

COVID19 Meeting with the Local Emergency Management Planning Committee

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Monday, March 23, 2020 at 12:00 noon by teleconference with the Local Emergency Management Planning Committee to discuss the COVID19 issues within the county. All board was present. Committee members present: Manager Garland, Health Director Beth Booth, EM Director Larry Hembree, Town of Robbinsville Mayor Steve Hooper, Graham County School Superintendent Angela Knight, Town of Fontana Dam Mayor Rob Hardy and Town of Fontana Dam Administrator Zelerie Rogers, USFS Ranger Andy Gaston, Sheriff Joe Jones and Lt. James Hyde with the Graham County Sheriff's Department.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks EM Director Hembree to give an update. Director Hembree stated that they are taking many calls from non-residents and they are putting out as much information possible to the Website and Facebook. Director Hembree stated that he spoke with Tennessee Department of Transportation and they will supply signage on the Tennessee side for the closures in our County. Director Hembree stated that the Cherohala Skyway is now completely blocked as of Friday. Director Hembree stated that he has talked with Swain County and they are closing their rentals but have not closed their roads at this time. Director Hembree stated that Cherokee County, Macon County and Jackson County have not closed their roads at this time. Chairman Wiggins stated that the residents near Hwy 28 and Hwy 129 Intersection did not want us to close that section of road completely due to the homes at Shuler Lake and they worried about going back and forth to work. Chairman Wiggins stated that this should be Swain County that would need to shut that area down and they definitely needed to shut that motel down.
3. Manager Garland stated that she had spoken with Pryor Gibson with the Governor's office, they are watching Graham County on our taking hard steps to prevent the illness from coming into Graham County, and they did recommend that one deputy be at the road sites in the event problems or trouble was caused. Manager Garland stated that a deputy could take care of any issues or problems. Manager Garland stated that she did plead for more highway patrol but that was very doubtful at this time. Manager Garland stated that we are seeing many non-residents coming into the county with people who are property owners or property owners allowing non-residents to stay at their homes. Manager Garland stated that this is a high potential for a positive to enter into the county. Manager Garland stated that across the smaller counties, this is the greatest concern of the influx of people and how do we control this situation. Manager Garland stated that we do not have the resources to accommodate all these people if the illness came into the county not counting the number of motorcycle accidents that usually occur.
4. Chairman Wiggins stated that we needed to take non-residents off the list for access into the county and if we need to, we can take these steps prior to closing the roads.
5. Kim Matheson with the Town of Lake Santeetlah stated that people are bringing in their entire families and/or are sending their kids to stay here. Ms. Matheson stated that she needed guidance because one part time resident picked up a family member from the airport and they were wearing a mask when they entered the Town of Lake Santeetlah so there could have been issues are more are planning to come. The board all agreed that if their name is not on the deed then they do not get to come here not including underage children. The board stated that the Town Counsel needed to put their foot down on this issue. Attorney Coward stated that the Town has just as much power as the County does at this time. Ms. Matheson stated that this is a problem for them due to the lack of labor. Chairman Wiggins stated that if nothing else the Town may need to reach out to the National Guard for help. Chairman Wiggins stated that a call would take place tomorrow with the Governor at 12:00 noon tomorrow.
6. Commissioner Orr stated that Adam Wachacha was using his staff as security and since our offices are closed, could we not use some of our staff. Chairman Wiggins stated that it would take many people to operate these sites.
7. Mayor Hardy stated that they have many long-term renters and they have one trucker who will need a permit to travel through because he does not have a NC License nor does he own the home. The board asks what the address is and Mayor Hardy stated that he lived in the Lower

Tuskegee area. Mayor Hardy stated that they have many folks that work in the Village who are not residents of the county. Manager Garland stated that they needed to go online and apply for a permit for work. The board also knew that Hospice Workers, Health Care Workers, and others would need a permit for work and we will access these first. Manager Garland asks that Mayor Hardy get her a list of names with their driver's license and she would expedite the process.

