

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, December 17, 2024, 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. Also, present Interim County Manager/Clerk to the Board Kim Crisp; Finance Director Stacy Carpenter and Project Manager Jason Marino.

1. Chair Smith called the meeting to order.
2. Chair Smith asks Commissioner Cody to give the Invocation.
3. Chair Smith asks Commissioner Orr to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chair Smith asks for changes to the agenda. Clerk Crisp stated that Tracy Jones was unable to attend the meeting due to sickness and asks that Lake Silver, Western Representative for Congressman Edward's office be allowed to speak during this time. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the agenda with the stated changes. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chair Smith asks for approval of the minutes for the November 19th Workshop and Regular Meeting and the December 2nd Organizational Meeting. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chair Smith asks Lake Silver to speak. Mr. Silver thanked the board for their time and gave congratulations to Chair Smith for winning the election. Mr. Silver stated that he would give a brief update to the citizens regarding what Congressman Edwards has been doing. Mr. Silver stated that they have been doing a lot of case work for our citizens who need help on the federal level with VA Claims, SS Benefits, Travel Passports, and other items. Mr. Silver stated that the Congressman was in DC and will be there every week. Mr. Silver stated that Congressman Edwards sits on the Budget and Appropriations Committee which is huge for our western district. Mr. Silver stated that this is the second term for the Congressman, and they will continue their monthly visits to the county and invited every citizen to come and speak with them. Mr. Silver stated that the Congressman has been busy with Hurricane Helene crisis and Graham County was blessed by God. Mr. Silver stated that the Congressman was able to assist in securing over fifty billion for the restoration and it has been very hard for these communities. Mr. Silver stated that his house was devastated in McDowell County and his is one of many. Mr. Silver stated that the Congressman will continue to fight for support to fill the many needs and if anyone needs assistance due to Helene to reach out to him. Mr. Silver stated that Graham, Clay and Cherokee Counties stepped up with supplies, assistance and resources and they are very grateful for the many donations that were made. Mr. Silver stated that he will be happy to work with the boards in the upcoming years. Chair Smith thanked Mr. Silver. Commissioner Orr thanked Mr. Silver and noted that he has been very visible and helpful to our Veterans and to our disabled community.
7. Chair Smith asks Brittany Holder to speak. Ms. Holder stated that she was here to speak about our animal control and had been speaking with Meggan Smith regarding Valley River. Ms. Holder stated that they hoped that the details for the budget can be worked out and she understands the county has been speaking with Bryson City regarding their new facility. Ms. Holder stated that Valley River assured her that they would not stop access from Graham County immediately but if the county does not agree to the conditions, they will no longer take animals from the county. Ms. Holder stated that this would devastate the county. Ms. Holder stated that people are dropping off animals in her driveway and she cannot take all the animals. Ms. Holder stated that the county has been going back and forth with Valley River since July and now she is in a panic over what will be done with our animals once they stop taking them. Ms. Holder stated that we need a full-time animal control officer to make sure that all animals have their rabies shots and are taken care of. Ms. Holder stated that Harold Millsaps is doing a great job, but he has no authority and there is no one that will remove abused or neglected animals. Ms. Holder stated that the calls are constant regarding vicious animals trying to bite people and they have been told by the Sheriff's Office to shoot the dogs. Ms. Holder stated that the citizens need to have their pets neutered and they need clean water and food. Ms. Holder stated that the animals in the Town are causing chaos, and they are getting more aggressive because they are hungry. Ms. Holder stated that we need some type of lease law with fines of \$20.00 per incident. Ms. Holder stated that the Town has had issues with LEO the barking dog that has been ongoing and even going to court. Ms. Holder stated that these dogs are being aggressive to children, and she encourages the county to form a partnership with Valley River so that our animals are taken care of. Ms. Holder stated that she has a petition with (336) signatures, showing this is not just about her but we have a problem. Ms. Holder stated that the county needed to work it out with Valley River because they take 16-20% of their animals from Graham County. Ms. Holder stated that she is limited on what she can do, and they need to rehome these animals and get them off the streets.

