

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board was present. Also present, Manager Brady Cody, Clerk Kim Crisp and Project Manager Jason Marino.

1. Chair Smith called the workshop session to order.
2. Chair Smith asks Brittney Holder, with Graham County Animal Refuge, to speak.
3. Ms. Holder thanked the board for their time and gave the board photos to review while she was speaking. Ms. Holder stated that she has a 501C3 foster based rescue in Graham County because animal welfare is not a priority in this county. Ms. Holder stated that she has been rescuing animals since she could drive and has a great love for all animals. Ms. Holder stated that she has drifted away from people for various reasons. Ms. Holder stated that she did not expect the refuge to grow as quickly as it has, with her handling (313) animals and has two partnerships in Virginia, a place that does not have the problems that we have here, and they do not have animals everywhere. Ms. Holder stated that there are only five people that help with her refuge and she needs help, some action, and some steps to be taken, soon. Ms. Holder stated that she knows that a shelter cannot be built overnight and it would take five to ten years to complete one, but the county could pay or enter a partnership with our neighbors to have a place to put these animals. Ms. Holder stated that her rescue has had \$75,583.56 in income and the expenses have been \$24,292.43 for Vet costs; \$18,640.00 for travel and vehicle expenses; \$27,984.82 for food, bedding and supplies which is \$70,917.25. Ms. Holder stated that this is too much for her to handle and this has well exceeded a non-profit status so now she is required to have a CPA for her paperwork, which is another expense. Ms. Holder stated that she receives a \$20,000.00 appropriation from the county and she has had several rescues that have cost more than \$4,000.00 per month. Ms. Holder stated that a commissioner has been telling that we receive much more than that and would like the misinformation to be corrected. Ms. Holder stated that she did receive a donated Explorer from the county and she did sell this vehicle to purchase a larger one because she is moving over forty animals at a time, so she wanted to clarify why she sold the vehicle. Ms. Holder stated that comments have been made in the public regarding the vehicle and she wanted to be transparent about everything and asked if the board has questions to please call her and she will answer any concerns. Ms. Holder stated that she and four other ladies put in non-stop hours trapping strays, handling endless puppies and kittens and helping owners with their pets. Ms. Holder stated that she has hosted rabies clinics out of her private business and this is a public service. Ms. Holder asks that our neighboring counties be contacted such as Bryson City or Macon County and see if they will partner with us on some of the counties animals. Ms. Holder stated that people are just dropping off animals that they find and the county needs somewhere that animals can be taken because there is no way she can do this on her own. Ms. Holder stated that in Stecoah they rescued (46) dogs, with many trips to the vet, some had parvo and (6) died and she had to leave behind (13) dogs that are staying around the campground, growling and biting people and are not being cared for. Ms. Holder stated that one home has no power, no water and her refuge cannot continue to carry this burden. Ms. Holder stated that this pack of dogs would harm someone eventually. Ms. Holder stated that at another location in Stecoah more than (10) dogs were abandoned and inside the home they found seven puppies that no one knew existed. Ms. Holder stated that the neighbor was trying to feed the dogs, but this is total neglect, and our county needs to do something about it. Ms. Holder stated that people in this county need to step up and help with this issue. Ms. Holder stated that Commissioner Nelms, who used to do animal control, knows how big of a job this truly is. Ms. Holder stated that there are 3000 feral cats and they have been able to treat (154) of these, but it costs money and vet bills. Manager Cody asks if Ms. Holder knows the vet cost because in Andrews they will give a 10% discount. Ms. Holder stated that they spend over \$20,000.00 on vet bills so the appropriation they receive does not touch the total costs. Ms. Holder stated that she was burning out and staying focused on animals continuously is not healthy. Ms. Holder stated that they trap these feral cats, get them fixed then release them because they have to do something to stop them from reproducing. Ms. Holder stated that all of this takes money. Ms. Holder stated that she took cat food to a resident and when she got there, she was told that her cats didn't eat that type of food and she has (70) cats. Ms. Holder stated that it is up to the board to build a shelter and do animal control because she has run around, they volunteer salaries and work endless hours for free, she appreciates the

help, but they need a game plan for the future. Ms. Holder asks if the board would do a poll and see if the county taxpayers would agree to pay for an animal shelter, something has to be done.

4. Chair Smith stated that animal control cannot happen overnight and she thanked Ms. Holder for her progress. Chair Smith stated that the board will look into models that other counties use and asks that Ms. Holder meet with Manager Cody. Ms. Holder stated that we need healthy pets and a place for residents to surrender their animals. Manager Cody stated that he has spoken with Swain County and hopes that it will be short-term potential. Chair Smith stated that this would at least take the burden off of Ms. Holder if the public had a place to take the animals to.
5. Commissioner Williams stated that it is 99% Law Enforcement and 1% Health Department and it needs to be housed with the sheriff's department.
6. Manager Cody stated that in some counties they are allowing enforcement to carry side arms when dealing with aggressive animals. Commissioner Orr asks if they have to be deputized. Manager Cody stated that he was not sure, but he would find out.
7. Chair Smith stated that we need Attorney Coward to finish the ordinance and decide if it does indeed belong with the sheriff's department.
8. Ms. Holder stated that she has spoken to some of the upcoming sheriff candidates and they stated that it needed to be run by county ordinances.
9. Attorney Coward stated that the county is required to deal with rabies.
10. Chair Smith stated that we did need to complete the animal ordinance.
11. Ms. Holder stated that anything will help because this project is not cheap.
12. Chair Smith asks how many animals there are in the city limits, this may be a Town issue as well.
13. Ms. Holder stated that there are over 3000 cats in the city limits. Chair Smith stated that the Town needs assistance on other matters, so now would be the time to discuss animal control as well. Manager Cody stated that he would schedule a meeting as soon as possible and invite the Town as a partner.
14. Chair Smith stated that this board tries to listen, hear and help and she understands that help is needed.
15. Chair Smith asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Williams made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Orr 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