



**Warm Springs/Rural Minutes of the regular meeting of the Warm Springs/Rural Citizen Advisory Board held on January 14, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. via ZOOM**

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

Present – Kevin Cook, Jan Mortensen, Carolyn White  
Absent – Larry Chesney

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

**3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Tammy Holt-Still introduced herself as a candidate for District 5 Commissioner. She shared that she has contact cards available, invited people to reach out to her at any time, and emphasized that although she lives in Lemon Valley and doesn't often visit the area, she is present and committed to serving the community.

**4. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF November 12, 2025**

Jan Mortensen motioned to approve the meeting minutes of the November 12, 2025, CAB meeting with the stipulation that Casey McDonald edit the wording on item #3 to be clearer. Carolyn White seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

**5. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATE**

**Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District**

Division Chief Joe Schum of Truckee Meadows Fire and Rescue provided an operations update for the Palomino Warm Springs area. In 2025, the department responded to 202 calls, slightly down from 206 in 2024. December saw only six calls well below the monthly average of 16 and, like the previous two months, there were no fires reported. December's calls included two medical incidents, one motor vehicle crash, and other minor calls. He reminded residents that open burning is allowed through April 30, 2026, but requires a permit and must follow daily burn-day guidelines due to wind risks. Even with snow on the ground, fires can still spread. Green waste collection is now closed for the year after higher-than-expected participation. Chief Schum also highlighted seasonal safety concerns, including chimney fires, improper ash disposal, and slips and falls due to ice. He encouraged residents to safely dispose of ashes, clear icy areas, and consider volunteering with the local Palomino Fire Department to support the community.

**Washoe County Sheriff's Department**

Lieutenant Nick Tone of the Washoe County Sheriff's Office introduced himself as the graveyard watch commander for patrol, overseeing calls Sunday through Wednesday nights. He reported that there have been no significant recent issues in the area, which he noted is a positive sign. He encouraged residents to report concerns such as illegal dumping, traffic problems, nuisance issues, or suspicious activity. Emergencies should go through 911, while non-emergencies can

be reported via the non-emergency number, 311 (which routes complaints to the appropriate agency), or through WashoeSheriff.com for specific traffic concerns, where residents can also request follow-up. Lieutenant Tone also highlighted the Sheriff's Office's new drone program, currently being prototyped for uses such as monitoring suspicious fires in nearby areas. Certified deputies operate the drones to provide aerial views more efficiently and cost-effectively than helicopters. A public demonstration or media day is planned to showcase the program. He noted that updated quarterly crime statistics are not yet available but will be shared once published. Finally, he mentioned he will be away for three months, and a qualified sergeant will attend meetings in his place to continue providing updates.

Kevin Cook asked whether deputies follow up on non-emergency calls. Lieutenant Nick Tone explained that follow-up contact is available if the reporting party specifically requests it when making the call. Dispatch notes in their system whether the caller wants contact, and deputies will then follow up as appropriate, for example, regarding disturbances or suspicious activity. He added that unless requested, deputies may not call back, especially during late-night or early-morning hours, but they are happy to provide follow-up if asked.

Jan Mortensen asked for clarification about shooting regulations in the Warm Springs/Palomino Valley area, noting ongoing discussion on social media and asking where, when, and why shooting is allowed. Lieutenant Nick Tone responded that the best resource is the Washoe Sheriff mobile app, which connects to the county's GIS mapping system. The app allows residents to view their current location and see clearly marked restricted and congested areas where shooting is prohibited, along with applicable laws. He explained that as development expands, such as near Golden Needle Park there are areas where shooting was once permitted may now be restricted. The Sheriff's Office is taking an educational approach, adding signage and having deputies inform residents about safe and legal shooting locations. He added that the app also provides tools for reporting issues such as homeless encampments, graffiti, and other concerns, making it a useful community resource.

