followed by a community meeting in May to gather input. She anticipates presenting options to the GID in early June, with potential approval of the interlocal agreement in July. Procurement processes would begin concurrently to ensure construction can be completed by the December funding deadline.

Carl Copek asked whether, if the Gateway property proves infeasible, funding could instead support preservation of the Gerlach water tower. He suggested that since an engineering firm will already be in the area for the feasibility study, it might also assess the water tower's structural needs and whether available funds could be directed toward preserving the historic landmark. Gabrielle Enfield expressed strong support for restoring the water tower and noted Washoe County has previously contributed funding for engineering work. However, she said the current priority for the recovery funds is completing the new art installation, which must be spent by the deadline. While she could not guarantee those specific funds would be available for the tower, she is open to exploring other funding sources. She added that coordinating with the engineering firm on a potential water tower assessment could be discussed separately.

7. FIRE ADAPTED NEVADA AND THE COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN

Kelli Nevills introduced herself as the Fire Adapted Nevada Coordinator for the Nevada Division of Forestry, serving as a forester, wildfire mitigation specialist and building inspector. Brett Taylor introduced herself as the Wildland Urban Interface Community Coordinator for Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District. She noted that while the district has traditionally operated south of Township 22, upcoming projects, including volunteer program support and development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) will increase Truckee Meadows' presence and services in the Gerlach area.

Kelli Nevills explained that Fire Adapted Nevada is a multi-agency partnership including the Nevada Division of Forestry, University of Nevada Extension's Living With Fire program, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, local fire districts, volunteer departments and counties. Its goal is to create fire-adapted communities through shared responsibility, preparedness and landscape stewardship. She emphasized the shift from a prevention-only mindset known as the "Smokey Bear effect," which has led to overgrowth and more catastrophic fires to a balance of prevention and preparedness, including thinning, prescribed fire and defensible space around homes. Nevills distinguished between wildfire "risk" (what the community could lose, such as homes and infrastructure) and "threat" (how likely a fire is to start), noting both must be addressed in planning. She highlighted Nevada's increasing wildfire danger due to hotter temperatures, prolonged drought, high winds and expanding development in the wildland-urban interface. Most home losses, she said, occur within the 0–5-foot zone around structures, where embers can ignite mulch, decks or vents even a mile from an active fire. Nevills encouraged residents to focus on home survivability through defensible space, home hardening and evacuation preparedness. She also promoted participation in the national Firewise USA program, which requires at least eight homes and a small leadership group to organize. Firewise designation can improve grant competitiveness and may provide insurance benefits, while strengthening community-wide wildfire resilience.

Brett Taylor provided an update on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process underway in Washoe County. CWPPs are comprehensive planning documents updated every five years that identify wildfire risks and outline mitigation strategies. Washoe County's last plan was completed in 2005, and efforts are now underway to update it with support from the Nevada Division of Forestry, Living With Fire, Reno Fire, Sparks Fire, Truckee Meadows Fire and other partners. The

county is currently in the risk identification and community assessment phase. Using a Community Assessment Tool, agencies will evaluate communities like Gerlach based on standardized wildfire risk criteria. The results will inform mitigation priorities such as home hardening, defensible space, evacuation planning and infrastructure protection. Taylor emphasized that the CWPP is intended to be a practical tool for communities not just a government document helping residents understand local risks and focus efforts where they will have the greatest impact. He noted that structure-to-structure ignition during wind-driven events is often a significant risk, underscoring the importance of defensible space and community-wide preparedness.

Kelli Nevills added that Fire Adapted Nevada will provide free training to local volunteer fire departments on how to conduct defensible space inspections. She emphasized that inspection information is not shared with insurance companies and is used solely to help residents improve wildfire preparedness and home survivability.

Russell Bierle asked how to schedule training for defensible space inspections. The answer provided was inaudible. Russell Bierle then asked whether Washoe County could pursue grant funding for fuel mitigation around Gerlach, noting that much of the surrounding land is federal, BLM or railroad property with heavy fuel loads outside the town's direct control. Brett Taylor responded that pursuing grants for fuel reduction is possible and aligns with the department's work. He said much of his role involves preparing grant applications and that successful proposals would require collaboration and local input to help shape the project scope. Truckee Meadows' fuels crews would implement the work if funded, as maintaining those crews depends largely on external grant funding. He emphasized the importance of community partnership in developing strong applications and moving projects forward.

Kristy Evans asked how Gerlach can create defensible space around the community when much of the surrounding land is owned by federal agencies or the railroad. She questioned how mitigation work could proceed on land not owned by local residents. Brett Taylor explained that while coordination with agencies like the BLM can take time, partnerships have improved. The BLM is increasingly willing to contract with local crews for fuel reduction work, and Truckee Meadows Fire regularly collaborates on such projects. If the upcoming community assessment identifies adjacent federal land as a key risk, that could help justify grant applications and interagency mitigation efforts. Evans also asked whether residents could request home-level defensible space evaluations. Taylor confirmed that free defensible space inspections are available and are a routine part of his work.

Kelli Nevills said educational materials are available for residents and emphasized that while coordination with federal agencies can take time, immediate progress can be made at the individual home level. She noted that the Nevada Division of Forestry and the Northern Nevada Fire Chiefs currently offer grant funding to support defensible space projects, including assistance for seniors, community cleanup days, dumpster events or vegetation removal efforts. She also highlighted a Ready, Set, Go grant through the International Association of Fire Chiefs, offering up to \$10,000 for volunteer fire departments, as well as funding to support evacuation planning and preparedness. Nevills offered to share grant information and assist the community in pursuing these opportunities.

Carl Copek thanked the presenters and noted that Gerlach has been proactive about wildfire risk, pointing to the community's large annual burn pile at the transfer station and ongoing weed removal efforts. He observed that state and federal agencies also appear to be conducting roadside fuel reduction and other mitigation work in the area. Copek acknowledged that Gerlach sits firmly in the wildland-urban interface and has experienced nearby fires in recent years, which heightens awareness and urgency around vegetation management. He emphasized that, given limited local

firefighting resources, proactive mitigation and community preparation are essential, and he expressed appreciation for the agencies' outreach and expertise.

8. NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB& OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Candee Ramos, representing Washoe County, provided an overview of ways residents can engage with county government and volunteer opportunities. She directed attendees to WashoeCounty.gov, specifically the "Your Government" and "Get Involved" pages, where residents can connect with their commissioner, access Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) information, and view meeting agendas and schedules for the Gerlach Empire CAB. She highlighted the Neighborhood Meeting Hub, an interactive map and listing of upcoming development proposals, and encouraged residents to sign up for email updates particularly District 5 and neighborhood development notifications to stay informed. Ramos also shared information on volunteering with Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District and applying for county boards and committees, noting current opportunities such as the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency advisory position. She encouraged residents to participate and stay engaged in local decision-making.

9. REPORT ON REQUESTS FOR SERVICE FROM PREVIOUS CAB MEETINGS

There was no report on requests for service from previous CAB meetings.

10. COMMISSIONER AND BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

Carl Copek thanked Candee Ramos and other presenters for attending, as well as community members and special guests, including candidate Brian Wadsworth. He expressed appreciation to Commissioner Herman for his appointment to the board and thanked fellow board members for their service before adjourning the meeting.

11. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 pm.