

Regular Meeting Minutes – August 21, 2018

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, August 21, 2018 at 5:30 p.m. for their regular monthly meeting in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board was present.

1. Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Williams to give the Invocation.
3. Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Orr to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chairman Eller asks for changes or approval of the agenda. Manager Garland stated we needed to move Sophia Paulos from #7 to #9 due to Ms. Paulos attending a meeting out of town and is unable to arrive in time for her report and to add Ms. Paulos to closed session for attorney/client privilege and contracts. Commissioner Williams made the motion to amend and approve the agenda as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chairman Eller asks for approval of the August 7th Regular Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chairman Eller asks Carolyn “BOO” Chekelelee to come to the front and presented her a plaque for her 30 years of service. The board thanked Boo for her hard work throughout the years and for everything she has done and will continue to do for this county.
7. Chairman Eller asks for the finance and manager’s report. Manager Garland stated that we ended the month with a \$7,738,252.57 cash balance which is over one million dollars from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that we are very blessed and we are making progress. Manager Garland stated that we are due \$152,002.58 from the 911 Board. Manager Garland encouraged everyone to go see the new 911 Center. Commissioner Orr stated that this was built with a \$3.4 million dollar grant of which we are very thankful and we will try to secure a \$15 million dollar grant for our schools.
8. Manager Garland stated that we had a good tax collection month with current taxes of \$675,000.00, prior years of \$17,880.61 and DMV of \$41,644.67. Manager Garland stated that we are \$72,000.00 ahead from this time last year and our tax collection rate is 11.07%.
9. Manager Garland stated that our revenues for the month was \$1,114,428.52 and the expenditures was \$913,839.13 giving us a \$200,589.39 surplus. Manager Garland stated that we collected \$184,400.07 in sales tax for the month which is below this time last year and she feels the decline is due to the amount of rain that we had this summer. Manager Garland stated that we have collected a total of \$610,472.27 in back taxes and stated that the tax office is working diligently in foreclosures and debt set-off.
10. Manager Garland stated that our budget should be at 92% and we are at 94% and she is very pleased and all expenditures of the budget is explainable. Manager Garland stated that our auditors will be here next week.
11. Manager Garland stated that she is still waiting on Heery’s report on the courthouse and they stated they are waiting on one more final cost estimate. Manager Garland stated that she does have their first invoice of \$28,931.64 to pay and needs board approval. Commissioner Orr made the motion to pay Heery Associates the first invoice of \$28,931.64. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
12. Manager Garland stated that she had spoken with Tim Howell, NC Forest Service last week regarding the differences in the contract amount with the smoke chaser added. The new contract with the smoke chaser and the increase to the 35% increased the budget by \$28,022.50. Manager Garland confirmed the increase based on the previous contract. Commissioner Orr asks for Manager Garland’s recommendation. Manager Garland stated that having a smoke chaser in the county is best for the people of Graham County. Commissioner Orr made the motion to pay the difference in the budget as stated. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
13. Manager Garland stated that we received the SRS funding which brings the total for timber receipts for last year to \$200,654.94 and she will need to do a budget amendment for \$115,755.35 for the schools portion and \$40,131.00 for the VFD’s portion. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the budget amendment as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
14. Manager Garland stated that a desk audit had been done on our Medicaid cost report for 2010-2011 and it shows us owing back \$11,600.00. Commissioner Orr made the motion to repay the \$11,600.00 to the state for the Medicaid cost report. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