## **6. COUNTY MANAGER KATE THOMAS MEET & GREET**

She has spent her career in local government, beginning in public works in Southern California after earning degrees in environmental studies and business. She later worked for the City of Reno, the Nevada Secretary of State's Office as Deputy Secretary of State overseeing operations, then returned to Reno as budget director and assistant city manager. About eight and a half years ago, she joined Washoe County as Assistant County Manager and now serves as County Manager after initially hesitating to apply for the position. She described herself as a dedicated public servant who values direct community engagement and collaboration. She explained that elected officials set county policy, while she serves as the chief executive responsible for implementing that policy and turning strategy into action. Washoe County employs about 3,200 people and operates with a roughly one-billion-dollar budget, and she expressed pride in the county's strong financial planning and strategic approach. Thomas highlighted the county's investment in upstream solutions, such as developing a behavioral health hospital to address root causes of homelessness and reduce long term strain on the justice system and taxpayers. She emphasized thoughtful budgeting, strategic risk taking when it leads to meaningful impact, and maintaining open communication with residents. She concluded by inviting questions and encouraging continued community involvement and dialogue.

George Boyce expressed concern that Citizens Advisory Board members, who volunteer their time, no longer feel heard or given meaningful input by the county. He said it seems their comments are being ignored and asked whether they will have more influence on local decisions rather than feeling dismissed. Kate Thomas responded that community participation is important and apologized if anyone has felt their time or input was undervalued. She affirmed that both she and the county commissioners support continuing Citizens Advisory Boards and view them as essential forums for meaningful dialogue. She emphasized that the county does not want to make decisions about communities without listening to residents and that advisory input helps shape better outcomes. Thomas acknowledged that not every request can be fulfilled due to funding limits or jurisdictional boundaries, but she stressed that residents deserve clear explanations when the answer is no. She encouraged anyone who feels dismissed to contact her directly and reassured attendees that there are no plans to eliminate the advisory boards. She reiterated that community input matters and that maintaining trust and open communication is a priority.

Caroline York Mortell, who is new to the area and to Nevada, asked which board or organization makes final decisions on development in the valley and who residents should contact if they have concerns. In response, it was explained that development proposals typically go first to the Planning Commission, which reviews the project and makes recommendations. The final decision is made by the Board of County Commissioners, who serve as the county's policy-making body. While the board considers community input, members must also follow the master plan and state law when making decisions. Residents who want to be involved are encouraged to learn about the planning process on the county website and engage directly with their county commissioners.

Laurie Squartsoff asked that the "good news" about Zoom access for meetings be shared with the community. Kate Thomas responded by acknowledging that the lack of internet access at the meeting location had been an oversight and apologized for it. She invited Management Services Officer Elizabeth Jourdin to provide details. Elizabeth Jourdin announced that going forward, internet access will be available at the meeting site, allowing meetings to be held over Zoom. She explained that the Commissioner Support Team worked to find a solution and emphasized the importance of ensuring rural residents have remote access so they can participate in local government even if they cannot attend in person. Casey McDonald confirmed that the internet is now functioning, though it may be somewhat slow.

Jan Mortensen asked whether board members should first go through staff contacts and then reach out if a community member brings forward an issue. In response, it was explained that while following the chain of command is encouraged, the county operates under a "no wrong door" approach. Board members can start with commission support staff, but any county contact is acceptable, and concerns should not go unanswered. There is a strong focus on improving internal organizational culture, communication, and coordination across the county's 26 departments to better serve residents. The goal is to ensure responsiveness, prevent issues from falling through the cracks, and make it easy for community members and board representatives to get help when needed.

Kevin Cook asked how a community concern, like potholes on the road leading to the facility, would reach the right person for action. Casey McDonald responded that the county uses input portals. Issues raised in Citizen Advisory Board discussions are submitted through these portals, routed to the appropriate departments, and addressed. As an example, a pothole concern mentioned at a previous meeting was submitted through the system, multiple departments were

contacted, and an assessment was scheduled for the 26th. This demonstrated that input from the board does result in concrete follow-up and action.

