

Regular Meeting – April 7, 2020

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, April 7, 2020 by teleconference for their Regular Monthly Meeting in Robbinsville, NC. Board present by teleconference was Chairman Dale Wiggins, Vice-Chairman Lynn Cody, Commissioner Connie Orr, Commissioner Keith Eller and Commissioner Jacob Nelms Also present was Manager Rebecca Garland, Attorney JK Coward, Graham Star Editor Kevin Hensley, Health Director Beth Booth, DSS Director Cris Weatherford, NCDOT Representatives Dirk Cody, Wanda Austin and Brian Burch, Community Paramedicine Director Billy Hyde, Senior Center Director Wanda Hill, Transit Director Juanita Colvard, Residents Jack Gross and Kristin Guillory.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins asks Commissioner Cody to give the Invocation.
3. Chairman Wiggins asks Commissioner Orr to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chairman Wiggins asks for approval or changes to the agenda. Manager Garland stated that we needed to delete Item #6 Prosperity Committee, Mr. Cody requests to be added to the next agenda. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the agenda with the stated change. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chairman Wiggins asks for approval of the minutes for the Regular and Workshop Meeting March 17, Emergency Meeting March 20 and Continued Emergency Meeting March 20, March 23, March 25 and March 27. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chairman Wiggins asks NCDOT Commissioner Dirk Cody to speak. Mr. Cody stated that he has Wanda Austin and Brian Burch on the line with him to discuss which option the Board wants to take on the A9 Highway. Mr. Cody asks if the Board wants to improve existing, use the Five Point Road option or tunnel through the Stecoah Mountain, which would have an unknown period. Commissioner Nelms asks if this decision today would negate any other locations for a corridor. Mr. Cody stated that we could look at new locations at any time. Chairman Wiggins stated that this discussion is concerning the bypass to Stecoah and as long as this has been studied, you would think that we would have had the plans for a road or tunnel. Brian Burch stated that they are looking for the preferred alternate so they can wrap up the documents, which does not mean that you cannot tweak areas that are needed. Brian Burch stated that this would state improve existing corridor is the preferred alternate at this time. Chairman Wiggins stated that we needed to decide if we want a tunnel or not and asks how much time a tunnel would save in commute time. Wanda Austin stated that it might save ten or fifteen minutes. Commissioner Eller stated that it would not save any time if you were sitting behind an eighteen-wheeler. Ms. Austin stated that it would be a two lane tunnel with other paving options on NC28 and NC143 with option to pass or climbing lanes where approved. Mr. Cody asks if the board wanted lanes to pass on the existing and they replied yes. Wanda Austin stated that there will be a four-lane section at the Appalachian Trail Intersection and there would be climbing lanes on both sides. Chairman Wiggins asks if the board wanted to make a decision tonight or did they want to study more on the options. Commissioner Orr stated that she did not want a tunnel and she did want the existing road improved. Commissioner Orr made the motion to improve the existing road without a tunnel. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
7. Brian Burch stated that they are working on a grant application that is due May 18 that will provide extra monies for this project and will help with other funds on improvements and they are requesting a letter of recommendation from the county board for the grant. Commissioner Cody requested a revised map for the Stecoah Community from Wolf Creek to Robbinsville. Dirk Cody stated that the map presented is with the improvements including passing lanes.
8. Chairman Wiggins asks Wanda Hill, Senior Center Director to speak. Director Hill stated that she is here requesting permission to apply for the Home Community Care Block Grant for 2021 with the same allocation as last year of \$130,172.00 and the county will have a match. Commissioner Cody made the motion to allow Director Hill to apply for the HCCBG Grant Funding. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. Director Hill stated that they have received more funds for our meals on wheels program and they are delivering to all congregate and home delivery. Director Hill stated that Transit has been assisting with the deliveries and she appreciates every effort that has been made to assist with the delivery of these meals.
9. Chairman Wiggins asks Juanita Colvard to speak. Ms. Colvard stated that she was hoping the board would be able to open the bids for the Ultrasound but they county did not receive enough

bids so we will have to rebid due to the cost being over \$90,000.00. Ms. Colvard stated that she would get with Clerk Crisp and re-advertise the bid.

10. Chairman Wiggins asks Commissioner Orr to speak. Commissioner Orr gave a brief update on Vaya Health during the COVID19 Crisis. Commissioner Orr stated that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is aggressively working to create flexibilities that will sustain and bolster our behavioral health, intellectual, and developmental disability system during the COVID-19 emergency. They are working with federal, state and local partners to make as many regulatory, contractual, and service-definition modifications as needed to support service providers in doing their work – work that is more important than ever. Commissioner Orr stated that the Objectives for Vaya Health are:

- a. To support the continuation of quality, medically necessary services and supports for consumers during this period of great change and uncertainty, recognizing the need for providers and consumers to rapidly adapt to new methods of treatment.
- b. To stabilize, sustain, and adapt provider networks to deliver services and supports tailored to the needs of North Carolinians in the face of the present challenge, while also readying providers for the potential lasting impact of this pandemic.
- c. To reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the need for any hospitalization, including facilitating discharge where appropriate and preventing avoidable readmissions from state psychiatric hospitals

Commissioner Orr stated that immediate measures are being put into effect to bolster their work towards achieving flexible funding for the COVID19 Response and they will proactively monitor provider networks, identify potential or expected network gaps, on-board additional qualified providers as needed, and contract with out-of-network providers as needed to ensure access to care. Chairman Wiggins asks if the Balsam Center is still open. Commissioner Orr stated that they are currently in operation but the Sheriff's Departments or Jail may not drop their folks off but must take them to the emergency room for evaluation. Commissioner Orr stated that the crisis center is open and their phones are manned.