15. Manager Garland gave the board a draft of a flyer for the sales tax referendum. Manager Garland stated that flyers have been used with success in other counties. Manager Garland stated that the Graham Star will charge \$500.00 for ½ page ad and \$1000.00 for whole page ad. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we needed to get this on Facebook as well. Manager Garland stated that the Graham Star is in support of the sales tax referendum. Manager Garland stated that we can also use the funds from the NC Bar Association for a billboard advertisement. The board gave Manager Garland a directive to move forward on getting the word out to the people of the county.
16. Manager Garland stated that we have been working toward a mid-September kick-off of a wellness program and we are naming it "Wise and Well". Manager Garland stated that MountainWise will be providing technical support and we will be assigning wellness champions for each department and will be competing against each other on a department level and a personal level. The program will kick off with a wellness panel provided to each department and Harris Regional has committed to doing a mid-course panel and an end of course panel. Manager Garland stated that we will be doing lunch and learns and providing other incentives for participation. Manager Garland stated that we have discussed negative incentives if employees refuse to participate and/or requiring noncompliant folks to pay part of their health insurance premiums. Manager Garland stated that for every dollar we spend on wellness, we save \$14.00 in health care costs.
17. Manager Garland stated that we needed to discuss the lights at the Stanley field and if the board would consider having Duke Energy place new poles at the ball field due to the fact that the existing poles are rotted and a hazard. Duke will place 4 40' poles and charge \$131.32 per month for a 36 month term lease and they are dusk to dawn lighting which could prevent nefarious activity during the night and allow us to get good resolution on cameras if needed. The total cost over the term is \$4,727.52. The board gave Manager Garland a directive to have Duke install the new lighting.
18. Manager Garland stated that Emma Stinnette has a property tax appeal for a home that she made significant improvements too and a discovery was made on the property taking it from \$80,000.00 to \$116,000.00 without proper notice to the taxpayer. Manager Garland stated that under the Machinery Act, if a property value is increased in a year outside of a revaluation year, the tax office should send written notification in January or February of the year so that taxpayers can get due process through the Board of Equalization and Review. Manager Garland called Charles Meeker to confirm and this is considered an immaterial irregularity and because the Board of E&R has adjourned, the Board of Commissioners will have to hear an appeal. Manager Garland stated that Ms. Stinnette has talked with the property tax commission and has come requesting that she receive an appeal hearing either as a part of the next meeting or schedule a special meeting for that purpose. Manager Garland stated that she has addressed the issue of notification with the new tax assessor and we will be ensuring that all changes outside revaluation receive proper notification so that all have the opportunity to have due process. The board all agreed that they will hear the appeal on September 18th at 5:00 p.m. during the workshop session.
19. Manager Garland stated that she has been doing a poll to see if senior citizens would be interested in a breakfast in addition to a lunch and we have had (10) people who would like to have breakfast. Manager Garland stated that she will run the ad again in this week's paper and report at the next meeting.
20. Chairman Eller asks for public comment. Chairman Eller asks the Senior Center Citizens to speak. The first speaker was Jerry Whitt and he stated that he has been attending the center since April or the first of May and there are some special treatment issues, to get to the point, when he came back to the center on Monday a note was on the door about visitors and they are required to sign in and out with the director and are limited to (15) minutes per visit. Mr. Whitt's question is why now. Mr. Whitt stated that something has been festering at the center and they are here as concerned citizens because they do not want to see the center go down. Mr. Whitt stated that he enjoys going and it helps by feeding him one meal per day and he meets friends and has fellowship and he presented pictures that were taken inside the senior center. Commissioner Nelms read the sign that said for safety purposes we have a sign in and sign out with a time limit of (15) minutes and mandated to speak with the director and if not adhered to they will be escorted out by a police officer. Mr. Whitt asks where this policy came from and stated that people come to see us and visit at the center. Mr. Whitt asks if we are running a senior center or a day care center and asks them to look at the pictures and is this at the best interests of the senior center. Mr. Whitt stated that this center is run on a budget and is this what the money is spent on. Mr. Whitt stated that this is a hazard to the senior's safety. Chairman Eller asks if Mr. Whitt took the pictures. Mr. Whitt's reply is that he got them. Chairman Eller asks again if he took the pictures and his reply is that he got them. Mr. Whitt

stated that this will make people mad and they will be mad at him but something needs to be done.

