

## Regular Meeting – February 16, 2021

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 5:30 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. Chair Orr called the meeting to order.
2. Chair Orr asks Commissioner Nelms to give the Invocation.
3. Chair Orr asks for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
4. Chair Orr asks for approval of the minutes for the Special Meeting January 15<sup>th</sup> and the Workshop and Regular Meetings January 19<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chair Orr asks Project Manager Jason Marino to give an update to the board. PM Marino stated that he did receive some new information on the negotiations with Aldridge Brothers on the recreation building.
6. PM Marino stated that he spoke with Kevin White regarding the school project today and everything is a go with the Department of Instruction and the updated cost with the approval by the Board of Commissioners and the project is set to start beginning with a metal building that will be placed beside the bus garage which will hold all the equipment during construction and hopes to have this under contract by the first of spring.
7. PM Marino stated that the Master Plan Study is complete, and the board would need to proceed to the next step in requests of proposals for the new Justice/Jail Center. PM Marino stated that the printout will not change on the interior with the real issue being the façade so once the requests have been approved the board would decide on the exterior of the building. PM Marino stated that he would need board approval to move forward.
8. PM Marino stated that the HVAC at the DHHS building is going well and they are about 40% complete with four zones being completed which leaves six or seven but are tracking on schedule. PM Marino stated that the board will need to discuss some of the findings for future repairs and redoing the zones will improve the efficiency and help the units. PM Marino stated that they did find an issue with insulation, so this is a plus for this facility to locate and correct some of the issues as they continue with this project.
9. PM Marino stated that he had provided Aldridge Brothers with ways to negotiate the price down of the original cost of \$341,442.00 but is sorry to say that the new cost went up \$1400.00 with the inclusion of the eighteen items provided to reduce the costs. PM Marino stated that he spent one hour on the phone with Aldridge Brothers and they are holding firm due to the rising cost of materials and with a metal building there is very little cost savings. PM Marino stated that he had also spoken with Elliott Brothers on price increases and learned that his supplies have increased by 7% on the mechanical side. PM Marino stated that he hopes that the pricing will go down, but we have few options to change anything else in the recreation building. PM Marino stated that we need this facility, and he was disappointed with the increase instead of seeing a decrease. Commissioner Eller stated that it will be the same for the Election Board renovations. PM Marino stated that he has not moved forward on the Election Board and Cemetery projects because of the increased costs and he wanted to see where we were in numbers with this project. PM Marino stated that the board needed to discuss the options of awarding the project, waiting to see if the materials price changes or contract internally to reduce some of those percentage costs that a contractor charge. PM Marino stated that we needed to move to the next phase. PM Marino stated that with the board's approval he could reach out to the NEP Contractors and see where those quotes come in at with us contracting internally. Commissioner Wiggins asks if the building itself was priced out. PM Marino stated that he did and at the time it was \$25K for a 30x50 and another \$19K for the building which will include the metal, roof and some insulation installed so this may be an option that the board would like to discuss. Commissioner Wiggins asks how much concrete is per yard. PM Marino stated that it is running \$150.00 to \$180.00 yard and he further stated that some pumping may be needed at the sight but not much. PM Marino stated that the property has no issues concerning the concrete pad. PM Marino stated that when he first quoted the buildings the cost was \$110.00 per square feet and now it is up to \$181.00 per square feet and keeps going up. PM Marino stated that most contractors have a hold on pricing for (15) days because the market is

so volatile. Commissioner Wiggins stated that the price quoted is too high for a metal building in his opinion. Chair Orr asks if extensive consideration has been given to managing the projects internally. PM Marino stated that this is the next option, but he will finish in good faith with Aldridge Brothers and let them know the County's intent due to prices. The board all agreed that this needed to be handled internally due to the high costs that were coming in.

Commissioner Wiggins stated that he would talk with PM Marino on some ideas later.

