

Budget Meeting – June 4, 2021

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Friday, June 4, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. Board present Keith Eller, Lynn Cody, Jacob Nelms, Dale Wiggins. Board absent Connie Orr. Also, present Manager Jason Marino, Finance Director Becky Garland and Clerk Kim Crisp.

1. Vice-Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Cody made the motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
3. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Manager Marino and Director Garland to continue the budget discussions.
4. Manager Marino stated that Sheriff Jerry Crisp and Chief Deputy Dennis Crisp was here to speak with the board on the Sheriff budget. Sheriff Crisp stated that Chief Crisp would present their discussion. Chief Crisp stated that he submitted four different budgets for the board to review, 1) with a COLA 2) without a COLA 3) with a COLA +1.00 per hour for all staff 4) without anything. Chief Crisp stated that their staff is well underpaid and stated that people are paying \$14.00 per hour for kitchen help. Chief Crisp stated that our deputies put their lives on the line and work very hard and currently we have two open positions and one on medical leave. Chief Crisp stated that he included the increase in gas prices and increased supplies due to those increases as well. Chief Crisp stated that they have a shortfall on vests and equipment to outfit the staff. Chief Crisp stated that he increased the contracted services for attorney fees and added a K-9 Budget. Chief Crisp stated that two officers provide their own dogs, and our office needs to pay for their food. Chief Crisp stated that they are asking \$2500.00 per month for this expense which is for vet bills and food costs. Chief Crisp stated that they would like to add one officer which would even out the night patrol for better coverage because having one or two officers at night does not allow enough time for patrol because they are busy answering calls. Chief Crisp stated that he would like to raise the pay by \$1.00 per hour to get to an average pay rate for our district and he is aware that Graham County cannot pay what the Tribe pays their employees. Chief Crisp stated that they do not waste money and it takes commitment by all of us. Chief Crisp stated that there is an increase in the investigative budget for the purchase of surveillance equipment. Commissioner Nelms asks if they need the surveillance equipment now and Chief Crisp stated that it would be good. Manager Marino asks if the system can be moved other locations and Sheriff Crisp stated that it could. Sheriff Crisp stated that his intent was to use the \$12,000.00 in drug money that he thought he had but when he went to get the money only \$400.00 remained in the fund. Sheriff Crisp stated that the prior Sheriff had spent the money on other things. Chief Crisp stated that last year the county did assist with the purchase of vests and radios, and they appreciated that, but it takes money to protect the County. Chief Crisp stated that they feel with the \$1.00 raise on top of their hourly rate it would draw some potential employees. Chief Crisp stated that the office does have a contract in place that if someone goes to BLET and quits within a certain time frame they are required to pay the county back a portion of the costs. Sheriff Crisp stated that he is currently trying to hire deputies who are already certified. Chief Crisp stated that they are asking for a \$126,982.00 increase which includes the COLA, retirement, and 401K contributions. Director Garland stated that our county health insurance came in with a 2% increase so that will be less than the amount predicted.
5. Chief Crisp stated that on the Jail Budget they proposed a \$1.00 per hour increase to their \$12.00 - \$12.50 per hour rate and again people in food service is making more than our detention officers. Chief Crisp stated that the Jail has been dealing with a COVID outbreak with inmates and employees and everyone is stepping up to cover the shifts. Chief Crisp stated that all staff is certified, and no one is being sent to school. Chief Crisp stated that their jobs are not easy, and it is a very important job.
6. Chief Crisp stated that they did budget for a vacuum system (the same as Transit) for their vehicle clean up.
7. Chief Crisp stated that they desperately need a new jail and asks that they look at how Cherokee County built their new jail facility since the cost for a new Justice/Jail Center cost is \$21 million. Chief Crisp stated that we needed to look at something different to save taxpayers money. Sheriff Crisp stated that Cherokee County's cost was cut in half due to their new facility and invites the board to tour the facility. Sheriff Crisp stated that he would set up the visit.