An inaudible question was asked about the Counties fiscal policy. Kate Thomas explained that her approach to fiscal management is focused on careful, strategic budgeting and long-term sustainability. She noted that about half of the county's revenue comes from property taxes, which is fairly predictable, while sales tax revenue is more volatile. She emphasized that unexpected or above-budget revenues are applied to one-time needs, like major maintenance, rather than ongoing expenses such as staff, to avoid creating unsustainable costs. She highlighted that staff is expensive, so the county holds the line on adding new positions, ensures employees are performing optimally, and monitors remote work closely. Overall, she described the county as fiscally conservative, diligent in expenditure management, and committed to using resources strategically for long-term stability.

Veronica Cortes asked about having an open checkbook for the county, referencing a previous manager's discussion. Kate Thomas responded that the county already has an online, user-friendly open checkbook in place, and encouraged everyone to visit it to see spending and hold the county accountable.

## **7. UPDATED GROUND WATER DEDICATION RATE ANALYSIS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT**

Timber Weiss, an engineer with the Washoe County Community Services Department, and water rights specialist Vahid Behmaram provided a high-level overview of the county's ongoing efforts to update and manage the Warm Springs water budget. Both presenters highlighted their backgrounds with the Nevada State Engineer's Office and decades of experience in water rights administration, noting that the presentation was intended as an introductory discussion with more detailed work to follow over the next year. They explained that water allocations in the basin currently exceed the estimated perennial yield, or the amount of groundwater that can be sustainably withdrawn year after year. Historically, over-appropriation was common practice statewide, particularly when agricultural uses dominated. As land use patterns have shifted and agricultural demand has declined, the county is working under Nevada Revised Statutes and county code to bring paper water rights and actual sustainable supply back into closer balance while protecting existing users and the long-term health of the aquifer. Behmaram outlined the history of the Warm Springs water budget, first adopted in 1990, which attempted to align sustainable yield, water rights, and projected land development. Subsequent reviews in 2009 and again during the 2022 master planning process found deficiencies in earlier accounting, including a higher total volume of appropriated water rights than originally calculated. Updated analyses confirmed a sustainable yield of approximately 3,000 acre-feet and revealed that total appropriations were significantly greater, requiring adjustments to the county's management approach. A key tool discussed is the dedication rate, or discount factor, applied when agricultural water rights are converted to residential or municipal use. By requiring more paper water rights to support a given amount of permanent water demand, the county can gradually reduce over-allocation and align future development with the basin's sustainable yield. The presenters emphasized that the goal is to protect existing well owners, prevent wells from going dry, and ensure water availability for decades to come while still allowing reasonable property development under a balanced and sustainable framework.

A resident asked whether the requirement to purchase water rights when subdividing property has been in place for a long time, noting that historically a landowner with 40 acres would need to acquire water rights before parceling and drilling a domestic well. The resident also questioned

whether the current proposal would require significantly more acre-feet than in the past. Vahid Behmaram responded that the requirement dates back to Ordinance 586, adopted in 1984, and confirmed that purchasing water rights for new domestic wells has long been standard practice. He explained that in most areas a domestic well requires two acre-feet of water rights, but Warm Springs is an exception, where the county has required more paper water than the typical two acre-feet. Timber Weiss added that staff can only make recommendations and that any change to the dedication rate would be decided by the Board of County Commissioners. He acknowledged that while the current Warm Springs requirement is 2.5 acre-feet, the proposal under consideration could increase that amount, potentially making it more restrictive than elsewhere in Washoe County and Nevada.