21. The second speaker is Sonya Cole from the Long Creek Community and she started the center in April and she has known the activity director for (12) years and he and her husband had a cattle business together and anyone who knows him loves him and he loves the people and he is kind and very concerned for her. Ms. Cole stated that something has changed and she's not sure what is going on but the issue is affecting us all and they hear the talk. Ms. Cole stated that he always has bent over backwards to help the seniors and he is there to help all seniors when we call on him and the new policy has made us unhappy. Ms. Cole stated that a lot of days she gets up and has a hard time since her husband has been gone and the center is a refuge for her and a place she can go for two to three hours. Ms. Cole stated that she loved to see the children because her grandchildren live away and our family is the senior center. Ms. Cole stated that if her children come here and they want to have lunch with her they should be allowed to come for more than (15) minutes and we should be there with open arms to welcome all. Ms. Cole stated that she is unsure what the safety issues are unless she is referring to the exercise room and it has toys in it. Ms. Cole stated that she would love for the Director to go places with them and do their activities with them. Ms. Cole stated that charges have been brought up against the activities director with DSS and this is untrue. Ms. Cole stated that abuse starts with wagging tongues. Ms. Cole stated that there should be a dress code put in place because one employee is very offensive to them.
22. The third speaker was Brenda Mills and she thanked the board for all that they do for the seniors but stated that there is a lot of tension in the center and it needed to be addressed. Ms. Mills stated that she has lived in Graham County for six years and she is very appreciative of the senior center. Ms. Mills stated that she has companionship and socialization at the center and they are fed good meals, play bingo and take trips and everyone is very appreciative of this but for the last few months there has been a change in the atmosphere and it is affecting the staff and the seniors. Ms. Mills stated that there are good people there. Ms. Mills stated that she can understand having your kids occasionally but all summer is too long and she is afraid that someone will be hurt if a child drops something which will could cause a fall for one of the senior citizens. Ms. Mills stated that she got along with everybody and thanked the commissioners for their time.
23. The fourth speaker was Nancy Almond and she stated that she began going to the center in February 2017 and she has concerns about a dress code for the employees and stated that they needed to dress professionally. Ms. Almond stated that she had a concern about the kids at the center and what if a senior citizen falls over a toy and gets killed. Ms. Almond stated that she loves everyone and they are all good people but feels that all perspective where the public is concerned is lost. Ms. Almond stated that Director Hill had addressed an issue over parking and everyone was good at their jobs but nobody was perfect. Ms. Almond thanked the board for their time.
24. Mr. Whitt stated that he didn't need to remind everyone that the senior center is for the senior citizens and their welfare and safety is the priority. Mr. Whitt stated that he has not been mistreated by anyone but something needed to be done and the light shines on this commissioner board when things are not handled.
25. The fifth speaker was Christine Chosewood and she stated that she goes to the center every day and has for over a year. Ms. Chosewood stated negative comments against the director that is considered personnel and Commissioner Williams told her that she could not name names. Ms. Chosewood stated that she was told that the activities director could not use her car but she doesn't see at night and he takes her home or takes her to church and she lets him drive her car. Ms. Chosewood stated that she was told that this is policy and he could not drive her car but he has her permission to do so and that's all she has to say.
26. The sixth speaker was Gloria Christman and she said it was a joy to go to the senior center and this is her family and her church is her family and she has been helped so much by the activities director and he is like a son to her. Ms. Christman stated that she loved the director. Ms. Christman stated that something is going on and it is upsetting the seniors and she did not want anyone to lose their job but asks for the commissioner's help.
27. Chairman Eller stated that the board has heard the seniors and they will be working on their concerns.
28. Chairman Eller asks Sophia Paulos, EDC Director to give her reporting. Ms. Paulos stated that she had the pleasure of attending the state NC Works Commission meeting and this is the first time a commission meeting has been held west of Hickory in many years and it proved a very informative experience. Ms. Paulos stated that we recently received our most up to date progress report on becoming a Work Ready Community and that she had a lot of questions about securing our goal for transitioning workforce. Ms. Paulos stated that we are 57% of the way to our goal and the one category we have not excelled in is Transitioning workforce.

Transitioning refers to currently unemployed or currently participating in adult education or GED programs or recently completed within 12 months. Veterans discharged within the last 12 months will also be captured; they will be counted in the transitioning workforce category. Ms. Paulos stated that while we are on pace with our neighbors in Cherokee County (59% toward goal); Macon County (56% toward goal); Jackson County (52% toward goal); Clay County (77% toward goal) and Swain County (78% toward goal). While many factors contribute to these numbers it is clear that we need to address our transitioning workforce and she has reached out to David Garret who was recently promoted to Workforce Director at the Southwestern Commission and they will discuss several opportunities that resulted from attending the state commission meeting. At the meeting, Ms. Paulos had the pleasure of meeting Vanessa James, Regional Reentry Specialist for the Department of Commerce and she will be working with her and several local employers to find work for our adults being recently released from incarceration. Ms. Paulos stated that these candidates are often clean of drugs upon release and are much less likely to return to the system if they are gainfully employed. Ms. Paulos would like to identify recently discharged veterans and connect them to employment opportunities so that they can have the most fulfilling homecoming possible and with the help of the community college system, NC Works and the Southwestern Commission we can achieve our goal of becoming a Work Ready Community by 2020.