11. Chairman Wiggins asks Manager Garland for her monthly reports and a COVID19 Update.

Manager Garland stated that she received quotes to outfit the Ford Interceptor for our Paramedicine Program and those quotes were:

- a. Atlantic Elite \$15,797.60 with a one-year warranty
- b. Kuhlman Project \$22,014.65
- c. Southeastern Specialty \$16,899.95 with a three-year warranty

The board had discussion and Commissioner Cody made the motion to accept Southeastern Specialty. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

12. Manager Garland stated that FEMA had requested that we update our Procurement Policies during the COVID19 Crisis and she did have an update for the board to approve. Manager Garland read the update to the policy. Commissioner Cody made the motion to accept the updated Procurement Policy to include State's of Emergency. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

13. Manager Garland stated that Western Carolina Comm Systems Inc. had submitted a price for the radios that the Sheriff had wanted. Manager Garland stated that there are 25 radios with phase 1 and 2 trunking licenses for \$51,693.75 before sales tax. The board had discussion. Commissioner Eller made the motion to table this until more information could be obtained on the licenses. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

14. Manager Garland stated that she had one budget amendment for consideration.

- a. Budget Amendment #14 – To amend for COVID19 expenditures that will be FEMA reimbursable for \$300,000.00.

Commissioner Cody made the motion to approve the budget amendment as stated.

Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

15. Manager Garland gave a brief update from the Governor's office. Governor Cooper stated that:

- Efforts are slowing spread and giving healthcare system time to get ready and increase capacity- have to continue the stay at home order and it is working – experts used NC as a model for how crucial social distancing helps;
- He does not know how long the order will last,
- He will be adding more limits for retailers for number of people occupying establishments in place;
- He stressed to Church and families – not a time to gather with extended family and friends – consider how it would be if you lost a loved one because you had to be together,
- He will assist with Emergency child care subsidy for families of essential workers – 888-600-1685 to get assistance to find a caregiver;

- He stated that you can find financial assistance – form on the NCDHHS website;
  - He stated that there will be a bonus \$300 per month for teachers and \$200 for non-teacher staff;
  - He stated that 400,000 people have applied for unemployment and their system is used to 3000 claims per week.
16. Chairman Wiggins asks for discussion items. No discussion items.
  17. Chairman Wiggins asks for public comment. Clerk Crisp stated that Kristen Guillory had signed in for public comment. Ms. Guillory thanked the board for taking this pandemic seriously and she completely supports and will continue to support the commissioners. Ms. Guillory stated that her question is related to COVID19 testing and reporting. Ms. Guillory asks if the totals are reported in the state or county that they are presently residing in or is it reported in their home state. Ms. Guillory stated that Cherokee County had a resident of Illinois visiting and they became infected but it was reported in Illinois so how can North Carolina keep a true account of the cases in our state. Ms. Guillory stated that this gives a false sense of security and she wanted to know if Graham County had any cases or actually had a case that did not have to be reported here. Health Director Beth Booth stated that Ms. Guillory was correct in the results being tallied in the state of residence and Cherokee County, Jackson County and Swain County all have had persons with COVID19 but not reportable in those counties. Director Booth stated that now the doctors are not required to notify of testing until they test positive then they must contact Health and Human Services but they still would not fall under North Carolina reporting if they reside in another state. Director Booth stated that they have a very good relationship with our providers and we get updates but they are not required to report. Director Booth stated that there are testing being done daily. Ms. Guillory asks where you go for testing. Director Booth stated that you could go to Tallulah Health Center, Smoky Mountain Urgent Care and the Graham County Health Department.
  18. Clerk Crisp stated that Jack Gross had also signed in for public comment. Mr. Gross stated that now is the time to request the last mile for internet connectivity for our county and asks that the commissioners use this time to get decent internet into our county. Mr. Gross commended the commissioners, manager and staff for their hard work during this COVID19 Crisis. Mr. Gross asks if under FMLA replenishment is it possible to look for a repeater radio system that will extend coverage to our entire area. Manager Garland stated that we are looking at every opportunity to enhance our coverage. Chairman Wiggins stated that we will be getting a new tower at Wachacha Bald and this should help as well. Mr. Gross again commended the board and staff for their actions during the COVID19 crisis and he appreciates the moves and action that has been taken. Chairman Wiggins stated that he appreciated the encouraging words and stated that they are trying to save lives and with our lack of medical care, we would not be able to treat an influx of people in the county if an outbreak occurred.
  19. Chairman Wiggins thanked everyone for attending by teleconference and stated that we would now 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 Nelms made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
  20. Chairman Wiggins asks for a motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Orr made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
  21. Manager Garland stated that Brandon Beavers needed (5) days without pay due to his wife having a baby. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the leave without pay as stated. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
  22. Chairman Wiggins asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Orr made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Signature page attached!

Signature Page for Regular Minutes April 7, 2020

---

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