

Workshop Session – July 19, 2016

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, July 19, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular workshop session. All board was present. Rebecca Garland served as Clerk for the meeting due to the absence of Clerk Kim Crisp.

Chairman Nelms called the workshop session to order.

Chairman Nelms stated that Joan Stillwell, CDBG Administrator was running late and asks if anyone in the public would like to speak.

Commissioner Orr stated that she, Manager Edwards and EDC Director Sophia Paulos had met at Stecoah Valley Center with a representative from Senator's Burr's office and they promised that they would look into the issue of permitting on protected lands. Ms. Paulos mentioned that a Burr representative did meet with a representative from the USFS and asked what the results of the meeting were. The representative from Senator Burr's office had spoken with them but would not have a report until Thursday at the GREAT dinner. Commissioner Orr stated that she did not realize they were differences in Graham County permitting from other counties related to guide hikes, birdwatching or fishing expeditions. Commissioner Orr stated that the insurance coverage required is about \$1.5 million for Nantahala Forest as opposed to Pisgah National Forest. Manager Edwards asks why there was a difference in permitting for land use. Commissioner Orr stated that there were even less restrictions in the eastern part of NC and the representative from Senator Burr's office will be addressing it with our USFS Representative.

Manager Edwards stated that he received a letter from Mr. Overcash and Tom Tillis office regarding an appropriation bill and wilderness area. Manager Edwards stated that the letter was in the commissioner's packets and stated that the government treats lands as wilderness even before Congress designates areas as wilderness.

Commissioner Orr stated that they talked about the SRS and PILT monies. Manager Edwards stated that he was surprised they were not really versed in this area and further stated that the SRS money would be ending which was a surprise to Senator Burr's office. Manager Edwards also stated that the issue of Broadband was a topic of discussion. Steven Green mentioned that other government contractors wanted to hold groups here because of the secluded area and we have broadband capacity. Scott Hamilton with ARC will be invited to the area by Senator Burr's DC office and further stated that he did not want to seem biased.

Manager Edwards stated that GREAT has been responsible for trails work and he had heard in DC that Congress had appropriated more money for trails but organizations like GREAT have not been given any work. Manager Edwards stated that the park service and Great Smoky Mountain National Park has only five persons hired to do trail maintenance and this park is one of the largest of parks.

Chairman Nelms asked if they have a list of special use permits and what can they be used for. Ms. Paulos stated that she understands they have a standard protocol. Ms. Paulos stated that discrepancies come with the required levels of insurance and there is a discrepancy between Smokey's and Pisgah parks which is odd due to the fact that they have similar terrain. Manager Edwards stated that there should be uniformity and further stated that in Graham County there are two cell towers in the whole county and where the high areas are is located in park lands. Manager Edwards stated that one of the government goals is economic development and how can this work when the use of the land is so limited and further stated that there must be equity and fairness.

Ms. Paulos also mentioned conversations for different industries that fit well with this area and one that may be viable is water purification. Ms. Paulos's perspective on water purification is that she does not understand why there is a need for this here because our water quality is good. Commissioner Orr stated that there were a lot of people that buy bottled water. Ms. Paulos will ask for more detail because she understood that it was more for defense contractors and they did not think about bottled water for local use. Ms. Paulos also stated that she had concern in areas that have ample water and if

these type of projects can have a negative impact on water supplies. Ms. Paulos stated that small business that do this type of work would work but larger companies could drain the water supplies. Commissioner Orr stated that we have plenty of water here. Manager Edwards stated that the Fontana Reservoir has pristine water and we need to have conversation with TVA about the use of the lake and further stated that this has been mentioned before at the Stecoah Valley Center.

Chairman Nelms asks Joan Stillwell to speak. Ms. Stillwell requested direction for going into the Old Sweetwater Sewer Project. Ms. Stillwell stated that our low to moderate income can be improved if we go into Long Branch. Ms. Stillwell stated that the house beyond the Old Sweetwater Road has issues with septic especially when it rains and using this house along with the other houses already chosen will improve our chances of getting the grant. Ms. Stillwell stated that she tried to talk with the engineer today to see if he had done some preliminary work with the application we made last year and we lost points in the last round and she is trying to get the application to get more points. Ms. Stillwell inquired as to why we lost points and they said that we left off information and she showed them where we had included the information. Ms. Stillwell stated that she protested the loss of points and they restored them and felt that we lost the grant due to an error on the part of Department of Commerce. Ms. Stillwell stated that the budget will be a little less than \$2,000,000.00 and the application is due September 27, 2016. Ms. Stillwell stated that she needed to know if the board is willing to work in this area to apply for the grant again which will increase the low to moderate income. Chairman Nelms stated that the board will discuss and get back to her by the next meeting. Ms. Stillwell stated that she needs the answer the sooner the better and further stated that she did not realize the population in the area had so many over the low to moderate income thresholds and suggested doing the legwork to see if it is feasible to apply and further stated that it would not cost the county for her time to do the preliminary work.

Chairman Nelms closed the workshop session.

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Jacob Nelms, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

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Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

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Lynn Cody, Member, Graham County Commissioner

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Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

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Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

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Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board

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Rebecca Garland, Finance Officer  
Assistant Clerk