

Regular Meeting – July 18, 2017

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, July 18, 2017 for their regular monthly meeting in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. Commissioners present was: Keith Eller, Jacob Nelms, Dale Wiggins and Raymond Williams. Commissioner Connie Orr was absent.

1. Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Williams to give the Invocation.
3. Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Wiggins to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chairman Eller asks for changes or additions to the agenda. Manager Garland stated that we needed to add #6A – Life-force Helicopter Team and Commissioner Williams asks to be in closed. Chairman Eller asks for approval of the agenda with the amendments. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the agenda with the amendments. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chairman Eller asks for approval of the minutes for the Special Meeting – June 19th; Workshop Session – June 20th; Regular Meeting – June 20th and the Continued Meeting – June 30th. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chairman Eller asks for public comment. Manager Garland stated that two people had signed in for public comment and asks Roy Stiles to speak. Mr. Stiles thanked the board for their time and stated that he lives in Stecoah and he is here about the taxes on his wife’s car. Mr. Stiles stated that he has tried to work with the tax office on the value of his wife’s car and he cannot get any help. Mr. Stiles stated that the car is a 2012 Explorer with 116,000 miles and she has it valued for \$22,000.00 when the Kelly Blue Book values it for \$10,000 to \$12,000 and the NADA price is \$12,500.00. Mr. Stiles stated that he is also here to complain about his property taxes that went up three times the price it was last year and he feels that this is unreasonable. Mr. Stiles stated that it was time for something to be done because you cannot talk to the tax office. Chairman Eller asks that Mr. Stiles leave his information with the Clerk and the board would give him an answer within 30 days.
7. Manager Garland stated that the next name was Connie Gross. Ms. Gross stated that she was a Councilwoman for the Town of Santeetlah and she wanted to thank the board for the opportunity to sit on the Regional Library Board. Ms. Gross stated that she has been speaking with the new librarian and sharing ideas and was awaiting a call from Daphne on the upcoming meetings. Ms. Gross stated that she would do the best for Graham County.
8. Chairman Eller asks Lifeforce Helicopter Team to speak. Jim Foxx thanked the board for allowing them to speak and stated that they are with Erlanger Medical Force and they started their program in 1988. Mr. Foxx stated that they currently have (6) helicopters and they will be stationing a helicopter at the Andrews Airport which is only (10) miles away. Mr. Foxx stated that they have a weather advantage helicopter. Commissioner Williams asks if they can fly you to any hospital or is it only Erlanger. Mr. Foxx stated that they can fly to any hospital. Mr. Foxx stated that they are also a part of the AirMed program that Sara Gordon had presented to the board. The board thanked the gentlemen for their time and everyone agrees that this is a great opportunity for our county.
9. Chairman Eller asks Sophia Paulos to give her monthly report. Ms. Paulos reporting was as follows:

Main Street

As I mentioned in my last report, REDI gave me many of the tools needed to get to work on reviving Main Street. Since then I have worked with the Town of Robbinsville, the Graham County Historical Society, and GREAT to begin to aggressively address this issue. A few weeks ago representatives from NC Commerce’s Main Street Program Karen Smith and Sherry Adams, as well as ARC representative Ann Bass, came to visit Robbinsville and begin working with myself and Brian Johnson on reviving the town. We met later that afternoon with members of the Graham County Historical Society, Becky Garland, and Beth Fields to discuss the best ways we can get to work. What became clear is that we must do all that we can on our own to demonstrate that we are willing and able to make progress. Power washing buildings, planting flowers, supporting the revitalization of the Snider Building by supporting the historical society, are all things that we have the ability to do on our own. I will be working with Rick Davis, and Brian Johnson to pull together a task force of people, to revisit “Reimagining Robbinsville” and

to develop and implement a strategy to bring our County seat into its new life that can live as a legacy to those who preserve it for many many years to come.

