

Regular Meeting – January 15, 2019

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 5:30 p.m. for their regular monthly meeting in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville NC. Commissioners present: Dale Wiggins, Lynn Cody, Connie Orr and Keith Eller. Commissioner absent: Jacob Nelms.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks Commissioner Cody to give the Invocation.
3. Chairman Wiggins led the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chairman Wiggins asks if there are any additions to the agenda. Manager Garland stated that we needed to add to Item #10 New Business: EDC Commission recommendation to appoint Mike Teem and Joe Jones to the EDC Commission; and Item #11 need to add Becky Garland for contracts. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the agenda with the changes as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chairman Wiggins asks for approval of the Workshop and Regular Meeting Minutes of December 18th. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chairman Wiggins asks Sophia Paulos to give the monthly EDC Report. Ms. Paulos stated that this evening's report will be a bit shorter than usual so that she can spend a bit more time on an update regarding Oak Valley and the American Timber Group.
7. Ms. Paulos gave an update on Main Street and stated that today a group of citizens and government leaders gathered at the Graham County Library to begin work on the Robbinsville Downtown Revitalization strategic plan with the support of Ann Bass, the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Office, and ARC. The meeting saw the project off to an excellent start as volunteers, non-profits, property owners and representatives from the town and county governments worked to identify our many assets and lay out our strategy going forward. This process will take place over the next six months and she will keep the board up to date as it develops
8. Ms. Paulos stated that the Growing Outdoors POWER project secured by Mountain Biz-Works has been chosen to share their story at the NC State Institute for Emerging Issues Re-Connect Forum in Raleigh next month. As a partnership of rural and urban areas in WNC, we will share with the state how we are leveraging our shared assets to develop strategies as unique as our communities for growing the outdoor industry across the region. This will be an excellent opportunity to share how the forward thinking leaders in Graham County and across the region are using our shared assets to grow the economy in innovative ways that serve our people as well as the industry. Because of her participation in the IEI Re-Connect Forum the \$275 registration fee has been waived and will be of no cost to the county. Additionally, travel expenses will be covered through the Growing Outdoors ARC POWER grant being administered through Mountain Biz-Works at no cost to the county.
9. Ms. Paulos stated that she has an update for the Oak Valley Hardwoods and the American Timber Group. Ms. Paulos stated that yesterday afternoon she received a call from Ex-Commissioner Raymond Williams. He was concerned by word that Oak Valley Hardwoods would be closing, that the staff would have one month, and that, if they chose to do so, they could transfer over to American Timber Group at a \$2 dollar an hour pay cut. Ms. Paulos assured Ex-Commissioner Williams that she would get to the bottom of it and that it may take up to a week as a face to face meeting may have been required. Ms. Paulos reached out to Mr. Lee immediately and left a voicemail. He got back to her yesterday evening and she quickly voiced her concerns. Over the course of the last several months Mr. Lee and Ms. Paulos have talked at great lengths about strategies that will best serve his business as well as the people of Graham County. The reason his business interests remain here is because he is so impressed by our people, their work ethic, their values, and their sense of community. It is also for that reason that he convinced his business partners to invest millions of dollars into this county through American Timber Group (as evidenced by all the new equipment being installed in the building). While consolidating the Robbinsville Oak Valley facility to make way for ATG has been on the table for several months the final decision was not made until yesterday morning. Mr. Lee wishes to be as transparent with his employees as possible and so he let them know right away and with a months' notice. This stands in stark contrast to the closing of the Stanley Plant when