10. Chair Orr asks 911 Director Misty Hembree to speak. Director Hembree stated that she had previously asked the board to consider adding positions to her department on the pay plan classifications for telecommunicators. Director Hembree stated that all have the same pay grade, and she would like to add a Telecommunicator II and III to be classified at Grade 59 and Grade 60. Director Hembree stated that this will allow the Telecommunicators to increase their pay with proper certification which she feels will increase the likelihood of longevity. Manager Garland stated that we did discuss this in budget prior to COVID and everything was tabled at that time, but this would enable succession planning with the ability to progress in their fields. Manager Garland stated that with progression the employees receive more training, and we receive more quality assurance and certification increases. Manager Garland stated that when we lost a former employee we did not backfill, and we need someone who can teach quality assurance as a DCI Coordinator. Manager Garland stated that she did an analysis and if we moved an employee from Grade 57 to Grade 59 the increase would be around \$3200.00 per year with wages and benefits and keep in mind that these are key roles and the amount you lose on turnovers is twice this amount. Chair Orr stated that succession planning is very important, and she supports that and employee advancement toward a career with Graham County. Commissioner Cody stated that he wanted to speak with Director Hembree on some of the verbiage used in the job descriptions. Director Hembree stated that she would take all the help she can get. Commissioner Cody stated that he totally supports adding the grades. Chair Orr asks for a motion to add Telecommunicator II and Telecommunicator III to our pay plan. Commissioner Cody made the motion to add the grades as presented. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
11. Chair Orr asks for the finance and manager's report. Manager Garland stated that we ended the month with \$11,151,087.50 cash balance which is the highest so far and we are \$643,260.25 ahead from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that we began this solid planning in 2011 when we had \$7.2M in the bank and now we are at \$11.2M and this is a testament of good solid planning. Manager Garland stated that we have \$2.2M in our capital projects account and she is getting ready to shift more into that account this week. Manager Garland stated that the School Capital Project account now has a total of \$114,000.00.
12. Manager Garland stated that our current year tax collection for real property was \$2,376,855.07 our prior year \$28,215.71 for a total of \$2,405,070.78. Manager Garland stated that our DMV tax collection for the month was \$47,267.80. Manager Garland stated that year to date real property tax collections is \$6,711,911.15 and our DMV is \$345,581.36 which puts us ahead \$123,000.00 on VTS and \$36,000.00 on DMV from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that our tax rate is 91.75% and thanked the taxpayers for being so diligent in paying their taxes.
13. Manager Garland stated that the revenues for the month was \$3,062,364.11 and our expenditures was \$1,540,323.51 for a surplus of \$1,522,040.60. Manager Garland stated that year to date surplus is \$3,189,166.91 which is ahead from this time last year of \$2,433,620.08 which does reflect the CARES ACT monies that we have received.
14. Manager Garland stated that our sales tax for the month is \$205,320.40 which is still increasing with \$20,000.00 ahead from this time last year. Manager Garland stated that she will be shifting \$39,000.00 to the School Capital Fund.
15. Manager Garland stated that our tax office is still working on back taxes and foreclosures and have collected \$481,000.00 in back taxes.
16. Manager Garland stated that our budget should be at 42% and we are holding at 44% and congratulated the department heads for the great job and hard work in keeping within their budgets. Manager Garland stated that as a new county manager comes in, she will be working with them to show them how the department heads have pulled their budgets in.
17. Manager Garland stated that she did have two budget amendments for the board's approval.
  - a. Budget Amendment #16 – amend to increase for COVID expenses to be reimbursed by NCDOT for Transit in the amount of \$6,200.00.
  - b. Budget Amendment #17 – amend to recognize additional timber receipts from the 2017 sequestration in the amount of \$10,614.00 which will be given to the schools and the fire departments.

Chair Orr asks for a motion to approve Budget Amendments #16 and #17. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the budget amendments as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