WCU

Arthur Salido: is the Executive Director, Community and Economic Engagement and Innovation. He came to Graham County to meet with Becky Garland, Jacob Nelms, Juanita Colvard, and myself to share resources available to help develop the economy and address various issues in Graham County. In addition to working with me on several projects to attract economic investment to Graham County, Dr. Salido's department has the ability to connect the County with various resources including planning and research.

Dr. Alison Morrison-Shetlar: is Provost of WCU. She and I met the week before last to discuss NC Promise and WCU's continued commitment to rural residents in the area. The University is taking a strong stance on local entry to the University as the number of applications from across the state begin to surge as a college education becomes affordable. \$500 tuition for undergraduate students holds a lot of promise for the bright young minds of Graham County. As the regional and county economy continue to grow this will increase the opportunities for our children to stay. In addition to NC Promise, Dr. Salido in coordination with the Provost's Office has launched a program to develop soft skills and internships for college students so that they are top competitors for employment when they graduate. We will be working with the internship program to create opportunities in Graham County so that our youth can see there are paths to staying here. Additionally, WCU has launched a program of Continuing Education courses for students and non-students alike to support various industry needs for professional workforce development in the region. This program was so successful with business and industry that when it was launched last year they reached full enrollment without even advertising the program. The message from Western is very clear: They are here for Graham County. They are here for our citizens, our children, our students, our economy, our future. They are eager to assist Graham County in any way that they can and they've already begun doing so.

Broadband

The Mountain West Partnership continues to forge ahead with the regional broadband initiative. Phase I is underway as we have received the RFP's and will be selecting the contractor in the coming weeks. We have put in for an ARC grant to fund Phase II and are currently working to raise funds from private partners to support the \$15,000 match required for Phase II. On the local level, we are still hard at work to bring service to our citizens. I will be meeting with Keith Conover from NC Commerce's IT Infrastructure Office and Matt Sanger from Balsam West to discuss their procurement of DNet, now West Net, and how Balsam West will continue to grow, along with other providers, in Graham County.

Agriculture

NC NPA: The NC Natural Products Association recently invited me to join their rural outreach committee and speak as a voice for rural economic development. As the natural products industry continues to see record growth year after year, Western NC is poised to be an international heavyweight. More importantly, Graham County is at the heart of this development. Our mountains; their pristine state, unique environments, and vast amounts of forested land make it literally one of the most desirable places on earth to grow the plants and medicinal herbs that support this industry. We are gaining international attention. This industry isn't just about medicinal herbs. The natural products industry includes the production of value added commodities and the manufacturing of products for the health & beauty and cleaning products markets. We will be working with our partners from the local extension office, academia, NC DA, NC BioTech, WCU, the SBTDC and federal representatives at the USDA and FDA to leverage Graham County's unique position to capitalize on this opportunity. This industry will create jobs, provide a way for families to profit from their land in ways like never before, and even opportunities for extra income the likes of which we haven't seen since the decline of tobacco.

USFS

Open House

The USFS will hold an open house next Tuesday July 25, 3-6 p.m. at the Cheoah Ranger District Office to provide the public with opportunities to talk with forest staff about local issues, district project, and the revision of the forest plan that is underway. District rangers and members of the Forest Plan revision team will be available to discuss the materials. I encourage you all to attend.

Partnership

I have been hard at work with members of the partnership on a proposal that will be sent to the forest service, with the full backing of the partnership, to act as the criteria for the forest plan as it pertains to the Unicoi and Fontana geographic areas that represent Graham County. I want to be very clear that this proposal is not the forest plan. This is the proposal that we and many other stakeholders will be advocating for the USFS to adopt as the forest plan. In the current

political and economic climate it is clear that they are aware that it is in their best interest to see to it that they listen to the people and reflect that in their policies, management's practices, and the forest plan. The points that the partnership has agreed to back are as follows:

- a. Recommend that the following inventory areas **not** move forward as wilderness: eastern portion of Tapoco extension (the part in the lakes GA), Lower Snowbird, Cheoah Bald, Yellow Creek Mountains, Joyce Kilmer Southern Extensions.
- b. Recommend that the following areas be considered appropriate for timber harvest for ecological restoration, maintenance of existing roads, and protection of rare species habitat, but not timber production or new permanent roads: Upper Santeetlah, Joyce Kilmer Southern Extensions, Lower Snowbird, top of Meetinghouse
- c. Recommend that no wilderness be added **unless and until** management benchmarks and conditions are met, but support wilderness when they are met, including: - Double(?) timber harvest volume- Wilderness causes no loss of road access- Recreation trails are open, passable, signed, and have parking/trailhead access.
- d. Recommend smoothing out harvest levels from year to year at the mid-scale. (It's hard for local purchasers to deal with boom/bust within a county)
- e. Recommend prioritizing objectives for types of harvest that are compatible with ecological restoration, wildlife habitat needs, and local timber industry needs.

-It would be ideal to list some of these

- Recommend improving and adding recreational access in lakes GA. Recommend improving and restoring trail accessibility, including current system trails and Joanna bald trail.
- Recommend reviewing existing trails to assess whether appropriate for multi-use? Can we develop more multi use trail opportunities to multiply visitation for trails?
- Recommend clarifying that the recreational resources in these GAs are underutilized and therefore small-scale commercial outfitter use is not likely to have impacts beyond normal public use, and encourage streamlining of permits.
- Recommend prioritizing areas with timber and wildlife habitat emphasis for restoring public road access.
- Designate the area around Santeetlah Lake, the Cheoah River and Lake Fontana as recreation priority areas.

Stakeholders Group

This is the other group working on making recommendations to the USFS for the forest revision plan. This group has good representation with regard to hunting and timber. That being said, they have not sought input from Counties until very recently. We have responded to their inquiry and I expect to be meeting with them in the near future to ensure that Graham County's interest are represented on all fronts.

10. Chairman Eller asks for the finance and manager's report. Manager Garland stated that our cash balance at the end of June was \$6,758,270.76 and we are \$1.3 million dollars ahead from this time last year and \$4.5 million dollars ahead from this time (5) years ago. Manager Garland thanks the board for allowing the fund balance to grow. Ms. Garland stated that our property tax collection for the month was \$22,858.21 for Real and \$40,101.80 for DMV. Manager Garland stated that our total tax collection for the year was \$6,168,900.78 for our Real and \$472,808.89 for DMV giving us a tax collection rate of 96.91%. Manager Garland stated that this was the highest rate since she came to work for the county and was very proud of the tax office for their dedication and hard work. Manager Garland stated that our revenues for June was \$1,008,746.59 and our expenditures was \$1,788,173.99 leaving us a deficit of \$678,857.26. Manager Garland stated that the county pays large bank notes in the month of June and the school bond is included in that figure. Manager Garland stated that we will be having a year-end surplus of \$1,013,450.34 and is very pleased with this number. Manager Garland stated that our sales tax collection was \$157,095.36 which is up \$7,000.00 from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that we have collected \$458,664.90 in back taxes.
11. Manager Garland stated that every budget was in good standing at year end and we finished the year with a 9% surplus and she is very thankful to the department heads for their continued hard work.