8. Mayor Hooper asks if all contractors needed to supply a list of names of their employees. Manager Garland stated that all local contractors that have people who do not have identification that live here will need a permit and they need to list any sub-contractors that they use that may be coming in or out of the county. Zelerie Rogers stated that Fontana sees many trail hikers and asks about them. Chairman Wiggins stated that they will not have a place to stay off the trail but he would hope that people could transport them to the grocery store but the shelter is on TVA land and we cannot control that area. Lt. Hyde asks about the employees of TVA coming in from Tennessee and Chairman Wiggins stated that they would have no problem entering the county with their TVA identification.
9. Commissioner Eller asks how long that this may last and Chairman Wiggins did not have an answer. Zelerie Rogers asks if the lists of employees needed to be sent to Manager Garland and Manager Garland stated yes to send them to her.
10. Commissioner Orr asks about the Governor call that is scheduled the next day and wanted the contact information sent to her. Manager Garland gave the call in number out and stated that the meeting had been pushed out to 1:45 p.m. instead of noon.
11. Chairman Wiggins stated that they needed to discuss the businesses that were closing that the Governor would say is non-essential. Director Hembree stated that beauty shops, barbershops, nail salons, and the county needed to add county parks. Chairman Wiggins stated that we also have an issue with the young kids hanging out at the Ingles and this size needed to be limited as the governor has stated. Lt. Hyde stated that the department has been breaking these up and are asking them to go elsewhere but Ingles will have to be the one to ultimately tell them to leave. Lt. Hyde stated that the county could issue a no loitering. Mayor Hooper stated that he would speak to the store owners on behalf of the Town of Robbinsville because this is within the city limits.
12. USFS Ranger Andy Gaston stated that he has had a lot of people coming in to camp along the lake and the outlying areas and they are monitoring these sites and asking that they disperse but they have (92) sites and asks if the commissioners will restrict camping. Mr. Gaston stated that he has seen a lot of out of state tags at these sites. Mr. Gaston stated that he does not have the manpower to patrol these sites nor does he have the direct authority but would have to do a long process through the regional office in order to accomplish this but the county could close the sites with the Sheriff's assistance. Mr. Gaston stated that the county has the full authority to restrict overnight camping and the county can enforce that. Mr. Gaston stated that the bathrooms are closed and if camping continues there will be a lot of garbage to deal with. Mr. Gaston stated that it was also time to reopen the gates of the Forest Service roads and wanted to know if the county wanted these roads to remain closed. The board wanted the roads to remain closed due to the influx of traffic and camping that this would allow. Chairman Wiggins stated that he has mixed feelings in regards to the road closures but the county is doing all that we can do to control traffic. Commissioner Eller asks that they revisit this March 31st. The board agreed due to April 1st being the first day of trout season. Mr. Gaston stated that the Forest Service Offices are now closed to the public and asks if the county intends to keep the Skyway closed. The board stated that we would close the Skyway at the Stateline. Mr. Gaston stated that they will try to keep Tatham Gap closed but the lock will be cut off the gate and stated that the county could install concrete barriers at this gate if they chose to. Commissioner Eller stated that the burden was falling on the county to enforce and asks why they do not have any authority to do these themselves. Mr. Gaston stated that these are uncharted waters due to a State of Emergency in trying to keep the residents safe. Mr. Gaston stated that the Cheoah Office and the Tusquitee Office are both closed to walk-ins and he has three men who live out of the county to assist him. Mr. Gaston stated that the boat ramps would remain open, they could gate the Joyce Kilmer and they closed the Horse Cove Campground today. Mr. Gaston stated that they can discuss later the opening of Tsali and Cheoah Point but did state again that trash will pile up because people will not pack their trash out.
13. Commissioner Orr stated that we need to do a resolution to NCDOT strongly recommending that they support Corridor K because we need a road here.