little to no notice was given and staff were left in the dark until April 1st. Another important difference is that our people will not be losing their jobs. On that note, she made some clarifications for both the board and the people of our county impacted by this growth. Yesterday evening Mr. Lee explained that there was an unfortunate miscommunication to some of the staff at Oak Valley Hardwood. While Oak Valley Hardwoods Robbinsville operation will be moving our people WILL NOT be losing their jobs. Every Oak Valley Hardwoods employee will have the opportunity to transfer to ATG at the same rate of pay, with the same insurance benefits, and all time accumulated during their employment will roll over to the new company. They will also have increased career opportunities as they transition from using outdated to modern equipment. Another important clarification she wanted to make for our citizens is one regarding grant funds. It has come to her attention that our citizens are under the impression that Mr. Lee has been the recipient of grant funds either through county, state, or federal government funds. As you will all recall, Oak Valley was awarded \$225,660 NC Department of Commerce grant funds through the county prior to her arrival here in Graham County. This is a common practice as millions of tax payer dollars are awarded to companies in this way across the state every year. But, she wanted to make it clear that Mr. Lee does not like to use government funds for any project unless absolutely necessary to make the business case. The hard work of the people at Oak Valley Hardwoods made it so he never needed that money. In March of 2018 he asked the board to return 100% of those funds back to Department of Commerce which the board did on his behalf on March 29, 2018. To date, Mr. Lee has never depended on government monies to grow his businesses. With all of that said, she will be meeting with NC Works tomorrow to develop transition and hiring strategies for the American Timber Group. Ms. Paulos stated that she is excited to watch career opportunities for our people grow within the forest products industry and she is excited to see what our people, businesses, and industry can do when given the opportunity to thrive.

10. Chairman Wiggins asks Manager Garland to give the Finance and Manager's Report. Manager Garland stated that the county ended the month with a cash balance of \$8,240,753.29 and we are still due \$436,689.57 from the 911 Grant. Manager Garland stated that we are running in a deficit of \$891,036.14 from this time last year but it is due to Brookfield paying their taxes in December instead of January.
11. Manager Garland stated that we have collected \$1,238,640.46 in current year taxes; \$8,961.04 in prior year taxes for a total of \$1,247,601.50. Manager Garland stated that we have collected \$39,611.82 in DMV taxes for the month and we are ahead from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that our tax collection rate is 89.9%.
12. Manager Garland stated that our revenues for the month was \$2,085,089.46 and our expenditures was \$1,076,025.94 giving us a surplus of \$1,009,063.52.
13. Manager Garland stated that our sales tax collection was \$174,999.14 and our back tax collection is now at \$614,115.97.
14. Manager Garland stated that our budget is doing well and we should be at 50% but we are at 56% and thanked the department heads for doing their part in spending wisely.
15. Manager Garland stated that she would now go to the Manager's report and stated that the 911 Call Center was approved for a (6) month extension on the grant and we have a little under \$1 million in the grant funds left to expend and the funds will be used to enhance redundancy with our neighboring counties.
16. Manager Garland stated that we had a call with Heery Associates on Friday and they will be evaluating the plat of lots remaining at Fort Hill. They felt that a combined justice center (Jail, Sheriff, Courts) could feasibly be placed on the remaining acreage with a multi-story structure. Manager Garland stated that they will be sending sample RFQ's for us to evaluate firms for building and site programming. Manager Garland stated that NCDOR approved our resolution and the ¼ cent sales tax levy will begin April 1, 2019 and we will get our first allocation in June, 2019. Manager Garland also stated that she is working with Davenport to update our debt modeling with the sales tax revenue and we will have workshops in February to go over the updates.
17. Manager Garland stated that the grand jury toured our courthouse and noted that we needed a new jail.
18. Manager Garland stated that work has begun at the old DSS building so that Admin can prepare to move along with Recreation and Building Inspections. Manager Garland stated that we still have a challenge with recreations in the long term on storage and we have tentatively discussed a 30x50 building to be placed on the P&J properties which will match the exterior of the DHHS

building. Manager Garland stated that we would like to go ahead and do a estimate of the structure so we can include it in our building /capital projects budget for the next fiscal year if the board is okay with this recommendation. The board agreed to this recommendation.