18. Manager Garland stated that we received word on Friday that the Senior Center Vehicles were approved by the State and these vehicles will serve our Senior Center and their clients for many years to come. Manager Garland stated that they used \$8,812.60 from a Blue Cross Blue Shield Grant; a \$9,984.00 Meals on Wheels Grant and \$27,247.47 from CARES funding which allowed us to purchase two vehicles.
19. Manager Garland stated that the federal government extended the expenditures deadline until December 30, 2021 and we have around \$14,000.00 left so if there are any more projects that the board would like for her to gain approval on please let her know.
20. Manager Garland stated that the school radios are in the process of installation and the vendor outfitted the system with the ability to add a channel dedicated to the school system which requires an addition repeater. Manager Garland stated that the additional channel would allow them to communicate if there is an emergency with a bus. Manager Garland stated that we are in the process of working with the United States Forest Service Office (USFS) and if the Cherokee Tribal Transit is not using their repeater, we would not overstress our tower. Manager Garland stated that EM Director Larry Hembree sent a Memorandum of Understanding to the schools because according to his records, we can charge entities a one time \$5,000.00 fee to enter our building and \$50.00 per month toward road maintenance. Manager Garland stated that the USFS waives the tower rent to governmental entities and Robert Vance had stated that this would be waived for the schools if we can arrange for the equipment to be hung on the tower. Manager Garland stated that we have been approached by the schools about a possibility of waiving the fees to enter the buildings. Manager Garland stated that she is not familiar with these fees so she will have to locate an agreement that has been used in the past. Manager Garland asks the board's position regarding the cost for the schools. The board asks that Manager Garland keep researching and update the board later.
21. Manager Garland stated that the county appropriated an additional \$30,000.00 for food distribution that we took out of the general fund budget and this freed up the above monies and has allowed us to purchase a back up generator for the vaccine freezers. Manager Garland stated that the \$30,000.00 allocations have been made and sent to the respective food banks. Manager Garland stated that the breakdown is as follows:
  - a. Graham Fellowship Food Distribution \$7,500.00
  - b. Grace Extended Ministries \$5,000.00
  - c. Panther Creek Church \$5,000.00
  - d. Grace Place \$12,500.00
22. Manager Garland stated that FEMA is reimbursing some of the costs of vaccinations, including additional personnel to administer and we can get the cost back on the contract personnel the Health Department hired to help with the effort.
23. Manager Garland stated that EMS has been communicating with Congressman Cawthorne's office on applying for funds to purchase GPS approach equipment for our LZ's. Manager Garland stated that Brian Stevens is heading up the project and estimates the cost to be around \$30,000.00. Manager Garland stated that this is a grant that would be coming via the Congressman's office and would be a great asset for our county EMS services.
24. Manager Garland stated that procurement for a grant administrator and a professional engineer for the CDBG-CV program and the flood on Snowbird Creek, respectively, is underway. Manager Garland stated that the deadline for submission of proposals is March 5<sup>th</sup> and we have received two engineering firms and one grant administration firm asking for additional information. Manager Garland stated that she would need three proposals to keep from having to reach out again.
25. Manager Garland stated that the Environmental Review Board has been advertised and is on file for the CDBG Housing Grant and this has been submitted to NC Commerce for final review and approval. Manager Garland stated that following approval, we will be able to begin the process of doing the site surveys with the approved owners to begin scoping out the work.
26. Manager Garland stated that we received a letter from the National Flood Insurance Program site visit from 2017 which was finalized with no findings.
27. Manager Garland stated that she received a letter requesting participation in the Beaver Management Program and asks if the board is interested in participation. The board declined.
28. Manager Garland stated that the NC A&T University that funds our Extension Office is moving toward a higher level of cost share between counties and our cooperative extension. Manager Garland stated that we currently fund at 35% and the new change will split the cost 50/50. Manager Garland stated that the increase would be over the next two years up to 42% then to 50%. Manager Garland stated that the board needed to have this discussion during the budget process. Manager Garland stated that our share is currently at \$4395.00 per quarter and would

increase to \$5275.00 per quarter. Manager Garland stated that we have been advised not to choose a “lock in” option because this would automatically obligate the County for raises or changes in match percentages on retirement. Manager Garland asks that a decision be held until the new manager is hired so that he/she may have part in the budget process. The board agreed to table this request.