29. Ms. Paulos stated that she attended the 82nd Anniversary and Memorial to Joyce Kilmer and the guest speaker was National Commander of the VFW Sgt. Vincent BJ Lawrence and the event honored the hero, soldier and honored veteran Joyce Kilmer. The Honor Party led by the retired veteran and Partners of Joyce Kilmer President Jim Kriner and a 21 gun salute in the forest made for a memorial on par with those held in D.C. It was an incredible experience and she thanked the Tourism Board for their support of this memorial to an honored veteran in such a special and timeless way.
30. Ms. Paulos stated that with a lot of hard work, persistence and a variety of support from NCD, Mountain BizWorks, and other regional partners, Wehrloom is ramping up its capacity. Their newly installed tanks are up and running and negotiations with large distributors is currently taking place. Wehrloom is continuing to break their own record. With a tenfold increase in capacity, space and wholesale distribution looming in the air, this Robbinsville success story is set to see sales this fall compete with their summer season as a result. This increase in capacity will mean an increase in both jobs and sales tax revenue for the county.
31. Ms. Paulos stated that in addition to the thousands of people who attended the show governor appointed bipartisan outdoor recreation industry leaders from Colorado, Montana, and North Carolina. Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming helped brainstorm and debut the Confluence Accords. This first of its kind national platform to strengthen and align state level efforts and priorities is a serious move toward growing the outdoor recreation industry. The accords focus on four main principles, Economic Development, Education & Workforce Development, Conservation & Stewardship and Public Health & Wellness. This industry is a sleeping giant that just woke up and with annual revenues at \$900 billion and 7 million jobs across the country, fostering this industry will provide great opportunities for Graham County and the mountain region as a whole. Ms. Paulos stated that we have two national sporting brands that will be speaking with Fontana over the fall about setting up future sporting events that will draw people from all over the southeast and some from across the nation. We also have an outdoor gear manufacturer looking at a move to Graham County and that is likely to come into being, or not, by next year. Ms. Paulos stated that she was able to gain media attention for the region connecting David Huskins with Wild Sam, a company that prints field guides for places highlighting the culture, history and little known facts about each of the places they do guides for. There is also communication going back and forth with Mr. Huskins about the creation of a TV show following a similar format and introducing travelers to the more unknown spectacular places around our great country. Ms. Paulos gathered resources for our neighboring counties on behalf of the Mountain West Partnership, make national level allies for the Forest Plan, and generate a lot of interest in Graham County with newly made national and international partners. Ms. Paulos thanked the board for allowing her to attend and work to connect the outdoor recreation industry to Graham County.
32. Ms. Paulos stated that it is becoming more clear that the USFS is hearing our call for increased access and over the last month USFS District Ranger Andy Gaston has come to her with two proposals:
 - a. Trail Expansion: Action Required: The Cheoah Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest is conducting a review of three proposals to improve trail based recreational opportunities on National Forest System lands on the Cheoah Ranger District in Graham and Swain Counties and the following requests have been proposed and the board input is requested.