A resident asked whether paper water rights are unlimited or whether there is a fixed number available, and who determines that amount. The resident also asked how the aquifer and overall groundwater supply factor into the number of rights that can be issued. Timber Weiss explained that water rights are administered by the Nevada State Engineer and that there is a finite amount of water that has been allocated. He compared paper water rights to checks written against a bank account, with the perennial yield representing the account balance. Over time, more paper rights were issued than the basin's sustainable supply, but no new appropriations are currently being granted in Warm Springs. In response to questions about the aquifer, Timber and Vahid confirmed that the U.S. Geological Survey establishes estimates of the basin's sustainable yield, which informs how much water is available. They explained that historically the state intentionally over-allocated water rights, largely during a time when agricultural use dominated and return flows to the aquifer were considered in those decisions. As land use shifts from agriculture to residential development, those historic assumptions no longer apply in the same way, which is why the county is now reevaluating how to better align paper rights with the actual groundwater resource.

Timber Weiss explained that the meeting was an introduction to a longer public process and outlined next steps for the year. In the first half of the year, the county plans to hire a hydrogeologist to review the U.S. Geological Survey's perennial yield estimate, including whether the current 3,000-acre-foot figure remains accurate. Once that analysis is complete, staff will evaluate the dedication or discount rate, which is the primary tool used to bring paper water rights into better balance with the basin's sustainable supply. By the end of the year, proposed updates will be incorporated into the area plan and presented to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration. Weiss emphasized that this will be a public process and that community members will have opportunities to stay engaged and provide input.

Carolyn White thanked staff for tackling a complex and technical topic, acknowledging that groundwater management and water rights are difficult to understand and require ongoing education for the community. She emphasized the importance of residents learning about the issue so they can meaningfully participate in the public process. White also highlighted what she described as the stakes of the proposal, noting that if the county does not update the discount factor and better align paper water rights with actual supply, the basin could experience aquifer drawdown and potentially dry wells. She said it is important for residents to understand that increasing dedication requirements is intended to prevent long-term harm to water resources. Vahid Behmaram added that timing is critical. He explained that many of the existing appropriations are still tied to agricultural use, and once those rights are converted to municipal or residential use, the county will have less flexibility to manage the imbalance. He noted that addressing the issue now puts the county in a stronger position to protect the basin before more permanent conversions occur.

Kevin Cook noted that groundwater conditions appear to vary across the valley, particularly between the west side of Pyramid Highway and the east side. Based on his experience drilling wells, he observed that some areas on the west side have artesian wells or high water availability, while wells on the east side can produce significantly less. He asked whether those differences would be considered in future studies and whether varying aquifer conditions could lead to different requirements in different parts of the valley. Timber Weiss agreed that groundwater conditions can vary within a basin and said that similar differences exist in places like Washoe Valley, where the eastern and western sides function differently from a hydrogeologic perspective. She noted that while the state manages the basin as a single management unit, it recognizes those variations in aquifer characteristics, and such differences would be considered as part of the broader evaluation. Vahid Behmaram explained that while groundwater conditions can vary within different parts of the basin, regulators and planners are required to manage the basin as a whole rather than dividing it into smaller subareas with different rules. Although recharge and pumping may occur in different locations and hydrogeologic studies consider those variations, water management decisions such as the discount factor must be applied uniformly across the entire basin. He emphasized that both the county and the State of Nevada take a holistic approach, using technical studies to inform a single, basin-wide management framework rather than setting different standards based on localized conditions.

Carolyn White clarified that the proposed changes to the dedication rate would primarily affect new development, not existing property owners. She explained that landowners with an existing parcel and the right to a domestic well would not be required to obtain additional water rights. The increased dedication requirement will apply only if someone chooses to subdivide a parcel, which is more likely in areas zoned for higher density development. Vahid Behmaram added that the focus is on new development versus existing uses. Current agricultural operations, such as turf farms, would not be subject to the discount factor unless they seek to convert their water rights to a different use, particularly municipal or residential. It is at the point of conversion to a permanent use that the higher dedication requirement would apply.

Kevin Cook asked when results from the planned hydrogeologic studies would be available and when the public could expect updated information. Timber Weiss responded that the county anticipates having preliminary information within the first half of the year. He said staff would coordinate to return with another agenda item once results are available and emphasized that the studies will take time. At this stage, no new data is ready for public release.

