

Workshop Session – July 17, 2018

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, July 17, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. for their regular workshop session in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board was present.

1. Chairman Eller called the workshop session to order.
2. Chairman Eller asks Phillip Price to speak. Mr. Price thanked the board for their time and stated that he is running for Congressman; he is a resident of our local district; is married to Michelle and has three children and is currently in the lumber recycling business. Mr. Price stated that he has never run for office before but he felt compelled to run for the people of our district and he is here to learn from Graham County on what they need to benefit from the governor's office.
3. Manager Garland stated that we have several issues the first being that our county is 74% owned by the Federal Government and we only receive \$301,000.00 per year for PILT (payment in lieu of taxes) which equals about \$0.54 cents per acre which is much less than the rate that our county taxpayers pay. Manager Garland stated that Congress needs to push for a permanent appropriation. Manager Garland stated that she would be doing a fly in to Washington with NACO to advocate about the PILT.
4. Manager Garland stated that we also needed the reauthorization of the SRS (secure rural schools) money which is the money that is made by the timber sales in the county from the federally owned land and stated that our county has a history to tell concerning the timber sales in Graham County. Manager Garland stated that Congress failed to reauthorize the SRS but later backtracked and gave a repayment to the counties. Manager Garland stated that we usually receive around \$200,000.00 and 80% of the money goes to the school and 20% of the money goes to our volunteer fire departments and further stated that if we lost this money this will leave a huge hole in funding to our schools and fire departments. Manager Garland stated that the school receives Impact Aid monies which is given because of the Federal and Tribal presence being in the county and we have been told that the federal government wants to cut this funding out as well. Manager Garland stated that this would devastate our local schools budget and our budget because we would have to ask the taxpayers to foot the shortages and we are already in an impoverished county with a high level of residents over the age of 65 years and are on a fixed income. Manager Garland stated that if we increase our taxes people will go without medicine or food to pay their taxes. Manager Garland stated that the federal government has failed to pick up the bill when it comes to paying for federally owned lands in any county. Manager Garland stated that our dealings with the Forest Service has not always gone well especially where logging is concerned but we are in the middle of a Forest Management Revision Plan and hopefully we will have a better outcome than we have had in the past.
5. Mr. Price asks who are top three employers were and they are: Graham County Schools; Graham County Government; Fontana which is seasonal and Brandon Lovin Contracting. Commissioner Williams stated that we have several contractors in our county and are very thankful to them for hiring our local people.
6. Manager Garland stated that we have the largest dam in the east and we receive PILT payments from them in the amount of \$745,000.00 but the bulk of the money for power is given to Alabama and Georgia because the tax is based on point of sale and Graham County only generates the power. Commissioner Williams stated that Fontana Village is the only people who receive power from the dam. Mr. Price asks who supplies the power in our area and the board answered Duke Energy.
7. Mr. Price stated that he understands that Graham County also faces an Opioid problem. Chairman Eller stated that it is bad here. Commissioner Orr stated that we needed to stop the drug supplies coming into the county because it is rampant in our areas and a lot of the supply crosses state lines and are received by mail. Commissioner Orr stated that this is a huge problem. Commissioner Williams stated that he worked for Rite-Aid when the Sheriff tried to slow down the sale of legal drugs being sold here and in one day they sold 3000 Oxycodone and the people came from Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia to purchase the pills. Commissioner Orr stated that legislature passed a bill to limit the number of pills that can be given and further stated that if they can't obtain them legally they will go after the illegal substances.
8. Mr. Price asks if the county has any facilities that offer help to these users. Commissioner Orr stated that we have a facility that is for Tribal members only but we do have Vaya Health which

assists us with these services. Mr. Price felt that the root of drug addiction is no access for job opportunities and he would like to offer education and work with these individuals by bringing renewable jobs, green energy jobs and this would also boost our technical and county schools. Mr. Price stated that maybe free tuition could be offered to those who cannot afford it. Mr. Price stated that we needed to mentally motivate them but the lack of economic opportunities reduce their chances and he would like to build the economy which would reduce the disparity of people who chose to go that path. Commissioner Orr stated that opportunity needs education and our children are being left alone due to the funding of our afterschool programs being taken away and after speaking with our local schools they state that some children come to school to get sleep and food. Commissioner Orr stated that our teachers are helping these children get rest, see that they are fed and this causes the children not being able to get a solid education. Commissioner Orr stated that she agrees that economy is the key. Commissioner Orr stated that education starts in kindergarten and these kids are taking care of their parents, traveling at all hours and getting no rest and it's just sad. Commissioner Williams stated that we have one church in the county trying to offer help, Sweetgum Baptist Church and several people have been attending and they look forward to going back each Monday night.

9. Mr. Price stated that Afterschool is big. Commissioner Williams stated that the money for afterschool shouldn't have been taken away because that program helped so many kids and parents in this community. Commissioner Williams stated that the kids stayed at the Stecoah Valley Center and loved the program that was offered.
10. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we have many challenges that we deal with and not knowing from one year to the next whether or not we will receive the PILT and SRS monies is very frustrating. Commissioner Wiggins stated that most moms and dads work to survive and not receiving the grant for Afterschool did affect a lot of people. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we have not had a good relationship with the Forest Service in years and 90% of forests in NC are on private lands. Of the 10% that is USFS 90% of that is in western NC. Commissioner Wiggins stated that the federal government needed to step up and take care of the lands but instead they will send people who are impossible to deal with because they leave before they get a chance to know the people of Graham County and now timber will not be marked on forest service property for five years and our schools and county benefit from timber sales. Commissioner Wiggins stated that the forest service claims that they do not have enough funds to do the environmental assessments that need to be done. Commissioner Wiggins stated that Western Europe does timber harvest and their forest survives and he doesn't understand why Graham County can't be the same.
11. Commissioner Williams stated that our citizens and kids take care of our county and it is evident by our 20 year old high school which still looks brand new. Commissioner Williams stated that our schools need the forest service monies.
12. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we are not all negative but this board is proactive and even though we do not have a lot of money we believe in doing the best that we can with what we have. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we have students that get the Moorehead Scholarships and we fully support our kids in the community. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we will soon have a Dialysis Center and we intend to remain proactive and provide the best service so any help we get from the federal government is greatly appreciated.
13. Mr. Price thanked the board for their time.
14. Chairman Eller adjourned the meeting.

Signature page attached!

Keith Eller, Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Connie Orr, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Dale Wiggins, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board