

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, October 15, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular monthly meeting. All board was present.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks who would be speaking for the Prosperity Committee. Jim Hager stated that he would be the spokesperson but would like his wife to start the conversation. Chairman Wiggins asks Mrs. Ann Hager to proceed. Mrs. Hager thanked the board for the job that they do and stated that Graham County was her place of birth and she would like to discuss alcohol sales in the county. Ms. Hager stated that they would present in a courteous manner and want to work with the commissioners on this issue. Mrs. Hager stated that their committee began through Hometown Strong when they were asked to come up with ideas that would help our county prosper and alcohol sales was very evident so they formed the Prosperity Committee. Mrs. Hager stated that the last vote for alcohol in the county was in 1948 and she understood the situation of the times in this period but times have changed and we need to address the economic issues that need to be fixed. Mrs. Hager stated that we needed alcohol sales in our county to support our schools, EMS and Sheriff's office. Mrs. Hager stated that our youth do not stay here and there are many that would love to come home but Graham County is not prospering. Mrs. Hager stated that people will come here to stay and enjoy our outdoor recreation but they will cut their trips short because we do not supply the full picture of what people are now looking for. Mrs. Hager stated that the people of Graham County should be allowed to vote on the issue of alcohol sales.
3. Jim Hager stated that he has been here since 1968 when he married his wife Ann and the county has been dry for 71 years. Mr. Hager stated that Graham County is the only county in North Carolina that is dry and we are the most distressed county in the state with the highest property tax of all surrounding areas. Mr. Hager stated that people do not move here and our restaurants are struggling to stay open. Mr. Hager stated that studies show that bans on alcohol sales are factors to the higher rates of meth use as well as more fatal car accidents. Mr. Hager stated that he is asking the board to trust the people of Graham County to decide for themselves. Mr. Hager stated that the Town of Robbinsville, when they go wet, would see an economic boost including new restaurants, motels and more, which will increase our tax base. Mr. Hager stated that people are willing to invest five to ten million dollars in our county if we have alcohol sales.
4. Lynn Kinley stated that she is a real estate broker here in Graham County and the number one thing that visitors ask is where they can dine that serve drinks and this does have a direct impact on the rental in this county. Ms. Kinley stated that the second part is the sales of homes when people ask questions about dinner and a drink and they will not return to our county when they learn this is not available. Ms. Kinley stated that she came here in 1986, the town looks the same, and people ask why we cannot have the right to vote on this issue. Ms. Kinley asks that the commissioners allow the vote to be county wide because we want to live here and enjoy our natural beauty, which is indescribable. Ms. Kinley asks that the commissioners allow the people the option to vote on this issue.
5. John Caldwell stated that our town is dying, the population keeps dropping and there is no industry left. Mr. Caldwell stated that the only thing that we have is tourism. Mr. Caldwell stated that people come here to ride the roads and see the scenery but they do not spend the night here because there is no place to have a drink with your meal in town. Mr. Caldwell stated that we have few hotels but none offers a pool. Mr. Caldwell stated that no one here are proponents of alcohol or opponents we are only asking for this to come to a vote.
6. Mrs. Hager stated that she sincerely urges the commissioners to consider putting this on a ballot. Mrs. Hager stated that several citizens have voiced their support for a vote on alcohol sales.
7. Chairman Wiggins stated that this is a sensitive subject in Graham County and it is something we are going to have to consider. Chairman Wiggins asks that they bring their data to the board on the economic impact that it would have on the county. Mr. Caldwell stated that the HUB would add \$100 thousand in sales and would hire three people; the ABC store would employ four with salaries of up to \$60 thousand dollars and this is revenue to the county and to our schools through the tax revenue. Mr. Caldwell stated at present these sales go to Cherokee and Swain Counties.

8. Chairman Wiggins stated again that this is a sensitive subject that can be unpleasant. Commissioner Lynn Cody agreed and stated that this board would consider everything that is said concerning this issue. Chairman Wiggins stated that he did not know if the alcohol sales brought the Town of Andrews out of economic distress but he does know that the Shell Station in Andrews sells the most alcohol than any other store in Andrews. Chairman Wiggins stated that the Town of Robbinsville would have to do their own referendum for alcohol sales in the Town.
9. Mrs. Hager asks that the board takes personal feelings out of this and give the people the right to vote. Mr. Caldwell stated that our groceries here are the highest because most residents will go to Andrews or Bryson City to purchase their groceries in order to purchase alcohol.
10. Todd Odom stated that alcohol sales would allow for more jobs. Mr. Odom stated that the employees at the ABC store would start out at \$40 thousand a year and our median wage for the county is \$13 thousand. Mr. Odom stated that this would change people's lives with better living wages. Mr. Odom asks that the board be part of a solution.
11. Mr. Hager stated that Robert Rankin would add a \$5 million dollar investment to his property will alcohol sales.
12. Kaye Davis stated that she didn't intent to speak but her brother died an alcoholic and he never did without in this county and she believes that if the alcohol had been legal then he would not have been able to get credit and he would not have had access to the alcohol in the manner that he did. Mrs. Davis stated that this is nothing earth shattering but our tourism is all we have in our town and the tourist do not intend to stay here without it. Mrs. Davis stated that she was in the Mexican Restaurant and a group of motorcycle riders came in to eat and ordered a margarita and the server explained that we are a dry county and they could not believe it. Mrs. Davis stated that this would help our restaurants, our motels, our grocery stores and our gas stations.
13. Tom Davis stated that he came here 60 some years ago as a wildlife officer and he was told that if he came upon a still in the woods he was to keep his mouth shut. Mr. Davis stated that he came upon a huge still and he never told anyone. Mr. Davis stated that this county has always had alcohol and it has never been dry. Mr. Davis stated that our tax revenue is going to other counties, times have changed, and we need our tax dollars to stay in this county. Mr. Davis stated that breweries are being built all around us and we need this money. Mr. Davis stated that people socialize with a drink at dinner and they do not get out of the way and he believes that the county has good people who deserve the right to vote.
14. Chairman Wiggins thanked everyone for their comments and adjourned the workshop session.

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