19. Manager Garland stated that we have an issue with storage at the DSS side of the building and our original idea would not work due to the roofline and we are working on another plan. Manager Garland stated that the “dead files” from DSS could be moved back to the community building and current files needed to be placed in file cabinets in DSS. Commissioner Cody asks about scanning the documents for storage. Manager Garland stated that we have looked into that but the cost was several hundred thousand dollars.
20. Manager Garland stated that Angie Knight has requested that she attend a meeting with DPI with her about the grant funding for school structure. At present, there is no feasible land to construct an elementary school however she needs to add a 6th grade wing to the back of the middle school to make the elementary Pre-K through 5th and convert the middle school to 6th through 8th. This would necessitate adding on to the cafeteria and adding gym space. The meeting is held January 24th in Raleigh and asks the board’s permission to attend. The board unanimously agreed for Manager Garland to attend this meeting.
21. Manager Garland stated that we did receive the CDBG \$750,000.00 Scattered Site Housing Grant but we have not heard anything further from Commerce. Manager Garland stated that we would need to issue a RFQ request to hire grant administrator.
22. Manager Garland stated that there are several meetings coming up and we will have Corridor K meeting on Tuesday, February 12th at the community building. The local officials meeting will take place between 2:00 to 3:00 pm and the public meeting will occur between 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.
23. Manager Garland stated that the NCACC announced that the Speaker of the House Tim Moore endorsed the \$1.9 billion education bond for NC to be placed on the ballot for school construction and the Speaker has committed to visiting all 100 counties to support the bond referendum to see what the needs look like. The NCACC publically thanked Speaker Moore for his commitment to the initiative and we look forward to having him visit Graham County.
24. Manager Garland stated that the School has a resolution that they would like for the commissioners to support to restore local control to the school calendars. This resolution is in support of legislation to be introduced at the General Assembly. The board was in agreement to supporting this resolution. Commissioner Cody made the motion to endorse the resolution to put the local officials in control of the school calendars. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
25. Manager Garland stated that we have not received any word on the Government Shutdown on the potential impacts to the counties. We have called Pryor Gibson with Hometown Strong and Johanna Reece with NCACC. There is a meeting scheduled with DHHS officials and Johanna will add us to the list to receive updates so we can prepare and find out whether the State will be doing any bridge funding.
26. Manager Garland stated that Representative Kevin Corbin advised us to pass a new resolution for the re-introduction of the occupancy tax legislation. Manager Garland stated that it is identical to the resolution passed last year with the changes of the board members names and asks for board approval. Commissioner Eller made the motion to adopt the Occupancy Tax Resolution. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
27. Manager Garland discussed some ongoing projects with the board. The EPA Grant Application for the Brownfield Assessment Grant has been submitted to the consultants for a technical review and will be submitted by the 01/31/2019 deadline. WR Martin is writing the grant pro bono for the county.
28. Manager Garland stated that we had a visit from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund through the Hometown Strong program. They are encouraging us to apply for a stream restoration grant to do the assessment of the erosion in the creek adjacent to the Stanley property and then later a restoration grant. Due to the brownfield issue we have a good chance at getting the funds to assess the stream bank.
29. Manager Garland stated that we had a visit from Bob Holman with the Conservation Trust and took a trip to the Stanley property. Mr. Holman retired from the DEQ and he is going to work with us to locate other brownfields in the Hometown Strong counties and will be taking the issue back to the General Assembly to try and get them to begin appropriating brownfields money for clean up because EPA money is difficult to obtain.