8. Chief Crisp stated that they would like to trade the trucks in for SUV's and can get more trade in at this time than they are worth. The board had no issue with trade in if the cost remains the same.
9. Chief Crisp stated that Cherokee County renovated their courthouse for around \$5.7 million instead of building a new facility and asks if the board could consider this route instead of building the proposed \$22 million Justice / Jail Center. Commissioner Nelms stated that by the time the facility would be built it could run \$40 million. Director Garland asks how many beds the Cherokee County Jail had. Sheriff Crisp stated that they have a (100) bed jail, and they house federal inmates and get reimbursement. Commissioner Nelms asks how many beds are held for federal inmates. Sheriff Crisp stated that he thought (10 – 15) beds. Sheriff Crisp stated that they make the money that funds the Sheriff and Jail Departments budget. Manager Marino stated that he was meeting with Representative Karl Gillespie concerning possible funding for a new facility.
10. Sheriff Crisp stated that they try to live within their means, and they help the best that they can. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we needed to keep trying to obtain funding. Chief Crisp stated that it is not fair that the government only pays a set rate for their property in the county. Commissioner Wiggins stated that they own over 70% of our land in Graham County. Director Garland stated that we also need to lobby our representatives to get the sales tax back the way it was in the past because we lost a lot of sales tax money when they changed the formula. Director Garland stated that Cherokee County receives a large portion of sales from Graham County, and this needed to be reformed. Commissioner Nelms stated that we needed to pursue this conversation.
11. Sheriff Crisp stated that he met with the NC Retirement Commission to pass a new law concerning retirement for law enforcement. Sheriff Crisp stated that he is trying to continue to hire certified employees. Clerk Crisp stated that some of these officers are already vested in the State Retirement and when they come here, they must wait a year and a half before paying in from Graham County which is not appealing to officers transferring to our county. Director Garland stated that new hires without certification would wait the probationary period.
12. Sheriff Crisp stated that Asheville has lost (84) officers and crime will grow in these areas. Sheriff Crisp thanked the board for their time and consideration.
13. Manager Marino asks about the fees in the county and if the board wanted to entertain any changes. Manager Marino stated that the septic and wells were changed at the health department meeting but asks about the building fees specifically the violations. Manager Garland stated that the board did need to pass on the Medicare Prevailing Rates for our ambulance calls. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to abide by the Medicare Prevailing Rates for 2021-2022. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. Director Garland stated that 2021 will be the last year to do an EMS Cost Report due to Medicaid Transformation and worries how this will look. The board discussed a possible increase with the COLA for the Sheriff's Department.
14. Director Garland stated that the board would need to schedule a workshop for the American Rescue Act monies and discussed possible bonuses to the frontline workers to recognize what they have gone through. Director Garland stated that these funds are more flexible than the CARES ACT funds. Vice-Chairman Eller asks which departments because employees cooked meals and delivered to seniors, the mowers and weed eaters never missed a day and there are more employees as well. Director Garland asks that the board hold a special workshop for discussion.
15. The board discussed Medicaid Expansion and worries on how this will look.
16. Commissioner Nelms stated that the board needed to help our recreation department. Commissioner Nelms stated that one employee has resigned, and the director needed an assistant director and a staff worker. Commissioner Nelms stated that our director is getting burned out and he should not have to do all these other jobs, force him to flex his time instead of being paid overtime when other employees get overtime paid. Commissioner Nelms stated that this department is worked to death, and they have ballgames every weekend and meetings on Sundays. Commissioner Nelms stated that the public met and insisted that we help our youth, and we need to support the director. Commissioner Nelms stated that we needed to invest in our youth and our director cannot move past what we have always done if he cannot develop and grow his recreation plan. Commissioner Nelms stated that we needed to try and purchase the Green property next to our ball field and if we succeed the new recreation building could be placed at the fields. Commissioner Nelms stated that if we invest in our recreation, it

will draw people here with tournaments and this will bring revenue to our tax base and entice people to stay here. Commissioner Cody stated that we needed a track for our older American's as well and we needed different sports and activities for the young and old. The board had discussion where the position needed to be on the pay scale. Commissioner Nelms stated that our recreation director has a vision, and we need to allow him to move beyond what we have now. Commissioner Wiggins stated that he was part of the committee that founded the GCYAA, and they would raise money every year to pay for the program. Commissioner Nelms stated that it would be unreal how much money we could make on gaming and recreation does not need to be just about ball. The board discussed doing an adjustment to the pay plan now and make sure that we have a job description with each position. The board wanted to move the Recreation Worker from Grade 53 to Grade 58; move the Recreation Director Grade from 63 to Grade 67 and add an Assistant Recreation Director at Grade 63. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to move the positions to the grades as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

17. The board discussed a 3% COLA for all county employees.
18. The board discussed the Sesquicentennial and wanted the county to be proactive with this event.
19. Director Garland stated that Transit Director Colvard had ask that she be allowed to utilize her CARES ACT money giving her employees a \$2.00 per hour raise. Director Garland stated that the board needed to have a workshop to review the federal requirements on the use of this money.
20. Vice-Chairman Eller asks if the board is happy with the EDC Office. Commissioner Cody asks that they be given a report on what is going on. Commissioner Wiggins stated that our director is very knowledgeable with grants and our employees can benefit with her help.
21. Director Garland gave a review to the board of the changes for the budget. Director Garland stated that she will do a baseline salary with a 3% COLA for all departments. Director Garland stated that she will be adjusting the recreation department pay grades as discussed. Director Garland stated that the board approved the purchase of a \$15,000.00 Pole Cam for the Sheriff's Department and to allow the trade in of the vehicles as requested by Sheriff Crisp if the cost is a break even. Director Garland stated that the Mil Rate will stay at 0.65 cents, and she will restore the special appropriations to the budget that were omitted due to COVID. Director Garland stated that she will begin a fund for recreation improvements. Director Garland stated that she would make the adjustments as stated and present the budget to Clerk Crisp and a public hearing will be set for June 15, 2021, to present to the public. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve the FY 2021-2022 Budget as presented by Finance Director Becky Garland. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
22. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Connie Orr, Chair

Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman

Lynn Cody, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Dale Wiggins, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board