

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, December 17, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street for their regular workshop session. All board was present.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks Steven Howard, AT&T Representative to speak to the board regarding a new tower at Wachacha Bald. Mr. Howard thanked the board for their time to tell them about their proposed project. Mr. Howard stated that AT&T would like to rebuild the tower at the Wachacha Bald with the intent to expand their footprint in this area. Mr. Howard stated FirstNet would dedicate prioritized connectivity for first responders and emergency personnel. Mr. Howard stated that AT&T was awarded the bid to build the network in the NC OPT-In to improve network capabilities. Mr. Howard stated that the tower would significantly improve coverage throughout the county especially in the northern parts of the county along NC28. Mr. Howard stated that the terrain here causes issues with the service being spotty and they are challenged to provide coverage in this area so there are plans for two other towers as we go forward. Mr. Howard stated that once the tower is completed AT&T would turn the tower ownership over to the county. Chairman Wiggins stated that he glanced over the FirstNet and they focus on Emergency Services and First Responders so will they plan to enhance cell phone service. Mr. Howard stated that Emergency Services have first priority and it is set up to block the use of frequency when emergencies arrive. Mr. Howard stated that non-emergencies all call on the same frequency. Chairman Wiggins asks what will be on the tower because in Graham County Wi-Fi is very poor in most areas of the county and will AT&T provide those services for providers to create a hotspot. Mr. Howard stated that the tower now standing is around 110 feet and they will be building one 140 to 150 feet and space could be leased to whomever, another carrier, provider or local services. Mr. Howard stated that it is similar now with the Highway Patrol on the tower. Commissioner Nelms asks if the ownership transfer happens at completion. Mr. Howard stated that once they receive occupancy ownership they would transfer ownership to the county. Commissioner Nelms asks about multiple equipment. Mr. Howard stated that additional equipment can be added preferably during the design phase and they will get all zoning requirements. Chairman Wiggins asks when the start date is anticipated. Mr. Howard stated that he needed to get the county okay, obtain some At Risk Policies, and work with NEPA on some environmental review. Chairman Wiggins stated that the county was well versed with NEPA. Mr. Howard stated that they anticipate starting construction next December 2021. Chairman Wiggins asks Mr. Howard what he needs from the county today. Chairman Wiggins stated that we need to see a copy of a lease agreement. EMS Director Larry Hembree stated that he would be involved in this process and he has questions about the equipment being moved from the old tower to the new tower. Mr. Hembree stated that the cost is around \$35,000.00 to \$45,000.00 to transfer our equipment to the new tower. Mr. Hembree stated that our tower is overloaded now. Mr. Hembree stated that in our existing building AT&T will have their own meter and own generator which will be completely separate from the county's but we will need to partnership with AT&T on repairs or replacement of the roof when needed. Mr. Hembree stated that the road is rough and the Forest Service wants the county to take on the upkeep of the road and asks if AT&T would be willing to do maintenance on the road yearly for 10 or more years or a one-time payment, this needs to be in the contract. Mr. Howard stated that he was sure that some type of agreement can be made concerning the road but was not sure about a forever agreement. Mr. Hembree stated that we would need to speak with the Forest Service on what they want the road to look like. Mr. Howard stated that once the tower belongs to the county they could lease space to other providers. Chairman Wiggins asks the County Manager to get with Jason Marino and start negotiations.
3. Chairman Wiggins asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Eller made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Dale Wiggins, Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board