



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: January 13, 2026

DATE: December 24, 2025

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Dave Solaro, Assistant County Manager

THROUGH: Kate Thomas, County Manager

SUBJECT: Discussion and direction to staff for the possible use of more than four hours of staff time as requested by Commissioner Mariluz Garcia at the October 14, 2025 Board of County Commission meeting to determine if individual parcels of land, not owned by Washoe County, and not currently being assessed taxes can and or should be reviewed for ownership by Washoe County or adjacent property owners. The current issue is many of these parcels of land have no responsible or responsive owner to manage the properties, leading to illegal dumping, or illegal camping without ability for adequate enforcement. (All Commission Districts)

SUMMARY

Staff is requesting that the Board of County Commissioners review, discuss and provide direction to staff for the possible use of more than four hours of staff time as requested by Commissioner Mariluz Garcia at the October 14, 2025 Board of County Commission meeting to determine if individual parcels of land, not owned by Washoe County, and not currently being assessed taxes can and/or should be reviewed for ownership by Washoe County or adjacent property owners.

The purpose of this request is to seek Board direction on whether to allocate additional staff resources to evaluate the ownership status and potential management solutions for these parcels, with the goal of improving public health, safety, and neighborhood quality.

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

PREVIOUS ACTION

On October 14, 2025, Commissioner Mariluz Garcia formally requested a future agenda item to direct staff and the District Attorney to review public nuisance procedures under Washoe County Code Chapter 125, specifically for parcels with deceased owners or dissolved LLCs. She cited the growing number of unmanaged private parcels experiencing illegal dumping and blight, particularly in District 3 and Sun Valley, and

referenced recent data provided by the HOPE Team identifying 37 such parcels. Commissioner Garcia advocated for a systemic approach to address the lack of responsible parties and the resulting enforcement challenges.

The Board has previously considered related actions regarding the use of staff time for research and analysis. Under the current Board Rules of Procedure, any request by a Commissioner for staff work estimated to require four or more hours must receive prior approval from the full Commission through an agenda item. This policy was reaffirmed in the revised Rules of Procedure adopted on February 25, 2025, to ensure transparency and appropriate allocation of staff resources.

BACKGROUND

The issue of unmanaged, privately owned parcels in Washoe County that are not currently being assessed taxes has emerged as a significant concern due to the absence of responsible or responsive ownership. This situation has led to illegal dumping, unauthorized camping, and related public health, fire, and safety challenges, particularly in areas such as Sun Valley and District 3. The situation also exists in District 2 and District 5. The lack of clear ownership or accountability for these parcels complicates enforcement efforts and hinders the County's ability to maintain neighborhood quality and environmental standards.

Historically, Washoe County has addressed property management and public nuisance issues through a combination of code enforcement, interagency collaboration, and periodic review of surplus or tax-delinquent properties. The County's authority to address public nuisances is established under Washoe County Code Chapter 125, which defines a public nuisance as "any condition or use of property which is injurious to health, indecent, offensive to the senses, or an obstruction to the free use of property, so as to interfere with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property by an entire community or neighborhood, or by any considerable number of persons". This code provides mechanisms for abatement, but enforcement is limited when ownership is unclear or when the legal owner is deceased or a defunct entity. Staff will explore opportunities to work with state legislators on statutory provisions related to this matter, including, but not limited to the definition of "nuisance".

The County's approach to tax-delinquent parcels is governed by Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) Chapter 361, which outlines the process for the sale or transfer of properties held in trust by the County Treasurer due to unpaid property taxes. Specifically, NRS 361.595 authorizes the County to auction such properties after proper notice, while NRS 361.603 provides exemptions for certain public uses and details the process for transferring parcels to governmental entities. Washoe County Code Sections 20.469–20.479 further detail the procedures for reviewing, auctioning, or transferring tax-delinquent lands. However, these statutory and code provisions primarily address parcels already held in trust by the County, not those that remain in private ownership but lack an active or locatable owner.

In recent years, the County has observed an increase in the number of parcels with deceased owners or dissolved limited liability companies (LLCs), resulting in properties that are effectively abandoned. This trend has been documented through reports from the

Washoe County HOPE Team, which have highlighted the impact of unmanaged parcels on illegal dumping and blight in both urban and rural areas. The County's ability to intervene is further complicated by the need to respect private property rights and comply with due process requirements under state law.