Zane Vaughn asked why the county would commission a new hydrogeologic study instead of relying on previous work conducted by TMWA, particularly a large study related to aquifer injection and groundwater analysis. He questioned whether using that existing study could reduce costs. Vahid Behmaram responded that the county would consider and use any available data, including prior studies. However, he explained that TMWA's analysis was largely focused on water quality and a specific area of the basin, particularly the cone of depression near the turf farm where significant pumping occurs. That study was designed around TMWA's operational goals, including storing and extracting water, rather than providing a comprehensive basin-wide evaluation for planning purposes. Timber Weiss added that while TMWA has done valuable work, different studies over time have produced varying estimates. The county's goal is to conduct an updated, independent review tailored specifically to its planning and regulatory responsibilities, rather than relying solely on a study developed for a different purpose. Vahid explained that any consultant hired by the county would review and incorporate all available data, including past studies conducted by TMWA and Washoe County Water Resources. He

noted that previous county analysis, including work by a former USGS hydrologist, produced different yield estimates. However, he said TMWA's study was more narrowly focused on the central portion of the valley and specific operational objectives. Because it did not evaluate the entire basin, the county cannot rely solely on that study and instead needs a comprehensive, basin-wide review to support planning decisions.

Veronica Cortes asked whether planners are adequately evaluating water impacts when reviewing new development or master plan amendments, and whether the need to revisit the water budget is tied to overdevelopment or projects using more water than expected. She also asked whether developers must redo water studies if they amend a project and increase the number of lots. Timber Weiss responded that developments cannot proceed without securing sufficient water rights to meet projected demand. Each project must dedicate water rights based on the number of lots and anticipated household use. She clarified that the current discussion is not the result of a single project exceeding expectations, but rather a broader issue of aligning paper water rights with sustainable yield. Weiss also confirmed that if a development proposal changes, such as increasing the number of lots, the water requirements are recalculated based on the revised plan before it moves forward for approval.

A resident asked how much of the estimated 3,000 acre-feet sustainable yield has already been allocated and what percentage of the total water supply remains available. In response, staff explained that the 3,000 acre-feet figure is based on U.S. Geological Survey estimates of the basin's physical water supply, including geology, precipitation and recharge. They confirmed that the amount of paper water rights already allocated exceeds that number, with approximately 7,000 acre-feet in appropriated rights, meaning allocations are significantly higher than the basin's estimated sustainable yield.

Vahid explained that over-allocation of water rights is common across Nevada and other western states that manage groundwater by hydrographic basin. Unlike riparian systems, Nevada regulates water rights based on estimated basin yield, but many early appropriations were issued before reliable yield estimates existed. When the 3,000-acre-foot estimate was later established, the basin had already been significantly appropriated. He noted that some of the historical overallocation was intentional, based on assumptions about agricultural use, seasonal irrigation and return flows to the aquifer. Curtailing agricultural users is also different from restricting residential users, which influenced past decisions. Vahid clarified that while there is a recommended sustainable yield, paper water rights accumulated over time as development occurred. However, in most of southern Washoe County, including this basin, the state has not issued new appropriations since roughly the mid-1990s, with new permits largely limited to more remote areas of northern Washoe County. Timber explained that the Nevada State Engineer is responsible for approving water rights permits and considers multiple factors when doing so, including agricultural use patterns and groundwater movement. She noted that the state formally recognized concerns about overallocation in the early 1990s and has been aware of and addressing these issues for decades, even as historic allocations remain in place.

An inaudible question was asked by a resident. Timber Weiss clarified that the referenced Nevada Revised Statutes apply only to water quantity, not water quality. She noted that water quality issues fall under the jurisdiction of the Northern Nevada Public Health District and suggested that they would be better equipped to address questions related to water quality.

