

Continued Emergency Meeting – March 31, 2020

COVID19 Update with the Board of Commissioners

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, March 31, 2020 at 12:00 noon by teleconference to discuss the issues related to the COVID19 pandemic. All board was present. Also present: Manager Garland, Attorney Jay Coward, Health Director Beth Booth, Health Nursing Supervisor Lorita Eller, Sheriff Jones and EM Management Director Larry Hembree, Town of Lake Santeetlah Administrator Kim Matheson, Town of Robbinsville Mayor Steve Hooper, Appalachian Community Health Center Administrator Tina Lee, Town of Fontana Dam Administrator Zelerie Rogers and Mayor Rob Hardy, Graham County School Superintendent Angela Knight, USFS Ranger Andy Gaston, 911 Director Misty Hembree, Graham Star Editor Kevin Hensley, Graham County Projects Manager Jason Marino, NCDOT Commissioner Dirk Cody, Town of Lake Santeetlah Emily Hooper, Lt. Jimmy Hyde, Brookfield Representative Ashely Thomas, DSS Director Cris Weatherford, Lt. Dennis Crisp, NCDOT Brian Burch and Community Paramedicine Billy Hyde.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins stated that he had spoken with Sheriff Jones and they have had cooperation at the checkpoints for the most part. Chairman Wiggins asks Manager Garland to give her reporting.
3. Manager Garland stated that the missing PPE's was noticed again at the checkpoints and this needed to be addressed. Manager Garland stated that she was not sure if it was the officers or the contractors but she would reach out to the contractor. Manager Garland stated that this is for their protection and it is giving mixed signals to the people trying to come into Graham County. Manager Garland stated that it is also OSHA standards and it is mandatory. Manager Garland stated that the permits have settled down and the calls to come back to the county has subsided. Manager Garland stated that she is receiving daily calls from a part time resident who lives in Asheville who were in the county prior to the closure and now they cannot get back in.
4. Manager Garland stated that she and Sheriff Jones had discussed the reimbursement from FEMA. Sheriff Jones stated that he is having communication problems on the northern end of the county and the Skyway and would like to order new radios. 911 Director Misty Hembree stated that the Sheriff was correct in the communication from these areas and her staff had a very hard time understanding them. Manager Garland stated that Western Carolina Communications would charge \$2,000.00 per radio and he is requesting (10) at this time plus the license requirements, which could run the total bill to \$50,000.00. Sheriff Jones stated that he is checking to see if this can be reimbursed by FEMA due to the checkpoints and the radios were in fact \$5,000.00 each due to the viper technology. EM Director Larry Hembree stated that he did have some extra radios if the Sheriff needed to use them until he received his. 911 Director Hembree stated that the static was worse this time and everything is going to the viper radios. EM Director Hembree stated that he was not sure on the reimbursement but he would follow up on this and recommended renting the radios versus buying because you would be reimbursed on the rental.
5. Manager Garland stated that we are still getting requests from workers that come home on the weekends for permitting and she is suggesting that they be as careful as possible coming back home and to try to abide by the shelter in place for North Carolina. Manager Garland stated that the Governor has repeatedly stated that people need to stay home.
6. Health Director Booth stated for the workers coming home on weekends, to abide by the stay at home and do social distancing while they are in the county.
7. Dirk Cody stated that they should not go to Ingles if they are coming into the county from Florida or Texas and he was told that Robbinsville residents were going into Tennessee to get their hair done and this should not be allowed. Manager Garland stated that the residents being out going to other states and places are putting us all at risk.
8. Manager Garland stated that she is putting a COVID19 banner on our WEB Home page with more information for our citizens. Dirk Cody stated that it would be good to post some things on the courthouse doors because many people do not have internet.
9. EM Director Hembree stated that plans are being made to set up medical surge hospitals at the Ramsey Center where persons with the virus can go so general sick persons would not be in the same room as the COVID19 patients. Director Hembree stated that they are also looking at Tri-County Campus for one as well that would serve Graham, Clay and Cherokee Counties.

10. Brian Burch stated that they pulled the last shot on the Gorge and they hope to get the road open next week. Mr. Burch thanked the board for working with NCDOT on the detour and he apologized for the lack of clarity to the county concerning the closing of the road. Mr. Burch stated that the county has not been in a good place due to the road closings but once the detour is over the board can restrict access into the county. Chairman Wiggins stated that we adapt to the circumstances that we have and go on.
11. Health Director Booth stated that Graham County has zero cases and the State now has 1500 cases with (8) deaths and (160) are currently in the hospital. Director Booth stated that she is putting out information daily on their web page and they are holding strong.
12. Angela Knight, School Superintendent stated that they are looking to tone down the 15 site meal distribution due to the amount of people it has been taking but they will continue to prepare and deliver food to feed their students.
13. Ranger Gaston stated that they have had two wildfires in the Tatham Gap area set by an arsonist. Ranger Gaston stated that opening day of trout season is here and Fish and Wildlife will be stocking the trout streams so we may see some movement of people. Ranger Gaston stated that his staff is limited but with the closure of the white water rafting, they should be fine.
14. Ashely Thomas, Brookfield Representative stated that they cancelled the white water rafting due to the shelter in place for NC and the limited Forest Service employees but asks that Manager Garland send a letter requesting that they postpone the white water rafting at this time.
15. Jason Marino stated that all sites are actively working and Tatham Gap is non-passable and within the next few hours, the Upper Santeetlah Road will be barricaded as non-passable. Mr. Marino stated that the traffic has slowed down some and it was very quiet upon the Skyway. Mr. Marino stated that PPE's were given out and they have been instructed to wear them. Mr. Marino stated that we just need to continue to get the word out about the closures.
16. Chairman Wiggins stated that we would fine people with a Class 2 Misdemeanor and a \$1000.00 fine and maybe a few days in jail if they do not adhere to our State of Emergency in Graham County.
17. Chairman Wiggins stated that the board would continue this meeting to Thursday, April 2, 2020 at noon and thanked everyone for their time in serving on this team.

Dale Wiggins, Chairman

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman

Keith Eller, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board