

Workshop Session – October 18, 2022

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, October 18, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular workshop session. Board present Connie Orr, Lynn Cody, Keith Eller, and Jacob Nelms. Board absent Dale Wiggins. Also, present Manager Jason Marino, Finance Officer Becky Garland, Attorney JK Coward and Clerk Kim Crisp.

1. Chair Orr called the workshop session to order.
2. Chair Orr asks for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Cody made the motion to approve. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
3. Chair Orr asks David Artiss to speak. Mr. Artiss thanked the board for their time and wanted to discuss the Justice Center that is proposed to be built at West Fort Hill. Mr. Artiss presented suggestions for locating the new Justice Center Downtown. Mr. Artiss stated that the project would leave the existing courthouse vacant and deprive downtown of a significant economic engine for downtown businesses. Also, there is an issue of how increased vehicle traffic on Five Point Road and West Fort Hill will be dealt with once a Justice Center opens off West Fort Hill Road. Mr. Artiss gave a review of the existing government buildings on this road as well as Churches, private residences, and other businesses including food distribution which generates significant traffic on some days. Mr. Artiss gave other concerns which included a high voltage transformer station. Mr. Artiss stated that the present courthouse is not adequate for current or future needs and the new justice center could be located downtown, to the north of the existing courthouse and could be a multi-story structure on Ford Street. Mr. Artiss stated that the advantages of the Ford Street location is the traffic would be more manageable, other government offices could go back into the current courthouse, Mr. Artiss stated that with direct access to Courthouse Square it will keep the current courthouse occupied and provide significant economic gains for downtown businesses. Mr. Artiss stated that parking and access from Ford Street would significantly reduce the current traffic congestion around the courthouse on court days and would leave parking space for patrons of downtown businesses. Mr. Artiss stated that the available property is approximately (3) acres with a hotel and office and two empty buildings owned by David and Brenda Artiss. Mr. Artiss stated that the existing hotel and hotel office building could be used for (10) housing units with minor upgrades, or if necessary, the buildings could be demolished if required for the new Justice Center and parking. Mr. Artiss stated that on the north side of Ford Street is a 60' wide Railroad Right of Way that is owned by the Town and can only be used for public purposes, this could provide additional space for parking or recreation for people visiting the new Justice Center. Manager Marino thanked Mr. Artiss for the information and asks for further comment. No further comment.
4. Manager Marino presented a slide presentation regarding the NC Opioid Settlement. Manager Marino stated that more than (20,000) North Carolinian lives have been lost due to Opioid use and COVID-19 caused a new wave of isolation, despair, drug misuse and overdose deaths. Manager Marino stated that the counties are on the frontline and local governments have spent untold amounts of money on opioid-related costs for healthcare, criminal justice, and social services. Manager Marino stated that (76) NC Counties filed litigation along with (8) Municipalities and NC will receive (\$750,000,000.00) over the next (18) years. Manager Marino stated that a 555 Committee was appointed which Finance Officer Becky Garland is a member. Chair Orr stated that Graham County has had good representation at the table with Ms. Garland.
5. Manager Marino stated that the funds will help continue our peer support program, which is working, and we have been hiring employees that have come out of the peer support program, so it is a success.
6. Manager Marino thanked Kevin Leonard, NCACC Executive Director for putting together this slide presentation. Chair Orr stated that this has been a collaborative effort, and everyone has been working together which is the best practice as we go along with this settlement. Chair Orr stated that what we are doing is very important for our community and most needed.
7. Chair Orr asks for comment. No further comment.
8. Chair Orr adjourned the workshop session.

Signature page attached!

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Connie Orr, Chair

Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman

Lynn Cody, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Dale Wiggins, Member

ATTEST: _____
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board