8. Chair Smith stated that she was new to this board, and she has been doing a lot of research, and we do need a neutral contract but of course the concerns are the money. Chair Smith stated that we have not had a new contract since 2019 and that is the contract the board went back to for this fiscal year. Chair Smith stated that last year they gave \$51,356.00 with no contract and now they are wanting \$221,000.00. Chair Smith stated that we give \$1.3 million to our school so that amount of money would take budget discussion. Chair Smith asks that they get the breakdown of the expenses with the salaries to show the taxpayers exactly what we are paying for. Chair Smith stated that she wanted to transparent as possible, but some things take a long time in finding the solution. Chair Smith asks that the board form a committee with one commissioner board member and bring ideas and recommendations to the board. Chair Smith stated that our tax base cannot be compared to Cherokee or Clay Counties due to the excessive acreage owned by the forest service so she hopes that people will be patient and see where this board is coming from. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to form a committee for our animal control issues within our county that will bring recommendations to the board of commissioners. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
9. Chair Smith challenged the people to help form this committee and work with the board and Valley River to come to an agreement that will work for everyone.
10. Chair Smith asks Bethany Leonard to give the Opioid Settlement Update. Ms. Leonard stated that she was here to present the update for the Opioid Settlement and the Community Linkage to Care and will let the board know of the progress that has been made. Ms. Leonard stated that she began this project in 2021, and they went through creating and implementing a needs assessment for the people in our county who uses drugs or has used drugs in the past. Ms. Leonard stated that in 2022 they began the strategic plan workgroup planning process and last year began implementation. Ms. Leonard stated that they reconnected in 2024 and began the implementation of the plan for FY 2024-2025 our current spending authorization is valid through June 30, 2025. Ms. Leonard stated that they do have one vacancy in the Community Linkage to Care and hope to rehire for this position as soon as possible. Ms. Leonard stated that she currently does the Community Linkage to Care and Emergency Preparedness and does need the extra help. Ms. Leonard discussed the funding appropriations to the various organizations and will continue with the checks and balances as the agreement specifications. Ms. Leonard gave an update on programs funded by the spending authorization resolution:
 - Community Linkage to Care (CLC) and Post-Overdose Response Team (PORT) – these programs continue to serve clients. There is currently an open position for a CLC Navigator/PORT Team member. I'm working with Donna Stephens to identify a timeline for rehire for this position. Both CLC and PORT are funded by a combination of Opioid Settlement funds and a grant from Dogwood Health Trust.
 - Cheoah Recovery Community Center- working on a subrecipient agreement with Five Point Center so they can invoice for their awarded amount.
 - HIGHTS- working on a subrecipient agreement with them so they can invoice for their awarded amount.
 - Prime for Life substance use classes by Sunny Jenkins- no participants yet, but met with Tiffany Phillips at DSS and reminded her about this offering and she said she would discuss it with the rest of the CPS team as an option for DSS involved parents.
 - Transportation assistance for social work/mental health interns with Graham County Schools- the schools do not currently have any interns but the funding is still there if they were to get an intern.
 - Harm reduction services by Western North Carolina AIDS Project (WNCAP)- they were awarded \$20,000 for fiscal year 23-24. They are due another \$25,000 for fiscal year 24-25. There is \$5,000 remaining in the current spending authorization resolution. Another spending authorization resolution is needed to correct the amount and make sure they get the \$25,000 they are due.
- Three reports were submitted to CORE-NC in advance of their due dates regarding the Opioid Settlement funds:
 - Financial Report for fiscal year 23-24
 - Annual Impact Survey for fiscal year 23-24
 - Report on the amendment to the spending authorization resolution from August 20, 2024.
 - Currently have been working with consultant to the Southwest Commission, Tonya Snider, throughout this process.

