

Continued Emergency Meeting – April 2, 2020

COVID19 Update with the Board of Commissioners

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, April 2, 2020 at 12:00 noon by teleconference to discuss the issues related to the COVID19 pandemic. All board was present. Also present: Manager Garland, Attorney Jay Coward, Health Director Beth Booth, Health Nursing Supervisor Lorita Eller, Sheriff Jones and EM Management Director Larry Hembree, Town of Lake Santeetlah Administrator Kim Matheson, Town of Robbinsville Mayor Steve Hooper, Appalachian Community Health Center Administrator Tina Lee, Town of Fontana Dam Administrator Zelerie Rogers and Mayor Rob Hardy, Graham County School Superintendent Angela Knight, USFS Ranger Andy Gaston, 911 Director Misty Hembree, Graham Star Editor Kevin Hensley, Graham County Projects Manager Jason Marino, NCDOT Commissioner Dirk Cody, Town of Lake Santeetlah Emily Hooper, DSS Director Cris Weatherford, Lt. Dennis Crisp and Community Paramedicine Billy Hyde.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins welcomed the team members and stated that things seem to be quieting down and there is very few traffic on Snowbird Road. Chairman Wiggins stated that out-of-town property owners are anxious to get to their property and they have had very creative reasons for coming.
3. Chairman Wiggins asks Manager Garland to give an update. Manager Garland asks if there is access to the bike trail at Tsali. Chairman Wiggins stated yes that they could leave the Tsali bike trails open. Ranger Gaston stated that yes it was open as well as the Lemon Branch Boat Dock and ramp. Ranger Gaston stated that they have not changed anything on their website that still states that non-residents are not allowed into the county but the Tsali trails will remain open for day use. Ranger Gaston stated that they are not maintaining the bathrooms or garbage due to the lack of personnel and they are not encouraging people to go.
4. Manager Garland stated that she had spoken with the Office of State Emergency Management on the FEMA Reimbursement and the regulations to apply are retro back to January 20, 2020 and she has been tracking completely since February but she would go back and pick up bills from this date. Manager Garland stated that the federal regulations have been relaxed during this pandemic and they requested that we add the language to our procurement policy, which she is working on at this time. Manager Garland stated that people who are on the frontline will have the reimbursement and the office staff will recoup funds under the directs. Manager Garland stated that she had spoken with Swain County Manager Kevin King, they have implemented a 14-day quarantine for anyone coming into their county from another state and their rentals and motels are closed with a variance to open motels if needed. Manager King stated that he was not having any complaints at his checkpoints.
5. Manager Garland stated that she is reaching out to the Faith Based Community to ask for help on food distribution and well-ness checks and they were supportive of the actions that the county has been doing. Chairman Wiggins stated that we could also reach out to the EMS volunteers that may be retired because we may need them at some point. Chairman Wiggins stated we should include retired law enforcement as well. Chairman Wiggins stated that we are receiving many calls to come into our county to check on their elderly family members and they say that they come every two weeks but we need to make sure that we reach out and check on these individuals as well as our neighbors.
6. EM Director Hembree stated that they are still looking at Tri-County as a temporary hospital and Tri-County was supportive of that suggestion.
7. Program Coordinator Marino stated that things are a little better now and he has been going over the invoices that have been coming in on the details of the staff and equipment. Mr. Marino stated that there were several changes in the beginning but all if fine moving forward. Mr. Marino stated that the Nantahala Gorge is set to reopen on Saturday and this will definitely help with the Tipton and Tsali Checkpoints and the board can stop access completely into the county because we do have people not telling the truth to gain entry at this time. Manager Garland stated that she did approve the first invoice submitted by Mr. Marino.
8. Dirk Cody stated that NCDOT was a little ahead on the opening of the gorge and hopefully it will be opened Saturday at 5:00 p.m. Mr. Marino stated that when this happens they can close Tsali and Tipton to checkpoints of residents or permittees only.

9. Health Director Beth Booth stated that Graham County is still at zero cases given that the pending tests are negative. Director Booth stated that we are in a good place and Graham County is one of ten counties that are left with zero cases in North Carolina and there are now 1900 cases in our state with (16) deaths and (184) hospitalized. Director Booth stated that all the information could be obtained from the NCDHHS website for all NC counties. Director Booth stated that they are receiving many questions on who is being tested but that remains confidential and there is minimal data that can be released.
10. Commissioner Nelms asks about the new rapid test and what is the timeframe for this type testing to be done here. Director Booth stated that the sensitivity of the test is in question but they are using this as a secondary method to test other household members if one that was tested came back positive. Director Booth stated that they are still recommending the first test and the second for screen out only. Director Booth stated that the rapid test was not FDA approved at this time and they do not recommend due to a chance of a false negative result so the State of NC is not recommending this test at this time.
11. EM Director Hembree stated that he was sent rules to do follow up with patients if they tested positive and they are to adhere to the protocol of tracking temps daily until they are out of the quarantine and the family members must track as well but the list is to be held until a positive reflects contact with persons of high risk. Director Hembree stated that the positive and their family would be isolated.
12. Sheriff Jones stated that all was going decently at this time with no issues to report except some negative comments on Facebook where they will be bringing a group to protest and come through the checkpoints regardless. Sheriff Jones stated that some family members would be writing the board concerning their elderly parent because they were not allowed through the checkpoint and they are requesting a permit for three siblings who take turns staying with their parent. The board all agreed that exceptions could be made. Manager Garland stated that our protocol is to allow persons with Tipton, Almond, and Robbinsville addresses be allowed through the checkpoints. Manager Garland asks for the information of the family members and she will get in touch with them for issuance of a permit.
13. Tina Lee stated that persons at the checkpoints need to be wearing their PPE's and they were not this morning at the Tipton checkpoints and this does not send out a good message. Mr. Marino stated that he continually reminds them to wear the PPE's but he will reach out again for as long as it takes. Director Booth stated that N95 Masks are not being recommended any longer just a dust mask will suffice and gloves must be used properly and stated that they may need some education on the how to properly use the gloves and the mask. Billy Hyde stated that if they do not touch the id's there is no need for gloves and they are standing back the required six feet. Mr. Hyde stated that cross contamination is worse than nothing at all. Manager Garland stated that she would be glad to assist with the education. Mr. Marino stated that they have been instructed not to touch anything at the sites and they are to use visual contact only with reading the licenses. Dennis Crisp stated that it is hard to tell someone to wear them who does not work for the county and they do not touch anything. Dennis Crisp suggested ordering some type of shields for them to use. The board was fine with shields to be put in place.
14. Attorney Coward asks how many permits has the county issued. Manager Garland stated they have issued 750 or more permits but not all of those are for out of town people but they are for contractors, doctors, nurses and people working in other counties.
15. Ranger Gaston stated that they put up signs on Tatham Gap road above the water treatment plant notifying every one of the barriers and they will monitor Porterfield Gap Road and reminded everyone that wildfires are to be expected.
16. Manager Garland asks if the officers are doing wellness checks on homes that have been closed for the winter because this is one complaint the part time residents are using to try to get into the county. Sheriff Jones asks that they be told to call the sheriff's department and give the specifics and they will do security checks but at this time, things are beginning to settle down. Dennis Crisp stated that they are just using that excuse to try to get into the county. Chairman Wiggins stated that Buncombe County put a stay at home order in their county.
17. Chairman Wiggins stated that he wanted to be notified of the first positive in the county and he would call an emergency meeting immediately. Chairman Wiggins stated that this meeting will be adjourned until Monday, April 6, 2020 at noon.

Dale Wiggins, Chairman

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman

Keith Eller, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board