

Special Meeting – December 11, 2018

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, December 11, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. in the Graham County EMS Base located at 70 West Fort Hill Robbinsville, NC for a special meeting. Board present was: Dale Wiggins, Keith Eller, Jacob Nelms and Connie Orr. Board absent was: Lynn Cody.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
3. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board would now have discussion with the EMS Personnel on their work schedule and to better understand what the department needs from the commissioners. Chairman Wiggins stated that our staff is well respected in WNC and he appreciated all the hard work that they do. EMS Director Larry Hembree stated that the main issue is losing staff. Director Hembree stated that we have lost two full time employees and we have two out due to injury or sickness and it is become increasingly harder to get part time workers to come to Graham County due to our scheduling of on 48 hours and off 96 hours. Director Hembree stated that most counties around us have went to the 24 hours on and 72 hours off schedule. Director Hembree stated that Tri-County no longer offers a paramedic class in Graham County and it is hard for our employees to work and go to school at their main campus. Director Hembree stated that our employees are worn out and he presented copies of the employee's hours that they have worked this year. Director Hembree stated that our employees work way over the 2080 hours which constitutes a full time position.
4. Commissioner Nelms stated that the board would have to offset the pay if the overtime was cut down. Director Hembree stated that was correct. One of the paramedics stated that we are below the minimum wage paid to employees by \$4.00 in Cherokee County and \$7.00 in Union County Georgia and further stated that part time employees do not receive over time hours.
5. Commissioner Nelms stated that at the end of the year the W-2's would line up to what they are now with the new rate. Director Hembree stated that this was correct and we would have to hire more staff to cover the shifts.
6. Andy Lynn stated that most employees where he works averages 84 to 86 hours per pay period. William Allen Rogers stated that he averages under 91 days per year where the Graham County employees are having to work 122 days and more per year.
7. Commissioner Wiggins stated that in the past the call volume was not as much as it is today.
8. Andy Lynn stated that there are more and more accidents involving ambulances and a lot is contributed to lack of sleep. Bob Keber stated that he has had to stop and trade out drivers because one of the medics was too sleepy to drive.
9. Billy Hyde stated that after 12 hours without sleep you are sleep deprived and are at the same level as someone who would have a .04 alcohol level and if you go 24 hours without sleep you would be the same as a .12 alcohol level which means you are functioning as if you were legally drunk. Brian Stevens stated that these facts are when you go the complete hours without rest. Chairman Wiggins stated that EMS has days like that. The employees stated yes.
10. Leon Allen stated that they average four calls per truck (sometimes more) and it is a very high stress job and sometimes with no time to rest mentally or physically.
11. Commissioner Nelms stated that we needed to pay attention to the logic and do what we can.
12. Chairman Wiggins asks why Tri-County did not offer classes here any longer. Director Hembree stated that this campus is not certified and you have to have accreditation. Director Hembree stated that he could teach at the EMS Base if he had accreditation. Director Hembree stated that the Tribe offers the classes and Southwestern Community College offers the class in Franklin. Chairman Wiggins stated that we needed to explore the options of having the class here in the county at the EMS Base. Billy Hyde stated that we would have to purchase all the equipment and pay for the instructor. Chairman Wiggins stated that it may be a short term expense but eventually it would pay for itself. The board discussed the importance of offering the classes to high school students and getting them interested young. Andy Lynn stated that you have to have two years of college now to be a paramedic and if you went two more years you could be an RN and most people are doing that due to less stress and better benefits.
13. Leon Allen stated that the department went six years before he was hired as a full time paramedic due to the low turnover. Andy Lynn stated that there are laws now that mandate you to have two paramedics on the truck in order to do certain things to a patient. Mr. Lynn stated

that he got involved when he was 15 years old and believes that if they get involved young they are more likely to stay for long term.