- Currently stepped into a new/additional role as Opioid Settlement Coordinator where I'll be working more directly with the County in all things Opioid Settlement funds.
 - Will continue to work ½ time as the CLC lead and PORT manager
 - And work ½ time as the Opioid Settlement Coordinator. The Opioid Settlement funds will become its own department, and she will be department head over that.
 - Ms. Leonard stated that she did receive assistance from Tonya Snider with Southwestern Commission and she will assist moving forward as needed. Ms. Leonard stated that she looks forward to her new role as Opioid Settlement Coordinator and will keep the board informed of all updates. Ms. Leonard stated that she will continue to apply for grants to ensure that the program continues forward as the funding is reduced per the Opioid Settlement Agreement and stated that the program is working, and they are making a difference. Ms. Leonard stated currently they have (20) homeless and no shelter in the county at this time. Ms. Leonard stated that she has around (250) clients with most being able to find a place to stay. Ms. Leonard gave thanks to the Five Point Center for their continued support and work supplying food boxes, programs and hot meals. Ms. Leonard stated that Reigniting Hope is supplying meals and other resources. Commissioner Orr made the motion to accept the updates and reporting as presented by Bethany Leonard. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
11. Chair Smith asks Jason Marino for the Project Managers Report. PM Marino stated that the Justice Center is in negotiations with the school on the acquisition of property.
 12. PM Marino stated that the Senior Center CDBG is 99% complete and invites the board to go and see the renovation and addition of walk in refrigeration/freezer along with a dry storage facility.
 13. PM Marino stated that our two CDBG Homes have been completed, and they are finalizing all the documents.
 14. PM Marino stated that the stadium bleacher project is on hold at this time.
 15. PM Marino stated that the Jail Abatement had to be rebid, and the quotes came in higher than expected. PM Marino stated that the board can refuse all bids, and he can finish the abatement in house.
 16. PM Marino stated that they are currently taking bids for two homes under the Neighborhood Revitalization Funding, and they are value engineering these projects so both homes can be done under budget. PM Marino stated that he would need approval to move forward with this funding. Commissioner Orr made the motion to proceed. Commissioner Smith seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
 17. PM Marino stated that the RDA-Azalea Hills project is going well, and they will be building a home with the school to sell to low to moderate income families.
 18. Chair Smith asks for the Finance Reporting. Director Carpenter stated that she did have one amendment for the board to approve. Budget Amendment #4 and discussed the appropriation and revenue changes. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
 19. Director Carpenter stated that currently we needed to update our financial institutions signature cards, and we currently have (24) UCBI accounts; (2) First Citizens accounts and currently the Finance Officer is the only authorized user for the NCCMT Account unless the board wanted to have a member added. The board gave a directive to add Meggan Smith to the NCCMT account.
 20. Director Carpenter stated that the school had requested use of the sales tax allocation for City Lock \$2,711.40; Encore Technology \$21,881.64 for firewall upgrades and \$1,930.28 for cameras for buses with Carolina Thomas. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the expenditures. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
 21. Director Carpenter gave the board a guideline of the Local Government Commissioner UAL Visit schedule.
 22. Director Carpenter gave the board copies of the income statement and expenditure statements showing which departments are over the recommended percentage on their budget at this time.
 23. Director Carpenter stated that our current year tax collection is \$1,526,009.31 with a year to date of \$3,627,581.89. Director Carpenter stated that our prior years collection is \$6,043.35 with a year-to-date total of \$85,613.55.
 24. Director Carpenter stated that our sales tax collection was \$250,882.97 with our year to date \$1,709,749.25. Director Carpenter stated that our sales tax set aside for schools November collection is \$50,753.36 with a year to date of \$280,141.33. Director Carpenter stated that our ¼ cent set aside for November is \$27,249.30 with a year-to-date total of \$1,519,098.82.
 25. Director Carpenter stated that our DMV collection for November is \$48,886.95 with a year to date of \$291,812.97.
 26. Chair Smith asks for public comment. Chair Smith asks Tabitha Myler to speak. Ms. Myler stated that she would like to see the financials for the county, there are some concerns and rumors going around that the county is not doing well financially, and she questions why

when Becky Garland left the county had \$22 million in the bank. Ms. Myler stated that the books seem to be \$5 million below that and she wanted to see where this money had gone. Ms. Myler stated that the federal government spends money on crazy projects and the county is supposed to be good stewards of the money and not waste. Ms. Myler stated that any extra money should go back to the people and do adjustments for living wage salaries, so she wanted to know why. Ms. Myler stated that they need to see the financial statements and see what happens with the county money. Ms. Myler stated that she will be back next month, and she wanted these things addressed by the board.