Legal and regulatory frameworks require that any action to review, acquire, or transfer ownership of these parcels must be conducted in accordance with established notice procedures. For example, NRS 361.595 mandates that notice of a tax sale be published in a newspaper of general circulation at least once a week for four consecutive weeks prior to the sale, with the first publication not less than 22 days before the date of sale. Washoe County has consistently followed these requirements in its annual tax delinquent property auctions, as documented in the Delinquent Lands Book and related staff reports.

The current request is for Board direction regarding the allocation of additional staff time to review the ownership status of unmanaged, non-taxed parcels that are currently being used for illegal dumping or illegal camping. While there are options for County ownership, or adjacent property owners acquiring the parcels, the goal would be to create a process where management of the parcels is appropriate to be in conformance with other surrounding properties. Unless otherwise directed by the Board, the intent is not to create an inequity in management or operation of the parcels. The restoration of accountability and improving conditions in affected neighborhoods is the outcome sought. While there are fiscal impacts associated with this action, there are also financial opportunities that staff will explore, such as using the proceeds to bolster the existing affordable housing trust fund or create a land bank that could create broader economic opportunities.

FISCAL IMPACT

While this staff report does not contain a direct fiscal impact the allocation of more than four hours of staff time to review the ownership status of individual parcels not owned by Washoe County and not currently being assessed taxes will have indirect fiscal and resource implications for the County.

As with many requests for the use of staff time, the item is generally not in the current workload of the various departments and may not be directly tied to a strategic plan goal or initiative. The financial impact will be the cost of staff labor, which will be absorbed within departmental operating budgets unless otherwise directed by the Board. Specific departments likely to be involved include Community Services Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Office of the County Manager, and the Treasurer's Office. It is estimated that there may be as few as 37 parcels, and as many as 60 parcels in this condition across the County, each one requiring an estimated 10 hours of staff time to review based on the complexity of ownership research, and the need for legal or title analysis. Any additional costs, such as title searches or external legal consultation, would be subject to standard procurement and contracting procedures under County policy and Nevada Revised Statutes. It has not been determined what current initiatives will need to be postponed to initiate this work, but based on current workloads and resources, this work cannot be absorbed within the current department priorities and statutory work.

Funding for this initiative is anticipated to be sourced from existing departmental budgets, as no dedicated funding stream has been identified for this type of parcel review. Should the Board direct staff to proceed, departments will be requested to estimate the hours and associated costs for the project as well as identify which current priorities would be paused while this work is initiated. If the review identifies parcels that are eligible for acquisition or transfer to County ownership, any subsequent actions—such as appraisals, public notice, or acquisition—would require separate Board approval and may result in additional one-time or ongoing costs, including but not limited to appraisal fees, legal notice publication, and potential property maintenance or abatement expenses.

The use of staff time for research and analysis of this nature is governed by the Board's Rules of Procedure, which require prior Commission approval for any request estimated to require four or more hours of staff work. This policy is intended to ensure transparency and the prudent allocation of County resources, particularly when the fiscal impact or the impact to current work priorities is not fully known at the outset of a project.

While the immediate fiscal impact is limited to staff time and any incidental costs associated with the initial review, the potential for future expenditures exists if the Board elects to pursue acquisition, abatement, or other management actions for identified parcels. Staff will provide periodic updates to the Board regarding actual expenditure and any anticipated budgetary needs as the project progresses.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board discuss and provide direction to staff for the possible use of more than four hours of staff time as requested by Commissioner Mariluz Garcia at the October 14, 2025 Board of County Commission meeting to determine if individual parcels of land, not owned by Washoe County, and not currently being assessed taxes can and or should be reviewed for ownership by Washoe County or adjacent property owners.

POSSIBLE MOTION

A possible motion would be:

"Move to request staff utilize more than four hours of staff time of the Community Services Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Office of the County Manager, and the Treasurer's Office for the purpose of researching the policy decisions, code changes, and operational changes that Washoe County will need to make for staff to implement a program or process for the management of the parcels in a way that is appropriate and in conformance with other surrounding properties, restoring accountability and improving conditions in affected neighborhoods."