14. Zelerie Rogers asks how restrictive the roads will be. Chairman Wiggins stated that essential travel only. Zelerie Rogers asks if they will be able to use the tennis courts and the commissioners stated that the park where the kids play is closed but the courts could remain open.
15. Chairman Wiggins stated that a hard line needed to be drawn for non-residents and Commissioner Eller stated that they are bringing their entire households. Manager Garland stated that they need to have husband, wife, and children under the age of 18 and all other family members would not be allowed to come to the county at this time.
16. The board discussed the permitting and agreed to issue green colored permits with a watermark to prevent copying of the permit. Manager Garland stated that our department heads are working very hard on the permitting and should have everything in place by Friday. Manager Garland stated that she was still posting information on Facebook and the WEB in hopes that people will read what needs to be done and what the county is trying to accomplish. Manager Garland stated that she spoke with the Funeral Home, they are limited traffic flow at funerals, and other businesses are having restrictions enforced.
17. The board hopes that the Gorge will open within three weeks and this will cut the flow of traffic down to necessary traffic only coming into Graham County.
18. Manager Garland stated that the people at the sites will be looking for the permits in the windows of the vehicles and they can send them straight through as well as commercial traffic. Commissioner Eller asks what will happen if they see an out of state tag. Manager Garland stated that they would be questioned on why they are here and if they say vacation in Graham County, they will be denied entrance. Lt. Hyde stated that 911 has been receiving extra calls from people reporting out of state tags in the county. Lt. Hyde asks what they do in the case the people are asked to leave and they refuse. Chairman Wiggins stated that the county will establish a policy to go by with penalties and if they resist forcefully they can be charged with a criminal charge and be arrested. Lt. Hyde stated that this could present a problem due to the limited space available for our inmates. Lt. Hyde stated that Swain County will not take on any extra inmates and Cherokee and Clay Counties Jails are full. Sheriff Jones stated that we are taking our inmates to Polk, Transylvania and Henderson Counties at this time.
19. Zelerie Rogers asks if this will take place for one month or two months. Chairman Wiggins stated that no one knows how long this will need to be in place but they will do all that they can to keep this community safe. Attorney Coward stated that the predictions are two months.
20. Jason Marino, Graham County Projects Manager stated that he is working with NCDOT on the barriers that are to be placed at the sites and asks if a deputy will be at these sites. Sheriff Jones stated that he could not have special deputies any more. Commissioner Orr asks if an exception can be made during this State of Emergency. Sheriff Jones stated that he would check.
21. The board agreed to continue this meeting to Wednesday, March 25, 2020 at noon.
22. Zelerie Rogers asks that the board send out the exact location of the road closures to them and she would remind her people to keep their identifications and drivers licenses with them.
23. The board stated that the closure of the roads would be Amendment #8 to the ordinance and they will get this executed as soon as possible.
24. The board wanted it made known that non-residents would only be allowed to have immediate family only and they would have to supply marriage licenses for couples with different last names and birth certificates for the kids.
25. Mr. Marino stated that he would get with NCDOT to get the exact layout to use at the sites and closures and asks again if the board wanted to close the Deals Gap area and the Cherohala and the board agreed that these sites needed to be hard closed. Mr. Marino stated that he would insure that the proper signage is placed at the sites as well. Mr. Marino stated that Tennessee is willing to help with the signage; they would need to rent barriers and signage for the remaining sites and discussed the areas where they wanted the sites to be located. Mr. Marino stated that he would make sure that supplies such as overhead lighting, space heaters and port a johns are at the sites as well and will check the sites for power poles which could make things a little easier with the lighting. The board thanked Mr. Marino for his work.
26. Chairman Wiggins stated that he would continue this meeting until Wednesday, March 25, 2020 at 12:00 noon.

Signature page attached!

Signature page for Continued Emergency Meeting March 23, 2020

Dale Wiggins, Chairman

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman

Keith Eller, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board