- b. Tsali Mountain Bike and Equestrian Trail Repair – Phase 1 would provide maintenance for trails within the right loop of the Tsali Recreation Area, improving trail sustainability, increasing safety and creating two new easy-rated, family-friendly loop train experiences. A deteriorating bridge would be repaired; a culvert would be added at an unsustainable stream crossing; approximately 1,000 feet of downhill trail would be reconstructed; and a turn at the bottom of this section: (1) an approximately 700 foot connector trail would be added to the Mouse Branch Loop Trail to make an easy three mile family loop and; (2) an approximately 300 foot connector trail would be added to the Right Loop Trail making a second easy three mile family loop. This project would also address intermittent spot maintenance needs on the Right Loop, Mouse Branch and Thompson Loop trails.
 - c. Tsali Mountain Bike and Equestrian Trail Repair – Phase 2 would provide for trail maintenance and repairs to improve trail sustainability, protect natural resources, and increase user safety on the Left Loop Train. An existing bridge would be removed and replaced with a new, longer bridge that would eliminate an unsafe 90 degree turn at the end of the existing bridge. This project would also address intermittent spot maintenance on the Left Loop trails system.
 - d. Fontana Trail Project – Phase 2 would renovate an existing user-created trail on lands leased by Fontana Village from TVA and on adjacent National Forestry System lands into a new, safe and sustainable multi-use loop trail system. The project would also decommission portions of existing user-created trails that are unsafe and unsustainable and are creating resource damage. The result would be the addition of three miles of equestrian and biking trail that would provide connections to Fontana Village Resort’s managed trail system and other multi-use trails on National Forest System lands. This new train would connect with the Fontana Loop Trail and the Bee Cove Trail, resulting in nine miles of loop trails in this part of Graham County. The Forest Service will be analyzing and disclosing the potential environmental effects of this proposal for both TVA and National Forest System Lands. Ms. Paulos would like to ask the board if they are open to signing a letter in support of these projects as they will further the growth of the outdoor recreation and tourism industries in the county. Commissioner Williams made the motion to support these projects by signing a letter of support. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
 - e. Kids in Parks: Track Trails: The new forest service director, Andy Gaston, asks to talk about grant money available to build Kids TRACK trails in Graham County and according to the nonprofit’s website “TRACK Trails include hiking trails, biking trails, geocaching trails, paddling trails, nature trail disc golf courses and even adventures you can do in your own back yard. In addition to getting prizes in the mail you can TRACK your adventures in your own online nature journal and see how many trails you’ve visited, how many miles you have hiked and more. The board wanted Ms. Paulos to go after all grant money available.
33. Ms. Paulos stated that she had asked the board to support the Graham County Historical Association with \$1,000.00 in match money for an ARC Grant that would provide a sustainability plan for the Snider Building. The time line for this highly competitive grant was aligned with GCHA’s timeline as the money would not come in for at least a year. Ms. Paulos stated that she was able to locate a much less competitive grant that would come in the next few months and would like to ask the board for permission to reallocate the \$1,000.00 set for the Federal ARC Grant to the Region A Opt-In Grant so that the GCHA will be met with funding that matches their expedient hard work. Commissioner Orr made the motion to reallocate the funds as stated. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
34. Ms. Paulos stated that we have been approved in partnership with Golden LEAF for \$100, 00.00 for a 3D mammogram machine and we have also been approved for the \$50,000.00 to purchase a QRV and start our Community Para-medicine Program and with the support of Steve Heatherly and Duke Lifepoint we will model a successful program in Jackson County. This will save the county thousands of dollars in “treat-no-transport” cases and provide significantly improved care for our citizens.
35. Ms. Paulos had the opportunity to attend the first public information session on Dogwood Health Trust and this trust will be the result of the sale of Mission to HCA. Once instituted it will be the largest per capita trust fund in the country. With 18 counties in the trust’s service area, Dogwood Health will manage \$5 billion resulting in \$22 million annually in grant awards addressing the social determinants of health in their service area. Dogwood Health Trust is already hard at work making sure that their board is truly representative of the region they will serve and I am looking forward to learning more about the new board’s makeup. In the interim, SEARCH, a non-profit health organization based in Mitchell County and several other health care

advocates have asked me to serve on a committee whose focus will be to ensure that Dogwood Health Trust is truly ready to serve the entire region.

36. Chairman Eller asks for the discussion items. Manager Garland stated that we have releases in the amount of \$961.31. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the releases as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
37. Manager Garland stated that we needed a recommendation for a Travel and Tourism Board seat appointment. Commissioner Williams stated that he has two recommendations and they are Mary Griffin and Michelle Redmond. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the T&T Board appointments as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
38. Manager Garland stated that we needed a board appointment for the Four Square Board who would represent the low income. Commissioner Orr asks that we table this for more discussion. The board all agreed.
39. Manager Garland stated that we have received quotes for a new health department truck and the lowest quote is \$26,254.30 from Asheville Lincoln Ford in Asheville. Commissioner Orr made the motion to go with the lowest quote. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
40. Manager Garland stated that she had one item for new business. Mr. Gaston, our US Forest Ranger has requested a meeting to meet with her and a commissioner on issues with the forest service. Mr. Gaston would like to take us out to some sites and show us what they are talking about. The board all agreed that this is a good idea and Manager Garland will get some tentative dates.
41. 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 Orr made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
42. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
43. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to grant Amber Long (5) days without pay. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
44. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

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