

Workshop Session – November 21, 2017

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, November 21, 2017 at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular workshop session. Board present: Connie Orr, Jacob Nelms, Dale Wiggins and Raymond Williams. Board absent: Keith Eller.

1. Vice-Chairman Orr called the meeting to order.
2. Vice-Chairman Orr asks Sophia Paulos, EDC Director to discuss the Stakeholders Forum. Ms. Paulos thanked Rob Elliott and Sam Evans for attending the meeting and asks Mr. Elliott to speak. Mr. Elliott stated that he was a member of the Stakeholders Forum under the Evergreen in Canton NC and he buys all the wood for the Canton Paper Mill and he and Sam was here to speak to the board on the Nantahala Forest Revision Plan. Mr. Elliott stated that he did not want to get into much detail but an overall general understanding of why the commissioner board's collaborative efforts are appreciated. Mr. Elliott thanked the board for allowing Sophia Paulos to represent Graham County. Mr. Elliott stated that the Canton Mill was established in 1906 and it plays a very important role and employees 2000 people. Mr. Elliott stated that we have loggers and lumber mill workers from the outside as well. Mr. Elliott stated that we all needed to come together and have an implementable plan. Mr. Elliott stated that the USFS has been unproductive in managing our recreation sites, engaging with the counties and with a lot of other issues. Mr. Elliott stated that the USFS relationship with the loggers has been contentious on timber management and stated that Graham County has a very positive leadership role being the only county at the table. Mr. Elliott stated that there are 30 stakeholders from environmentalists to paper mill operators and the county's interest is very important. Mr. Elliott stated that the relationships that are ensuing will carry forward to implementation of a better plan. Mr. Elliott stated that timber receipts are supported by our environmental community. Mr. Elliott stated that everyone could bring old baggage to the table and the timber industry has been at odds with the environmental company but if handled correctly and the laws and processes are followed we can create a great partnership.
3. Sam Evans stated that his environmental partners want to be partners with the stakeholders and having timber habitat accomplishes multi-goals and even though they may have different values we can strategize to become a part of this revision plan process. Mr. Evans stated that there are several different groups at the table but we needed to present a group leadership to the Forest Service. Mr. Evans stated that they wanted to see better trail access, trail maintenance and trails that make connections. Mr. Evans stated that we want to work together on this project and have our plan used as an example for other areas in similar situations with the Forest Service.
4. Sophia Paulos, EDC Director stated that the plan needed to be driven to reflect Travel and Tourism opportunities as well as timber harvesting opportunities. Ms. Paulos stated that if we work together then we all win. Ms. Paulos stated that the forest service is working on proposals to move the gate at Meeting House to allow people to park on the top of the hill instead of in the road. Ms. Paulos stated that it is very important that we stick together and hold the forest service accountable and be partners in this upcoming plan. Ms. Paulos stated that we have exciting leadership and will be engaged in a lot of avenues of the plan. Mr. Evans stated that he was in Washington D.C. two weeks ago and delivered paperwork to the Chief Forest Service Officer. Mr. Evans stated that we needed to hold the forest service accountable on our forestry products. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we also needed to have a local ranger that would stay since we have been through five in the last eight years. Mr. Evans stated that this is one of the most important reasons that the collaborative is important, they need to be held accountable. Mr. Elliott stated that the turnover rate is standard and we do not have enough students taking forestry and we do not have enough foresters. Mr. Elliott stated that Graham County is in a place to tell what the people want with their forests and the proposal needs to reflect that. Ms. Paulos stated that there will be more collaboration on this plan and everyone needed to be working together.
5. The board thanked Mr. Elliott, Mr. Evans and Sophia Paulos for their hard work and agreed that we all needed to work together.

Signature page attached!

Signature page for the November 21, 2017 Regular Workshop Session

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