30. Manager Garland stated that the tax and finance committee has been working for a couple of months to fully implement the GIS component of our tax program and to make sure that our mapping and our tax scroll is reconciled. We also want to add layers to the GIS and to make it more functional and to allow it to be more helpful to emergency management in the event of a disaster such as occurred in Gatlinburg in 2016. We will be making a request in the upcoming budget to make these enhancements.
31. Manager Garland stated that we have been speaking with a consultant regarding gaining some additional technical support with the tax office software and the GIS merge with BI-Tek.
32. Manager Garland stated that we will begin budget work in the next staff meeting with departmental goal setting and creating strategic plans for the coming year. Manager Garland would like to have a retreat with the staff in the coming weeks to solidify these goals as they work through their budget requests. Manager Garland has been speaking with the Aycock Group who do leadership and strategic planning support and would like to use their process of gaining tools to be more effective in the retreat and their cost is \$1500.00. All board was in agreement to Manager Garland's recommendation.
33. Manager Garland stated that she and Sheriff Jones met with our representative from Fleet Management. Manager Garland stated that Sheriff Jones is requesting to be able to purchase a 2017 Ford Expedition from Collins Auto Sales for \$25,843.84 to use as his vehicle. Sheriff Jones discussed the need he has for new vehicles and the aging of the vehicles that he currently has. The board is well aware of the issues in our fleet and agree that we need to get this worked out during our budget workshops. The board agreed that we will focus first on fleet management and EMS Scheduling. Sheriff Jones also wanted the board to know that only one vehicle is being driven out of county. The board all agreed to set up workshops and get the discussions on the table.
34. Manager Garland stated that we received the 911 PSAP funding letter for 2019-2020 and they will fund us \$124,987.98. Manager Garland stated that this number could change after they review the 6/30/2018 reports.
35. Manager Garland stated that a quote was given to resurface the pool for \$65,000.00 and we are awaiting another quote. Manager Garland stated that the pool inspector stated that he will pass our inspection for this coming season as long as he knows we are trying to get the pool resurfaced. This is a must for the upcoming budget.
36. Manager Garland stated that Commissioner Orr has been nominated to the Vaya Health board and we will know if her nomination has been accepted later this week. If she is accepted she will need the board to approve the nomination and will tentatively need to attend the board retreat January 25th through the 26th in Asheville.
37. Manager Garland stated that Randy Collins from Agriculture Extension has requested that they use one of our county vehicles for 4-H activities this summer. The State has been providing a van, however, they charge \$300 per month plus mileage and gas. Manager Garland stated that they will pay us mileage and they have about (5) events in June and July and (2) events in August. Manager Garland has reached out to our insurance agent to make sure they would be covered and asks the boards thoughts. The board all agreed that the senior center van would be the most feasible but they would have to work with them on the availability of the van. Manager Garland stated that they have (5) kids that they would need to transport.
38. Manager Garland stated that Larry Reeves sent the annual report of the Community Advisory Committee for Long Term Care and the report identified workforce shortages for long term care facilities and the need to continue community education about elder abuse prevention.
39. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board needed to sit down with Fleet Management again and we need to have Sheriff Jones with us.
40. Chairman Wiggins asks for public comment. No one was signed in for public comment.
41. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board would now go into the discussion items. Chairman Wiggins stated that we have Releases in the amount of \$549.35 and Discoveries in the amount of \$148.90. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the releases and discoveries. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
42. Chairman Wiggins stated that we received the information for the CSBG Grant from Four Square Community Action, Inc. and they need us to acknowledge the submission of the grant. Commissioner Orr made the motion to accept the submission of the grant from Four Square for Graham County. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
43. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board needed to accept the nomination for Commissioner Connie Orr to be on the Vaya Commission Board pending the acceptance from Vaya.

Commissioner Cody made the motion to accept the nomination as stated. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

44. Chairman Wiggings stated that the county offices will be closed Monday January 21st for Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.
45. Chairman Wiggings stated that the EDC Commission has recommended that Mike Teem and Joe Jones be appointed as EDC Commission Members. Commissioner Eller made the motion to appoint Mike Teem and Joe Jones to the EDC Commission. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
46. Chairman Wiggings stated that the board would need a motion to go into closed session under G.S. 143-318.11(a) (1) (3) (5) (6) for privileged or confidential information, attorney-client privilege, personnel and contracts. Commissioner Eller made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
47. Commissioner Orr made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
48. Commissioner Orr made the motion to enter into a contract with Farris Enterprises for the Tax Office in the amount of \$10,000.00. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
49. Commissioner Eller stated that he wanted to table the EMS Scheduling discussion until the budget meetings have begun. The board all agreed to this recommendation.
50. Chairman Wiggings stated that we would need to continue this meeting to Tuesday, January 22nd at 4:00 p.m. at the Transit Facility. Commissioner Cody made the motion to continue this meeting as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Dale Wiggings, 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