29. Manager Garland stated that Vaya Health has presented their quarterly financial report and COVID related funding did improve their spendable cash into a positive position. Chair Orr stated that they have been able to add services and not one time were any services lost and she is very thankful to Vaya for the work that they have done during this pandemic. Manager Garland stated that Medicaid Transformation is coming, and she will be listening to all information concerning Medicaid in North Carolina.
30. Manager Garland stated that the GREAT Grant Awards did award \$344,447.00 to Graham County to expand broadband.
31. Chair Orr asks for public comment. No public comment.
32. Chair Orr asks for approval of the Releases. Clerk Crisp stated that this is personal property for Account #150380002 which is an individual that is deceased. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the releases as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
33. Chair Orr stated that the board received notice that our Register of Deeds Carolyn Stewart is retiring March 1<sup>st</sup> and the Republican Executive Committee has recommended Kimberly D. LeQuire to fill the upcoming vacancy on March 1, 2021. Commissioner Eller made the motion to accept the recommendation in appointing Kimberly D. LeQuire as the Register of Deeds for Graham County effective March 1, 2021. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
34. Chair Orr stated that we receive an appropriation for our Veteran Office in the amount of \$2000.00 and the County matches the appropriation with \$2000.00. Chair Orr stated that she would like to designate these funds for the purchase of two new flags per year to be installed at our Veteran Park on Main Street. Chair Orr has requested that the flag always remain up and Commander Harold Phillips will take care of the lowering of the flag when needed. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to appropriate the funds needed for the purchase of two new flags per year for the Veteran Park. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
35. Chair Orr asks for a motion to approve the poll for the two vehicles purchased for the Senior Center. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the poll as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
36. Chair Orr asks for discussion on the surplus vehicles. The board discussed an auction or sealed bids and they agreed to take sealed bids. Clerk Crisp stated that we have two Pathfinders for surplus from Transit and we will have two Escapes from Senior Center plus a van that was previously assigned to Admin that is not needed. Commissioner Eller stated that he will have a truck that will need to be sold as well. The board agreed to put the vehicles up for bid at the same time.
37. Chair Orr asks for a motion to adopt the Temporary COVID-19 Sick Leave Policy. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the policy as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
38. Chair Orr stated that Senator Kevin Corbin and Representative Karl Gillespie will submit our Occupancy Tax Resolution for approval and asks if the board wishes to resubmit the resolution that increases the Occupancy Tax for Graham County. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to resubmit the Resolution. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
39. Chair Orr stated that Four Square has been doing several repairs to homes in Graham County and she wanted to publicly thank the board members from Graham County Ramona Solesbee, Marshall McClung, Dale Wiggins, and herself for the work that is being done at the Four-Square Office. Chair Orr stated that \$3332,000.00 has been spent in Graham County. Commissioner Wiggins stated that in the past prior to his and Chair Orr’s membership to the board monies was sent back to the State that was not utilized and he is happy to say that the agency will fully utilize all monies that are received. Commissioner Wiggins stated that you never send monies back to the State because the next time the appropriation will be much less if any.
40. Chair Orr stated that she was notified that Graham County will be receiving much needed broadband connectivity with Charter Cable supplying (2313) slots, and Space Age Technology supplying (20) slots for our county. Commissioner Wiggins stated that this will give Graham County with the GREAT Grant enough to cover almost (4000) households. Manager Garland stated that they will be able to utilize our Duke Energy power poles which will be a quicker installation period.
41. Chair Orr stated that we have a Special Meeting on Friday, February 19<sup>th</sup> to discuss contracts with medical providers.

42. Chair Orr stated that we will have a Special Meeting on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup> for an Ethics Webinar and to discuss lights for our school ballfields.
43. Chair Orr asks for new or old business. Commissioner Eller asks if the board is ready to vote on the Town of Lake Santeetlah Cooperation Agreement. Commissioner Wiggins stated that since it is contractual, he would like to discuss in closed. The board agreed.
44. Commissioner Cody stated that he would like to purchase Carolyn Stewart, Register of Deeds a plaque for her 29+ years' service with the county. The board all agreed.
45. Chair Orr asks for 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 Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
46. Chair Orr asks for a motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Cody made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
47. Chair Orr asks for a motion to direct Attorney Billy Clark to draw up the deed with HG Holdings regarding the Stanley Properties. Commissioner Eller made the motion as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
48. Chair Orr asks for a motion to accept or not accept the Town of Lake Santeetlah Cooperation Agreement. Commissioner Eller made the motion to not accept the agreement. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. Commissioner Nelms was excused from the vote due to a conflict of interest.
49. Chair Orr asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Wiggins 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