

Workshop Session – May 20, 2013

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Monday, May 20, 2013 at 4:00 p.m. at the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville NC for their regular monthly workshop session. Commissioners present were: Robert M. Edwards, Billy Holder and Keith Eller. Commissioners Connie Orr and Raymond Williams were absent due to sickness.

1. Commissioner Edwards called the workshop session to order.
2. Commissioner Edwards asks Glenn Carson to speak on behalf of Graham County Soil and Water Conservation. Mr. Carson gave a brief slide presentation on how the Soil and Water Conservation began and the purpose of the conservation program. Mr. Carson stated that two farmers in Graham County alone have received \$207,649.00 in funding since 2009 to improve their lands. Mr. Carson stated that money was available for Agriculture Mixing Facilities and they also sponsored 102 kids in the annual education programs. Mr. Carson stated that the office helps with stream restoration, pollinator plantings, grape growing efforts, erosion control and road problems. The board thanked Mr. Carson for his time and information.
3. Commissioner Edwards asks T.J. Holland to speak. Mr. Holland stated that he was here to ask permission to conduct a Phase I archaeology to locate the site of Fort Montgomery located on county property at Fort Hill. Mr. Holland stated that earlier investigations to find the exact location of the fort site have lead researchers to believe that the fort's location is in the area that is owned by Graham County. Mr. Holland stated that the project will be a partnership between Graham County and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Mr. Holland stated that Graham County will have no financial obligations for this project. Mr. Holland stated that if the exact location of Fort Montgomery can be determined through this project there are a number of opportunities for the County to pursue regarding historic preservation and heritage tourism. The board thanked Mr. Holland for his time and all agreed that a letter of support would be given in regular session.
4. Commissioner Edwards asks David Dodson to speak. Mr. Dodson will be presenting in the regular session.
5. Commissioner Edwards asks Tabitha Myler to speak for Travel and Tourism. Clerk Crisp stated that Ms. Myler was unable to attend. Commissioner Edwards stated that Commissioner Connie Orr is absent due to her sister's illness and has requested that Keith Eller be appointed to the RDA Board as Interim and Mike Edwards be appointed to the Travel and Tourism Board as Interim until she is able to return. Commissioner Edwards stated that this will require action in the regular session at 5:00 p.m.
6. Commissioner Edwards stated that the county has been obtaining lists of all unpaid taxes in the county due to the deficit of the upcoming budget and the board has decided to follow through with foreclosures. Commissioner Edwards stated that the tax office has tried by all means to collect the taxes owed and the next step is foreclosure. Commissioner Edwards stated that he knows times are hard but the county board felt the need to be fair to all citizens of the county and not allow this cycle of never paying taxes to continue. Commissioner Holder stated that the majority of our citizens pay their taxes and our collection rate is above 95% but he is tired of some people getting a "free ride". Commissioner Holder stated that we all live here and we all need to pitch in and do our part.
7. Commissioner Edwards stated that the board had agreed at the recommendation of the Travel and Tourism Board to raise the occupancy tax in the county to 6% and he further explained that the county is not taking away from any township. If a township wants to have occupancy tax of 3% then they may do so and if they do the county will only collect 3% in those towns. Commissioner Edwards stated that the county never intended for the town's to think that the county was trying to collect the entire 6% inside their townships. Joe Deddo, a member in the audience stated that the county is doing a tax and spend and this is not right. Mr. Deddo stated that there are vacant buildings everywhere and you tax the small business owner. Jay Kelly asks the board's decision on 1% food tax. Commissioner Edwards stated that the 1% food tax was not added. Commissioner Holder stated that the county is trying to go after unpaid taxes and the occupancy tax is paid by visitors not the business owner. Commissioner Holder stated that the federal and state government is handing down unfunded mandates to the counties and all of us are getting squeezed. Mr. Deddo asks the board "when does the taxing stop?" Commissioner Edwards asks what Mr. Deddo recommends. Mr. Deddo stated that a Travel and Tourism Budget of \$140,000.00 should not require more funding and that department doesn't justify the spending.
8. Commissioner Edwards adjourned the workshop session.

Robert M. (Mike) Edwards, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Keith Eller, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Billy Holder, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Raymond Williams. Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board