

Special Meeting – September 13, 2018

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Thursday, September 13, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. in the Graham County Transit Facility located at 201 West Fort Hill Robbinsville, NC for a special meeting to discuss the courthouse assessment. All board was present. Clerk Crisp was absent. Manager Rebecca Garland will be taking the minutes.

1. Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Bob and Barbara with Heery Associates provided a presentation on power point and will be talking through the presentation with the commissioners. They will go over the needs assessment and goals, go over space projection processes and do an overview of Option 1 and 2 and visit about expansion strategies. They will be recommending plans for growth and needs in the future and try to give an overview of the program process. They looked at each department in their assessment and then reviewed it against needs to derive the square footage needs. They discussed the net square feet is taking existing department use and converting to gross square footage to take into consideration circulation, wall thickness, and corridor needs. The building's gross square feet is to put all items in the building that have to be considered to include exterior walls. Courthouses are a special entity building and efficiency is not as good as a typical building because of the public, private and security circulation and are not as efficient due to the public and security.
 - a. Option 1 – expand and renovate objectives; ADA compliance; Security; Minimize impact on existing structure
3. Heery went into the study document to go over graphics and spreadsheets of findings in the report. The board of commissioners had the paper copy of the report in front of them. Barbara stated that the program meets the need but stay within the existing building with the idea that we would not be able to get everything back into the building. The first option adds onto the front and back of the building with screening inside the front entrance. The new entrance would provide for secure screening and take out the existing elevator and relocate it to the side and front because the existing does not provide for security and appropriate access from the front. The clerk of court would move into where the register of deeds was located. The elevator would be placed where the clerk vault was located. They would add a conference room to have small hearings and provide a small toilet for staff upstairs. They want to maintain existing courtroom but will need renovation of jury and witness boxes for ADA compliance. The upstairs expansion would include stairs from the existing jury room and another exit from the courthouse for fire code. The renovation will create a better office for judge and jury deliberation and the judge will have access to chambers from downstairs. The lower level will have holding cells with access to courtroom from behind. It will also be shared and secure for court staff and support staff. The holding cells would be more secure and meet more modern security standards than the current configuration. Another need that is addressed is that they need another hearing room and a place for jury assembly. They developed a space downstairs for jury assembly and other hearings which would give a better place to process jurors. They acknowledge that it looks a bit “cobbled” but it maintains the current walls and they tried to use the existing space without having to make a lot of structural changes to the existing configuration on the old part. They took old departments and upgraded to create more public space.
4. Jail – The top floor would be on grade with the courthouse. It would be a public area which would be accessible to public and more secure and create a more stable visitation configuration. The second level is all of the holding for the facility which allows for 14 inmates (8 male and 4 for female and 2 for juvenile) with the idea of keeping visibility separate without having to have a lot of supervision and staff to monitor. They put the jail together for what you would expect to see in a “vacuum”. This is just a conception and if we decide to move forward they would need a lot more discussion of what the true needs are.
5. Commissioner Nelms asked how much more of a footprint would be needed to double to the census (28-35 inmates on the average)? Heery reviewed their spreadsheets to look at square footage reports and reported that the holding area would need to add another 3500 square feet. As we increase holding then support spaces would need to rise and we would need more support staff and contents. We would need to look at state regulations about recreation which would necessitate a yard in addition to the day room. Manager Garland reported to Heery that we would need to plan for at least an average of (25) that is our current census. We want to get away from all being outsourced. They asked if we needed to plan for juvenile. Commissioner Orr