Kevin Cook asked whether updating the water budget and discount factor could ultimately stop new development, even for projects that otherwise have legal entitlements, if sufficient water

allocations or availability are not present. In response, it was explained that if adequate paper water rights are not available to meet a project's demand under the required discount factor, development could be limited. Zahid added that in some areas, such as parts of the North Valleys, continued development already depends on supplemental solutions like large-scale water importation projects. In that sense, water availability can influence or constrain future growth if sufficient supply or transferable rights are not in place.

A resident cautioned residents to be skeptical of proposals that promise to recharge or "fix" the aquifer, suggesting that such claims should be scrutinized before being accepted at face value.

## **8. LETTER TO THE COUNTY MANAGER AND ASSISTANT COUNTY MANAGER**

Jan Mortensen motioned to move item #8 and #9 on the agenda to the next CAB meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Carolyn White seconded the motion, and these items are tabled until the March 11<sup>th</sup> CAB meeting.

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

This item was tabled until the next CAB meeting.

## **10. NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT HUB & OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Casey McDonald provided updates on development and community follow-up items. He noted an upcoming virtual meeting on Jan. 20 regarding a proposed development in District 5 near Red Rock on Osage Road, which includes plans to repave approximately one mile of roadway. He also highlighted how public comments from prior meetings led to action. After concerns were raised about road conditions, he contacted the county Roads Department, which is reviewing jurisdiction and sending staff to investigate. A request for a left-turn lane from northbound Pyramid Highway onto Winnemucca Ranch Road was forwarded to NDOT. NDOT conducted a site distance analysis and determined the intersection meets required safety standards, so no changes are planned. A separate concern about Peak Road was found to involve a private dirt road, making maintenance the responsibility of property owners. McDonald emphasized the importance of residents speaking up at meetings, noting that rural issues may not come to the county's attention without community input. He also mentioned a SWIFT evacuation survey being conducted by the county's Emergency Management Division related to wildfire evacuation planning and said he would share the survey link so residents can participate.

## **11. CAB MEMBER/COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/REQUESTS**

Carolyn White encouraged community members who are interested in local issues to apply to join the Citizens Advisory Board. She noted that the board currently has vacancies and is operating with fewer members than intended. White emphasized that joining the CAB is a meaningful way to get involved in the community and said the application process is straightforward, inviting interested residents to reach out for more information.

## **12. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT –**

Veronica Cortes introduced herself as a lifelong Washoe County resident, CAB member and District 5 commissioner candidate. She shared her personal ties with the community, including her family's property near Winnemucca Ranch Road and her work as a school district employee

and nonprofit founder. Cortes said she is running for office out of concern for local development decisions, particularly in Sun Valley, where she believes community opposition to certain projects has not always been reflected in final decisions. She encouraged residents to closely research all candidates, evaluate their track records and stay engaged in local issues. She emphasized the importance of informed voting and community involvement, urging residents to seek leadership that reflects and advocates for neighborhood concerns.

Rob Pierce introduced himself as a Navy veteran, former CAB member and current member of multiple Washoe County boards and commissions, including the Board of Adjustments, Planning Commission and Regional Planning Commission. He shared that he moved to the North Valleys for its rural lifestyle but became more civically involved after development changed the character of his neighborhood. Pierce said his experience serving on several county boards has given him firsthand insight into development issues, and he announced that he is running for County Commissioner, District 5, as his current term on other boards is ending. He expressed support for responsible, smart growth rather than unchecked expansion, emphasizing the need for stronger public safety, improved emergency response, road repairs, flood mitigation and greater accountability and transparency. He said growth is inevitable but should be managed in a way that respects community character and local needs.

A resident asked whether there is a central place where all County Commissioner candidates are listed. In response, it was explained that official candidate filings will not be available until the filing period opens in early March. Once candidates have formally filed, residents can find the complete list on the Washoe County Registrar of Voters website.

**ADJOURNMENT** - The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.