14. Andy Lynn stated that Graham County is unique because we do not have a hospital and it takes two hour transports versus 15 minute transports for the counties who have a hospital and this is why we have to have highly trained paramedics here. Mr. Lynn stated that as a taxpayer he wouldn't mind paying more to ensure that we kept this high level of service for our residents.
15. Commissioner Nelms asks if we change the schedule to 24/72 would it work with the number of employees that we currently have. Director Hembree stated that we would have to hire two more full time medics. Billy Hyde stated that we could get that easily as he has talked to people that would love to come and work here. Cindy Knight stated that we cannot take people's word on that because they can just as easily change their minds. Andy Lynn stated that a 24/72 is a must. Mr. Lynn made a comment on the retirement for part time workers and Manager Garland stated that the state requires that the county pay retirement after the employee goes over the 1000 hours of service. Manager Garland stated that you are placed on retirement after the one year probationary period and it takes general employees six months to get the 1000 hours or more but with public safety it would not take six months. Manager Garland stated that she did not know how it was applied in the past.
16. Andy Lynn asks if the crew are allowed to bypass Swain Hospital or are you required to take them to the closest facility. Mr. Lynn stated that it can take four hours at Swain hospital before you get transferred to another hospital. Manager Garland stated that Medicare will not pay if the patient is not taken to the nearest facility. Manager Garland stated that a lot of third parties follow the rules of Medicare. Mr. Lynn stated that his aunt had a heart attack and they stopped at Swain hospital when she should have been sent straight to Asheville. The board all agreed that the policy needed to be followed. Commissioner Nelms stated that he was under the impression that the hospital made the call whether to send them on to another hospital or not. Director Hembree stated that the medics needed to justify in their report the reason for bypassing the closest facility. Billy Hyde stated that the paramedic has the capability to make those decisions and the details can be worked out after the patient has been taken care of.
17. Commissioner Nelms stated that he would agree to a temporary roll over of a new schedule of 24/72 with the understanding that if it did not work out the pay would be adjusted back to the original pay. Commissioner Nelms stated that alleviating the overtime is one of his biggest concerns. Sam Ingram stated that most paramedics are not in it for the money but for the county residents. Chuck Jenkins stated that if we change the schedule people will come and work here.
18. The board discussed the equipment needed to do their jobs and wanted to make their jobs easier. Director Hembree stated that a Lucas Device cost around \$16,000.00 and the automatic lifts are around \$140,000.00 to \$150,000.00. Andy Lynn stated that the Lucas is a great investment. Billy Hyde stated that new first responders are being trained on the new equipment and are under the assumption that all departments have them. The board discussed searching for grants for equipment.
19. Chairman Wiggins stated that they needed to get this fixed because it is not going to get any better.
20. Bob Keber asks how long will the board take to decide because our schedule is made a year out and it will begin in 2019. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board will again on the December 18th and they will try to have a confirmed decision by December 31st. Commissioner Nelms stated that we have to prepare the numbers. Brain Stevens stated that we would have to hire four more people as well.
21. Chairman Wiggins thanked the staff for coming and asks that they make a list of their needs. Commissioner Eller asks how much it costs to outfit a medic. Director Hembree stated that it is \$1,000.00 for one set of clothes and for two sets it is \$1200.00. Andy Lynn stated that the county needed a bank of radios for part time employees to use.
22. Chairman Wiggins asks about the use of the 911 Funds. Manager Garland stated that they are very restricted on what the money can be spent on yet we are penalized if we don't spend the money. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to contact our legislators and ask that legislation be entered to allow the Tier 1 counties the discretion to spend the 911 Funds as needed. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
23. Chairman Wiggins stated that an Easement had been done years ago for the Carringer Trailer Park but it was never recorded and they are asking that the board grant the easement now. Chairman Wiggins stated that Attorney Tallant prepared the Easement. Commissioner Orr made

the motion to grant an Easement to Pam Carringer Moody, Clark Joel Carringer and Willa Mae Carringer for the property located in Deed Book 147, Page 781 of the Graham County Registry. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

24. Chairman Wiggins asks if it is necessary to go into closed session. No closed session was taken.
25. Chairman Wiggins asks that the board discuss the situation with the EMS personnel. The board reviewed the discussion by the employees. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to go to a 24/72 schedule for a temporary period of (6) months. The board felt that more discussion needed to be done. Commissioner Nelms rescinded his motion. Commissioner Eller stated that we have some disparities in salary now and this needed to be fixed. Commissioner Eller asks if the board wanted to consider contracting the services out. The board agreed to have a decision by the next regular meeting. Commissioner Nelms worries about how much control the county would have if the service is contracted out. The board asks that Manager Garland get the information together on the cost for this rescheduling and they will make a decision at the next regular board meeting.
26. Chairman Wiggins asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Dale Wiggins, Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board