

The Graham County Board of Commissioners and the Graham County Travel and Tourism Authority met Wednesday, August 23, 2017 at 5:30 pm in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board of commissioners was present. The Travel and Tourism board present was: Raymond Williams, Revonda Williams, Jess Wehr, Billy Brown and Robin Turner.

1. Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Eller turned the meeting over to Commissioner Williams.
3. Commissioner Williams thanked everyone for coming and stated that at the last Travel and Tourism meeting they went over some issues that Fontana is facing and hopes that we can assist Fontana where TVA is concerned. Commissioner Williams asks that we write letters to our Congressman, Senators and Representatives to see if they can ease the burden of expenses for Fontana from TVA. Commissioner Williams stated that TVA charged Fontana \$60,000.00 to repair electric lines that the Fontana staff had fixed before TVA arrived and they pay \$40,000.00 a month for their power bill. Commissioner Williams stated that their lease payment two years ago was \$90,000.00; last year was \$100,000.00 and now this year they are being charged \$110,000.00 plus 20% of the profit that was made by Fontana. Commissioner Williams stated that Ted and Avis Phillips has done a lot for Graham County and they have used their own money to help finance Fontana and we need to do something to try and help them out. Commissioner Williams stated that Fontana was our second highest employer and it is seasonal but our county benefits from the business. Commissioner Williams stated that they are our highest contributor in occupancy tax as well. Commissioner Williams stated that Fontana wants to remain in business but if something doesn't happen they will try and sell the place and no one will purchase the business knowing the amounts of money that will have to be paid to TVA.
4. T&T board member Revonda Williams stated that this is too high for them to maintain and this business could be profitable if the land rent would come down. Ms. Williams stated that we needed to use TVA's own programs to assist Fontana through their Rural Economic Development Programs which support rural and economically distressed areas. Ms. Williams stated that TVA has special grant assistance and Graham County has the highest unemployment rate and we could use this assistance. Ms. Williams stated that she pulled the information from their website and further stated that TVA helps sustainable communities to ensure healthy environments, and suggests that we go to them.
5. Manager Garland stated that we receive PILT payments in regards to their property taxes and this is a very small amount.
6. Commissioner Nelms asks if we have any connections with TVA. Commissioner Wiggins stated that he thought they had a regional office in Knoxville. T&T Member Billy Brown stated that he thought the Knoxville office closed.
7. T&T member Robin Turner stated that no one will want to purchase the business knowing they have a 30 year lease without renewal. Mr. Turner stated that if the county could assist in extending the lease or if TVA would sell the property to the county this would be one way of keeping the business alive.
8. The boards agreed that they must pursue this issue because of the importance to the county.
9. The boards discussed how much property TVA owned as far as power that they supply. Clerk Crisp stated that Duke has power to Brooks Cove which is just around the curve from the village.
10. Commissioner Orr stated that we should have a copy of their lease in our offices and stated that we should have contact information for them as well.
11. The boards discussed the workforce or the lack thereof for many businesses.
12. The boards all agreed that we formulate a presentation letter and get it to Congressman Mark Meadows to get him on board. Commissioner Williams stated that the contract that the owners have is iron clad.
13. The boards all agreed that the Town of Fontana Dam needed to be included in this conversation as well because if the Village folds then the Town of Fontana Dam will no longer exist.
14. Commissioner Orr stated that we needed to form a coalition to get TVA here to speak with us. Commissioner Nelms asks how many needs to be on the committee. The board agreed to the following members: Greg Corvelle, Sophia Paulos, Becky Garland, and Robin Turner with a back-up of Rick Davis, Commissioner Dale Wiggins with a back-up of Commissioner Connie Orr. The boards agreed that we needed Congressman Mark Meadows, Richard Burr and Thom Tillis on this issue to assist us. Commissioner Orr stated that she would contact Avis Phillips to inform her of our plans.
15. The boards discussed the houseboats issue and found that Bob Corker, Lamar Alexander and Richard Burr had assisted with the bill.
16. The boards agreed that this needs to be done rather quickly.

17. Commissioner Orr made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion.  
Vote unanimous.

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Keith Eller, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

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Connie Orr, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

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Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Commissioner

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Dale E. Wiggins, 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