

Continued Emergency Meeting – April 6, 2020

COVID19 Update with the Board of Commissioners

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, April 6, 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, Sheriff Jones, EM Management Director Larry Hembree, Town of Lake Santeetlah Kim Matheson and Emily Hooper, 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, DSS Director Cris Weatherford, Lt. Jimmy Hyde, Health Nursing Supervisor Lorita Eller and Community Paramedicine Billy Hyde.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins stated that he went to every checkpoint and they are set up nicely. Chairman Wiggins stated that some people still do not understand what a stay at home order means or they just wish to defy the governance with a careless attitude that puts everyone at risk. Chairman Wiggins stated that we are having drive-up church with some shaking hands and disregarding the six-foot social distancing. Chairman Wiggins stated that everyone needed to be reminded how serious this pandemic is and that no one knows who may be a carrier. Health Director Booth stated that the church gathering was put on hold and NC now has 2854 cases and people are getting complacent but staying home is helping and this is being proven. Manager Garland wanted to know about the permitting since the Governor issued the stay at home order through the end of April. The board wanted the permitting to be held and only issue ones on a case-by-case basis. Editor Hensley asks how many permits have been issued to date. Manager Garland stated that we have issued 1326 permits and have 100 applications that came in over the weekend and the breakdown is (371) non-residents; (176) houseboats; (108) medical care workers and (671) commuting workers and we allow business workforce to pass through such as FEDEX, COKE, etc. Commissioner Nelms asks how we determine if the houseboat is one of ours. Manager Garland stated that we request a picture, a NC Wildlife license and tax card. Lt. Hyde stated that at one time there were over 500 houseboats on Fontana Lake. Manager Garland stated that these go through Graham County Harbors.
3. Manager Garland stated that she has been speaking with the Faith Based Community on helping us with wellness checks on our elderly to make sure that they have meals and essential items that they need on a day-to-day basis.
4. Commissioner Orr asks about the animal that was reported to have COVID19 at the zoo. Director Booth stated that she did not receive any information on this but it is possible to pass the virus from dog to person, cat to cat but not dog to dog but she would look into this and report to the board.
5. Director Booth stated that we are still at zero cases and the NC death rate is doubling every three days so beginning this date they are no longer testing the deceased. Director Booth stated that in Carteret County twenty people have died. Chairman Wiggins stated that the virus is all around us. Director Booth stated that there are now (7) counties left without a positive case and Graham County is the only one without a positive in Western North Carolina. Chairman Wiggins stated that Cherokee County is becoming a hotspot and Wal-Mart will be restricting the number of people they will allow in the store at one time.
6. Sheriff Jones stated that we are having some motorcycle issues running through the checkpoints and traffic is picking up due to the time of the year. Sheriff Jones stated that he made it plain this morning that if they did not have a Robbinsville Address on their Driver's License or Graham County Tax Card they would not be allowed into the county as stated to him by the tax office. Manager Garland stated that nothing has changed concerning the permits or the driver's license and she would speak with everyone today. Manager Garland stated that Driver's License that have Robbinsville, Almond, Deals Gap or Fontana Dam would be allowed access into the county.
7. Commissioner Nelms asks if the opening of the gorge has helped. Sheriff Jones stated that they are seeing Tennessee tags coming through and some are trying to go through even though they are told to turn around. Chairman Wiggins thanked Sheriff Jones and his staff for all the work that they are doing in helping to keep Graham County safe.

8. Commissioner Orr asks about the restrictions in Wal-Mart. Chairman Wiggins stated that people will have access to the groceries and the pharmacy but random shopping was being stopped. Chairman Wiggins stated that they are limiting the number of people in the store at one time and no one can enter until one comes out and it is his understanding that this will become a nationwide policy on Saturday due to people ignoring the social distancing. The board all agreed that something should be done with Lowe's as well.
9. Ranger Gaston stated that NC has a burn ban in place statewide and we did have one large fire in Cherokee County.
10. Manager Garland stated that she would hold all permits until the end of April with the exception of emergency cases and stated that every State that we border has a Stay at Home order in place. Manager Garland stated that she wished that people would heed what the recommendations are to stay home in your own county and state. Manager Garland stated that the State of Georgia is sending mixed messages by issuing a Stay at Home but opening their beaches. Manager Garland stated that she was so proud of Graham County for staying consistent.
11. Chairman Wiggins stated that we would meet again on Friday, April 10th. Ranger Gaston stated that he would continue to keep the Cheoah Beach closed and asks if the board has plans of a specific date to reopen. Chairman Wiggins stated that no plans have been made at this time. Ranger Gaston stated that the USFS could not maintain bathrooms and trash so opening the day use areas could lead to problems. Chairman Wiggins stated that boat ramps are fine to be left open.
12. Chairman Wiggins continued the meeting to Friday, April 10, 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