12. Manager Garland stated that Sara Gordon with AirMed will be returning to the county to allow community members to sign up for their program and that 16 employees have already signed up for the program. Manager Garland stated that this program works with anyone that is flown out by helicopter, they will manage the bill with the insurance company and pay the remaining balance. Manager Garland stated that Ms. Gordon will be hosting a BBQ to invite the community to join the program.
13. Manager Garland stated that the Charters of Freedom had visited us and they are ready to do the monuments that have been designated to be installed at the library. Manager Garland stated that they will solicit donations and they are working with the school system to get assistance with the building of the monuments.
14. Manager Garland stated that the NCACC gave a reporting on the long session and stated that some of their goals is making some progress.
15. Manager Garland stated that she met with Brookfield, USFS, and the US Fish and Wildlife last Wednesday at the Blue Waters Resort. Manager Garland stated that they were discussing the release dates on the river. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we needed to check our FIRK agreement on the dates when we can request changes. Manager Garland stated that the big meeting will be in October. The board all agreed that we needed more release dates for the kayaking in the county. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we are one of the stakeholders and we do have a seat at the table.
16. Manager Garland stated that there is a GREAT meeting on Thursday, July 20th at the RHS Campus. Manager Garland stated that there is a NC Rural Center meeting Wednesday, July 26th in Marble from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
17. Manager Garland stated that our public hearing will be held August 7th on the consolidation of the DHHS and the DSS.
18. Manager Garland stated that there is a meeting in Raleigh on August 8th on the A-0009 Corridor and she will be attending along with Commissioner Eller and Nelms.
19. Manager Garland stated that she, Commissioner Wiggins and Commissioner Orr would be attending the NCACC Conference August 10th through the 12th.
20. Manager Garland stated that we would now go to the discussion items. Manager Garland needed approval for the Releases - \$7,026.86 and the Discoveries - \$5,394.09. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
21. Manager Garland stated that Representative Kevin Corbin and Senator Jim Davis are still working on HB 795 to insure that we stay as a Tier 1 County.
22. Manager Garland stated that there was some confusion on the disposal of scrap tires and according to the old fact sheet from the state the person delivering the tires had to unload and stack the tires but the new sheet does not state this information any longer. Manager Garland stated that we would designate two days per month when the tires could be delivered so that our employees will be on site to help unload the tires. Manager Garland stated that if they know that they are coming then they can assist. Chairman Eller stated that most stations haul tires on their slow days so two days a month will not always work. Manager Garland stated that she would work with Sanitation Director Gavin Colvard on this issue.
23. Manager Garland stated that Fontana is having a ribbon cutting on the new water plant and stated that we needed to RSVP if any of the board wanted to attend. Commissioner Williams stated that he would be attending.
24. Manager Garland stated that we had a recommendation to appoint Jimmie Holder to the SW LTC County Advisory Board. Commissioner Williams made the motion to appoint Jimmie Holder to the SW LTC County Advisory Board. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
25. Manager Garland stated that we needed to appoint a member to the Travel and Tourism Board. Commissioner Williams made the motion to appoint Rick Davis and stated that he had spoken with him and he would serve. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
26. Manager Garland stated that the board needed to be considering appointments to the Advisory Board once the county consolidates the DHHS and DSS. Manager Garland stated that the members must meet a certain criteria in order to serve and named the positions available.
27. Manager Garland stated that the board needed to review the quotes for the Sheriff Cars. The quotes was as follows: Taylor Ford - \$25,671.82; Ken Wilson Ford - \$27,194.00; Asheville Ford - \$27,288.88 and Jacky Jones Ford - \$27,471.82. Commissioner Williams made the motion to go with the lowest quote which is Taylor Ford. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
28. Manager Garland stated that we needed to surplus the 1999 Transit Bus and the 2009 Transit Caravan. Manager Garland stated that Juanita Colvard, Transit Director asks that the board give the Bus a minimum bid of \$3,000.00 and the Caravan needed a minimum bid of \$1,600.00. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to surplus the 1999 Transit Bus and the 2009 Transit

Caravan with the minimum bids as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

29. Manager Garland stated that the board needed to appoint a NCACC Voting Delegate. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to appoint Commissioner Connie Orr as the NCACC Voting Delegate. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
30. Manager Garland stated that she had a request from Clerk of Superior Court Tammy Holloway to close the courthouse on the day of the solar eclipse. The board denied this request.
31. Manager Garland stated that we did not receive one bid on the 1999 Ford Truck that was salvaged at sanitation. The board all agreed to put the truck in the metal pile.
32. Chairman Eller stated that we needed to go into closed session under G.S. 143-318.11(a) (1) (3) (5) (6) for privileged or confidential information, attorney-client privilege, personnel and contracts. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
33. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
34. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to accept David Hyatt's resignation. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
35. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to appoint Jacob Nelms as the Building Inspector. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
36. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Keith Eller, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Dale E. Wiggins, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board