

Continued Emergency Meeting – April 15, 2020

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, April 15, 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, EM Management Director Larry Hembree, Town of Lake Santeetlah Administrator Kim Matheson, Town of Robbinsville Mayor Steve Hooper, Town of Robbinsville Alderman Brian Johnson, Appalachian Community Health Center Administrator Tina Lee, Town of Fontana Dam Administrator Zelerie Rogers, 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. Jimmy Hyde, Health Preparedness Coordinator Emily Collins, NCDOT Brian Burch and Community Paramedicine Billy Hyde.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks Manager Garland to speak. Manager Garland stated that the biggest thing to discuss today is making changes to the checkpoints and she would like Jason Marino to cover this discussion. Manager Garland stated that she has been releasing permits to non-resident property owners because truly they are no more risk than the residents traveling to other counties or states at this time. Chairman Wiggins asks that they be told to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival, bring their medications and food with them, and contact the county office upon their arrival to give their license plate number on their car so that they can be identified as a property owner in Graham County. Chairman Wiggins stated that this does bother him greatly due to our number of elderly people in the county but if the committee does not object the staff will begin contact with the non-residents that have applied for a permit to let them know of the changes that are taking place.
3. Manager Garland stated that she is working with the faith-based community to reach out to our elderly and shut-ins to make sure that they have food and necessities.
4. Mr. Marino stated that they have had some small issues at the checkpoints and stated that some of the protocols could be confusing and we have had some to run through the checkpoints but Graham County Land has been stepping up with the PPE's. Mr. Marino stated that he has been working with NCDOT, TDOT and the highway patrol and will try to get the barricades in place on the Cherohala today. EM Director Hembree stated that all was approved and put in place but one sign did need a location change. Mr. Marino stated that the barricade would be at the North River Rd where the cars will have better access to turn around. Mr. Marino stated that there was a lot of signage and this will be put in place today. Mr. Marino stated that the closure on Hwy 28 would need to be at the bridge below the dam and they hope to close this access on Friday of this week. Mr. Marino stated that the detour signs would be posted at the Pit Stop in Fontana Village to alert every one of the closure. Sheriff Jones stated that Swain County had expressed some concerns about the closure on Hwy 28. Zelerie Rogers asks if they will be able to get to the Water Plant and the Wastewater Plant. Chairman Wiggins stated that the intent was to put it at the bridge, which will be below the road that leads into the water plant. Mr. Marino stated that the barricades are Type 3 and they can be removed to get access to the other side. Sheriff Jones stated that Sheriff Cochran had expressed concern but with these type barricades, it will be an inconvenience but they can get through. Chairman Wiggins stated that TVA had expressed a little concern but they can use the campground road to get back and forth if needed. Commissioner Cody asks if Stecoah Fire and Rescue needs to get through this could be an inconvenience as well. Chairman Wiggins stated that he was hopeful that the staff at Fontana Village could move the barricades aside in the event of an emergency. Jimmy Hyde stated that TVA could access a road that they maintain to get from the bottom of the dam to the top on the Swain County side if needed. Mayor Hardy stated that as long as the barricade is at the bridge the closure would be fine with them. EM Director Larry Hembree stated that David Breedlove did not have a problem with the hard closure and our first responders are usually the first ones there. Commissioner Cody stated that it would be an inconvenience to them to take down and then put back up.
5. Chairman Wiggins asks if we talked to Monroe County on the hard closure on the Skyway. Manager Garland stated that they are in the process of signing a Memorandum of Agreement with them for EMS, Fire and Rescue and the NC State Highway Patrol was very much in favor.

Commissioner Eller stated that you could hook chains to the barricades and move them out of the way in just a few minutes. The board discussed Little Snowbird and Mr. Marino stated that he and EM Director Hembree did talk about that but newer nicer bikes would not try to access this road.

6. Chairman Wiggins stated that he has been getting complaints from real estate brokers from Cherokee County not being able to show their properties. Chairman Wiggins stated that they needed to let the Sheriff know when they needed access into the county.
7. Chairman Wiggins asks Health Director Booth for an update. Director Booth stated that we have zero cases in Graham County; 5123 cases in North Carolina; 431 are in the hospital and there have been 117 deaths. Director Booth stated that the Snowbird Clinic is conducting drive through testing for Tribe members. Director Booth stated that staff is still telecommuting and they have no problems or concerns at this time. Dirk Cody asks how many members were tested. Director Booth stated that 71 tests were conducted and 23 have come back negative and the others are pending. Manager Garland asks if the health department can do the testing. Lorita Eller stated that they can but you must have a doctor's order and they do not have a doctor on staff at this time. Ms. Eller stated that the doctor's offices are following up with the health department on their testing and Quest and the NC State Lab are the ones that the tests are being sent to. Mr. Cody asks if the health department is receiving all the numbers for testing in the county. Ms. Eller stated that our doctor offices have been sending the health department the information even though they are no longer required to do so at this time.
8. EM Director Hembree stated that he wanted the MOA signed by Monroe County prior to the hard closure. The board expressed concern on a closure at Tapoco due to Brookfield and their employees. Manager Garland stated that she did receive a call from a concerned citizen that Brookfield was allowing contractors to go home to Michigan for the weekend and then return on Monday. Manager Garland stated that she would be reaching out to Brookfield to see what was going on. Dirk Cody stated that these employees needed to be screened prior to allowing them back on the job because this is how the virus can potentially be spread from one state to another. Dirk Cody stated that this is a very valid concern for all county citizens that may meet these contractors in stores, gas stations, etc.
9. Attorney Coward stated that this is one of the main reasons that the county put the barricades in place to prevent people from other states access to come and go from our county without taking precautions. Attorney Coward stated that it was concerning that some people are still being allowed access into the county without a permit. Attorney Coward stated that our county has the right to enforce authority at these checkpoints. Chairman Wiggins stated that if people are coming in for work they have been allowing them access but if they are traveling back and forth every weekend this needed more conversation. Attorney Coward stated that he has fixed an amendment to cover situations that allow entry into the county without a permit to allow them temporary access after their name, address and location of where they are going to work has been obtained. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve Amendment #3. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. Attorney Coward stated that he respected this county for their stand on staying home and knew that many of these decisions were not easy to make. Commissioner Orr asks EM Director Hembree if he needed the MOU from Monroe County prior to the hard closure and he replied yes. Sheriff Jones stated that they would have the same agreement concerning law enforcement even though they had a verbal agreement at this time. Sheriff Jones stated that Monroe County has always been good to respond to the NC side when needed.
10. 911 Director Misty Hembree stated that she would need copies of the agreements to send to DCI, a requirement on her end, to allow DCI knowledge of any MOA's.
11. Lt. Crisp asks if a permit could be made in a different color for workers entering the county to keep down confusion. Chairman Wiggins stated that tag numbers needed to be written down as well when workers are coming into the county. Chairman Wiggins stated that a temporary permit should not be longer than seven days and upon that expiration, they will have to obtain another permit. Sheriff Jones stated that he would do whatever the committee wanted if it makes things easier on all concerned.
12. Chairman Wiggins continued this meeting to Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at noon.

Signature page attached!

Signature page for April 15, 2020

Dale Wiggins, Chairman

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman

Keith Eller, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board