

## Budget Meeting – May 28, 2021

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Friday, May 28, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. for a budget meeting in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. Board present Keith Eller, Lynn Cody, Jacob Nelms and 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. Manager Marino asks that we add the NCACC Voting Delegate nomination for 2021. Commissioner Cody made the motion to approve the agenda with the stated change. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
3. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to adopt Resolution 0402021.1 Renaming West Buffalo Bridge #131 after Dr. Patricia Johnson. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to adopt the resolution as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
4. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for approval of the Budget Ordinance for NC Neighborhood Program – CV for Graham County for \$900,000.00. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the budget ordinance as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for approval of the Budget Amendment for DSS – Additional LIEAP funding. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve the budget amendment as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Finance Director Garland to proceed with the budget discussions. Director Garland stated that Franklin Shook, Director for the Nantahala Regional Library was here to speak on the funding request for the Nantahala Regional Library. Mr. Shook thanked the board for their time and stated that their library is now 80 years old. Mr. Shook gave the board a review of how the funding streams is received for their multi-county libraries and how the NC State appropriation worked. Director Shook stated that there are (84) State Aid eligible Library Systems (84) County Libraries; (13) Municipals and (12) Regionals. Director Shook stated that (41) Counties are in Regionals. Director Shook stated that they were very sad to hear of Raymond Williams passing, as he was one of their board members and was very respected. Director Shook asks that if a memorial of some type was to be held in the future to please let them know. The board had discussion on the funding streams and Director Shook explained how the funding worked from each entity. The board thanked Director Shook for his detailed reporting which helped them understand the funding requested. Director Shook thanked the board for their time and support. Director Shook stated that no one had anticipated COVID, but they developed a hybrid program to allow the use of the library and will be excited to see visitors in person. Manager Marino stated that traffic was picking up around the library and he plans to visit and introduce himself to the staff.
7. Director Garland stated that our insurance came in with a 2% increase which is good news, and she presented the board with notebooks which show details of the budget. Director Garland stated that she has been looking at the pay plan and she gave two options for a cost-of-living adjustment, one at 3% and one at 5%. Director Garland stated that she is recommending a budget request of \$18,470,537.00. Director Garland stated that she did need guidance on the America Rescue Act Funds and asks that the board hold a special workshop to discuss this funding.
8. Manager Marino stated that he met with Representative Karl Gillespie, and he is working to find money to help with the Justice/Jail Center. The board discussed court fines and asked that Manager Marino get with Attorney Coward to see if some of those funds could be given to the County due to our being mandated to build a new Justice Center. Commissioner Cody commended Commissioner Wiggins for the speech he gave during the meeting held at the school with our State Representatives. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that he asked if anyone had not been affected by drugs in their immediate family and no one raised their hand. The board all agreed that until drug dealers are caught and prosecuted nothing will change and we need to hold the Attorney General's Office accountable for non-protection of our citizens. The board all agreed that the average number of crimes are being committed in the Town and it would be good to have a police department once again. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that people are not afraid of the law, court, or anything else.

9. Director Garland asks the board how they wanted to proceed. Director Garland stated that with a COLA the budget request will be \$18,626,788.00 and without the COLA it will be \$18,151,974.00. Commissioner Nelms stated that he did not want to go through every department and just give the board specific areas that need attention. Director Garland went through the departments and gave details on why specific budgets had increases. The board discussed the Sheriff and Jail budget with the increases in pay and compared our salaries with Cherokee County. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that the insurance benefits for spouse and family is what hurts Graham County because ours is so high. The board discussed the salary pay plan and agreed that adjustments needed to be made.
10. Commissioner Cody stated that he proposed a 3% COLA and wanted to add back the Special Appropriations that we funded prior to COVID. Manager Marino asks if the board wanted to proceed with the pool repairs and Vice-Chairman Eller stated that we needed to do the repairs in the spring. Director Garland stated that we can apply for PARTF Funds and ask Dogwood Trust for assistance as well.
11. Commissioner Wiggins stated that he heard that Angel Hospital in Franklin may be converted into a treatment facility which would be good news for our far western counties.
12. Commissioner Nelms stated that he would like to purchase the land beside our recreation facility at 191 P&J Road and asks that we reach out to the Green family to see if we have an option to purchase the property.
13. Vice-Chairman Eller asked if anyone had been receiving raises. Director Garland stated that some raises were given when an employee became certified or moved up in a position.
14. Commissioner Nelms stated that he wanted to add an employee to Recreation and increase the pay for the director as well. Commissioner Nelms stated that we have heard the public state that we need things for our youth in this town and if our director must stripe fields and do flowerbeds, we will never get a Recreation Plan nor will we move past what we have now. Commissioner Nelms stated that one of the recreation employees is leaving due to the low pay and we need commitment to our recreation program.
15. The board discussed our EMS and the need for paramedics. Clerk Crisp stated that she had three applications in her office for EMS one of which is going to school to become a paramedic. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that we have had this discussion on getting resources out to entice people to want to work as a EMT or Paramedic then COVID hit, and everything stopped. Commissioner Cody stated that now you must get an associate degree and people are not interested in doing that. Director Garland stated that we may need to reach out to Western Carolina University to see if they would be interested in dual enrollment where the seniors in high school could have the associates degree when they graduate high school. Commissioner Wiggins stated that we needed to formulate a committee with school personnel, EMS personnel, Commissioners and members of the public and work to find a solution. The board agreed.
16. The board discussed the Sweetwater Dumpster Site. The board discussed the issues related to this site.
  - a. Rent is paid for this site only.
  - b. This site is being used for high drug activity; needles and drug paraphernalia cover the ground, and our staff is required to clean the site.
  - c. Multiple wrecks have happened due to the location of the site.
  - d. This site is seeing many materials not allowed such as debris, construction and demolition materials, oil (not in containers), etc.Commissioner Nelms made the motion to close the Sweetwater Dumpster Site for safety hazards and due to the expense of rent and clean-up. Vice-Chairman Eller seconded this motion. Vote called. Commissioner Eller, Nelms and Cody voted yes. Commissioner Wiggins voted no. Motion carried three to one. The board wanted it noted that they regret that Chair Connie Orr was not in attendance for this discussion, but the simple fact is that this site is costing the county more than just money and the safety of our citizens and staff is more important.
17. The board discussed fees in various departments. The board agreed that the building permits are being violated more than the other fees and felt that anyone violating the building permit fees will be charged a 25% penalty in addition to the cost of the permit. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to access a 25% penalty in addition to the cost of the permit to all violations regarding building permits. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
18. The board discussed extending the hours of operation at the Transfer Station to allow working people a chance to bring their items after they get off work.

19. The board agreed to give the appropriation to the library as requested by Director Shook which will be \$84,490.00.
20. The board discussed a replacement for Raymond Williams on the Library Board. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to appoint Manager Jason Marino to the Library Board. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
21. The board agreed to give the school \$1 million noting that the county gave over \$300,000.00 for new stadium lights.
22. The board discussed the contract with Sansoucy Associates on the revaluation for our dams. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve the Sansoucy Associates contract for the revaluation of our dams. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
23. Commissioner Cody made the motion to appoint Connie Orr as the NCACC Voting Delegate and the Alternate Voting Delegate Dale Wiggins. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
24. Commissioner Cody made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

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Connie Orr, Chair

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Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman

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Lynn Cody, Member

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Jacob Nelms, Member

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Dale Wiggins, Member

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board