27. Chair Smith asks Alice Lombard to speak. Ms. Lombard stated that six years ago she and Robin Mason had a non-profit with the Graham County Animal Advocates and she recognizes that something needs to be done. Ms. Lombard stated that Judy Covert worked non-stop to have a good relationship with Valley River and she herself volunteers there. Ms. Lombard stated that something needed to be done because they handed this over to the board years ago and they were proud of where the county was at that time. Ms. Lombard discussed the organization prior to today and the work that they did and stated that this is not right for the county not to do anything and possibly be banned from Valley River. Ms. Lombard stated that Valley River has helped all the counties with their animals and now we are least on the totem pole and asks that Lake Silver help us on a state level with funding. Ms. Lombard stated that the county dropped the ball, and they needed to pick it up and move forward.
28. Chair Smith asks Machel Crisp to speak. Ms. Crisp stated that she has asked for the bank reconciliation's and has yet to receive them and the rumors keep flying about the county's finances. Clerk Crisp read emails that had been sent to Ms. Crisp regarding her request that had not been answered. Finance Director Carpenter asks permission to address this question. The board all agreed. Director Carpenter stated that when she first started, she lost the entire finance staff as well as the payroll person and she had no experience in either, so she has had a learning process, and she has had a lot to stuff to cleanup as well as trying to get the audits up to date. Director Carpenter stated that she is not a certified officer, and her lack of experience has been a challenge but the Local Government Commission, the NCACC and two private hired CPAs are helping her get the financial insight for local government. Ms. Carpenter stated that the one audit was submitted in December, and she is working on the other remaining audit for submission by March. Ms. Carpenter stated that a new plan is being put in place, and she has been training for weeks on processes and making sure that everything is accounted for because they have found that restricted funds had been placed in the unrestricted balances for some time. Ms. Carpenter stated that there have been no misappropriations of fund, she does have unrestricted funds, and she did supply the financials on the back table when she came into the meeting. Ms. Carpenter stated that she can guarantee that the counties money has not be squandered and rumors are what they are, just rumors but if you want exact details please come to her office and ask for them. Director Carpenter stated that once the audits are complete, any taxpayer will be able to come into her office and she will be able to show them the balances of all monies received and spent.
29. Chair Smith asks for further public comment. Brittany Holder stated that we do have a major problem with the animals in our county and would like to see some type of punishment for the owners that let their dogs starve to death and she stated that animals come last in some people's eyes, but they need to help these animals. Commissioner Nelms stated that our ordinance goes by the statutes for dangerous dogs and they intend to work on the ordinance. Ms. Holder stated that no one will enforce the ordinance. Chair Smith stated that her focus is to humans first and, but they will work on the animal ordinances but feels that the best thing to do at this time is to form a committee to work with Valley River, the County and move forward. Everyone agreed to this suggestion.
30. Chair Smith stated that they would now go to the discussion items. Chair Smith asks for approval of the Releases \$1373.24 and the Discoveries \$635.84. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
31. Chair Smith asks for a motion to award the EDC Grant to Chubby Chicks for \$3500.00. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
32. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the Holiday Closing for Christmas and New Years. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
33. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the poll from 11/20 for the pass-through grant on radios for \$33,323.56. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
34. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the poll from 12/16 for the email security of \$5347.08. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
35. Chair Smith asks for a motion to appoint Pam Adams to the Four-Square Board. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

36. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the Health Operating Procedure Policy. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
37. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the November 12, 2024, Health Board Minutes. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
38. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the letter for Four Square regarding NCDEQ Reimbursement. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
39. Chair Smith asks for a motion to approve the letter to NCDMV requesting the DMV come back to Graham County. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve. Commissioner Williams seconded the motion. Vote unanimous.
40. Chair Smith asks for a motion to release EMS Bill 224610 due to deceased patient with no estate in the amount of \$516.00. Commissioner Williams made a motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
41. Chair Smith asks if a commissioner would like to serve on the America's 250th Anniversary for Graham County. Commissioner Orr made the motion to appoint Lynn Cody to this committee. Commissioner Nelms seconded the motion. Vote unanimous.
42. Chair Smith 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 Williams made the motion to go into closed session. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
43. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
44. Chair Smith asks for a motion to allow payment of 59 hours of comp time to Andy Blevins. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the request. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
45. Chair Smith asks for a motion to extend FMLA for Donna Hill. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
46. Chair Smith asks for further business. Commissioner Orr wanted all phone lines to have a recorded message that states that the office is closed during the Christmas Holiday. All board agreed.
47. Commissioner Orr made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Meggan Smith, Chair, Graham County Commissioner

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Natasha Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board