and Commissioner Nelms said we want to accommodate all aspects and asked if we need to look at acquiring other property. Heery asked if we own any property beyond what the existing footprint of the administration is and if we own anything down the hill. Heery stated we will want to look at property acquisition down the hill. They planned for a rear drive in entrance. Commissioner Orr asked if it is possible to build another level up to provide other cells above. Bob stated we need to make sure that we look at how we are stacking the functions for efficiency and we need to look at how it is stacked. Commissioner Orr wanted to look at the option to add a level. Barbara said if we move up we could put something for outdoor on the top. Commissioner Nelms asked the requirement for recreation. Bob was not sure but he stated he was not sure about NC requirements but he knew that if you have them staying overnight there are requirements. Commissioner Nelms asked about square footage requirements. Bob said there is requirements but do not know off top of his head. Barbara mentioned that the plan has an area for food prep, but it does not include a fully equipped kitchen. Bob stated that if we are really serious about changing the jail, we will want to do a separate programming exercise for a jail. This was a quick exercise to create an option to look at. The model included intake. This is the first draft of what a small jail could be. Barbara tried to keep the project in keeping with the money that we have available. Commissioner Orr is not looking to create a building that is the same size of what we have now. Commissioner Williams stated we need at least 25-30 beds. Manager Garland reiterated getting what we need and knowing the true cost of what we need. The configuration stacked will not be more cost effective than vertical construction. Taking off site will need us to look at a one story and transport cost to jail. Commissioner Williams stated that we do not want to be transporting out of county because it is not feasible. Manager Garland clarified they were talking about something close by and transporting from in county to the courthouse. Commissioner Nelms asked what it would cost to close the jail except for court. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we need to go forward with the courthouse and then study for a new jail. Commissioner Nelms asked if the courthouse renovation would meet the requirements of the jail. Bob feels like it will meet the needs and it needs more security and more spaces and ADA compliance. Commissioner Nelms asked about parole offices and Barbara said it is still there but needed to rework to make the security issues work and accommodate privacy concerns and give ability to do drug testing. It makes it easier for the judge to be upstairs and get the drug testing done without leaving the courthouse. Commissioner Williams stated it was originally the Jail Caretaker facility and the only jailor lived at the jail then it became the County Manager's Office. Commissioner Nelms asked about the cost to do a study on the jail study. A jail study would be about another \$50,000 to do a true jail study. They would bring in correction experts. Manager Garland asked that the renovation option have holding cells and we would need to move all inmates and Commissioner Wiggins stated that we will have to move all offices out of the courthouse for the renovation period. What time period would it take for the renovation? Bob said a total move out would be 18-24 months but a phased project will take much longer. Manager Garland said if we have to move court out of county then we might have to move court out of county which will be expensive as well. Commissioner Wiggins asked if we need to look at saving the old courthouse and building a new one. This will be expensive. What do we do with old courthouse? Commissioner Orr said if you do then you kill the town. Barbara said that other counties are creating the old rooms to other public spaces and bring it back to its old glory and use the existing space. Bob said you can look at the phased project that is very disruptive and we need to rework the mechanical systems that will cause issues and it would be more helpful to have the whole building. Manager Garland asked if they built schematics for a new building. Bill stated that we need to know property layout for a new building before they create a footprint and would need a site for assessment. Manager Garland has a lot of unknowns to think through. Barbara said a new is "pack up and move" which allows us to put other county offices in there and do the cost estimates for reuse as county offices. And the renovation of what we have we can repurpose and this solves ADA and leaves spaces intact per Heery without reconfiguring for efficient flows which is included in the 1.6M per HEERY. Bob stated he is a bit of a classist and prefers keeping the courthouse in place for historical reasons because prior courthouses was on the same site and it is a handsome building and is in great shape structurally. There is something nice about keeping it in town on the square per Bob. Bob feels we should talk with the judiciary and if they are satisfied with the configuration then the rework could be a good option. If they are looking at a more up to date structure then a new build may be in order. We need to meet with them and give an opinion because either way it is

a huge improvement on what we have. Commissioner Wiggins stated we have a lot to think about and many decisions to make. The board all agreed. The board signed off from Heery.

6. Commissioner Orr stated that the information that she wants to see is looking at how Cleveland County's plan worked and they found it was costing them more to have their own jail and if this is the case here then we need to move them out. Commissioner Nelms is not convinced we need a jail. Commissioner Wiggins would like to see a study of our actual census. Manager Garland stated that she has been working with the jail to get the data out of jail pack. Chairman Eller stated that regardless of the decision he does not want another set of commissioners to have to deal with this for another 100 years. The board all agreed. Commissioner Nelms stated that a new Elementary School will be dealt with but it will take 5-6 years but if they leave that property then we will need to deal with that property. Commissioner Wiggins stated that if they vacate the property then they will give us the first option on the property and if Graham County does not want it then they can sell it. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we traded property for the Stecoah School. Commissioner Wiggins asked what we are going to do with a court system while we do the project. What will the town do if we change the street configuration? Commissioner Orr stated that we cannot kick this down the road. Chairman Eller stated that we do not want anyone else having to sit in this chair on decisions that should have been made. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we need a study of the jail for the past 5 years and cost comparatives of closing and moving all inmates out of county. Commissioner Williams talked with a person that goes to Swain and they average 60-80 and can house 114. Chairman Eller says if we build a jail that would hold 30-40 it would be smart to have a kitchen because the state could begin to mandate the kitchen and trustees can help with the cooking. Commissioner Nelms stated that a kitchen is not going to break a deal when we are worried about \$10 million. All Board agreed to that.
7. Commissioner Wiggins wished Commissioner Orr a happy birthday.
8. The board had some general discussion about the history of our issues and what other counties are doing and have done and sources that could be used.
9. The board gave a directive to get real numbers about current costs and census figures and agreed that it is good to get a complete cost study of the current jail.
10. Chairman Eller asks for further business, no further business was discussed. Commissioner Orr made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Williams seconded the 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:

Rebecca Garland, County Manager

Clerk Crisp was absent.