

Regular Meeting – June 15, 2021

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, June 15, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. for their regular monthly meeting in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC 28771. Board present Keith Eller, Lynn Cody, Jacob Nelms and Dale Wiggins. Board absent Dale Wiggins. Also, present Manager Jason Marino, Finance Director Becky Garland, Attorney J.K. Coward, and Clerk Kim Crisp.

1. Vice-Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Cody to give the Invocation.
3. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Commissioner Wiggins to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for approval of the agenda. Manager Marino asks that Wanda Hill, Senior Center Director be added as Item 12A. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the agenda with the stated change. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for approval of the May 18th Workshop & Regular Meetings. Commissioner Cody made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to close the regular meeting and open the public hearing for the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Proposed Budget. Commissioner Nelms made the motion as stated. Commissioner Wiggins seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
7. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Manager Marino and Finance Director Garland to present the budget. Manager Marino welcomed everyone and stated that they will cover several items for the budget and then open the floor for public comment. Manager Marino stated that after the public hearing the board can choose to adopt the FY 2021-2022 Graham County Budget. Manager Marino asks Finance Director Becky Garland to go over the budget with the public. Director Garland stated that she is presenting a FY 2021-2022 Budget for the General Fund of \$18,611,891.00 which reflects no change in the mil rate of \$0.65 per \$100 in value. Director Garland stated that the overall tax base in the county decreased slightly. Director Garland stated that following North Carolina General Statute 159, the board budgeted total property tax revenue at the 2019-2020 collection rate of 96.51% of the levy for 2019-2020. Director Garland stated that the tax collection rate as of this past Friday, June 11, 2021, was 97.5%. Director Garland stated that the sales tax revenue was increased to better reflect the reality of the current year because we experienced an 18% increase in sales tax revenue over the past year, however, for conservatism, the board used the 2019-2020 year as a baseline to project revenue growth. Director Garland stated that the expenditures in payroll and benefits represent a 5% increase from 2020-2021 budget due mainly to last year's budget was decreased due to COVID. Director Garland stated that the budget includes a 2% increase on health insurance which represents an annual increase of approximately \$26,000.00. Director Garland stated that this budget does include a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment as representative in the region which represents a \$225,000.00 increase in the budgeted payroll and benefits expenditures. Director Garland stated that the board did consider bringing our pay plan to the 2016 state pay plan but the projected increase to the budget would have been \$750,000.00 which represents \$.0729 increase in property tax to achieve this benchmark. Director Garland stated that retirement costs increased by 11% which represents \$50,000.00 in additional employee matching contributions. Director Garland stated that wage and benefit increases totaled approximately \$300,000.00 for the 2021-2022 budget year. Director Garland stated that the cost of benefits per hour per employee equates to \$4.39 per hour per employee for the budget year 2021-2022.
8. Director Garland stated that in the capital projects and capital outlay they budgeted for one new ambulance, which is done yearly, at a cost of \$230,000.00; the budgeted transfers of quarter cent sales tax to capital reserves in the amount of \$445,000.00 and the budget county transfer of sales tax to schools above debt service was \$200,775.00. Director Garland stated that there are plans to trade some of the sheriff fleet with no additional scheduled cost. Director Garland stated that the ongoing projects include the middle school, election board renovations, recreation and cemetery buildings which was approved with a capital project ordinance and these projects will be debt funded later in the upcoming fiscal year.
9. Director Garland stated that the total budgeted debt service is \$723,500.00 which includes \$365,000.00 in continuing debt service for the high school and elementary school projects. Director Garland stated that these notes pay off in 2023. Director Garland stated that there will

be a new borrowing for the middle school this fiscal year. Director Garland stated that the debt service includes \$292,000.00 in payments on the Health and Human Services building, for which \$178,000.00 in indirect cost reimbursements on the depreciation of the DSS side of the building fund part of the debt service.

10. Director Garland highlighted some comparison to prior year budgets (pre-covid).
 - a. Transfers for capital projects increase by \$383,000.00 (school and courthouse – county funded).
 - b. Revaluation transfer increase \$90,000.00 to fund revaluation – county funded; state funded.
 - c. Added a transfer of \$76,850.00 to fund expansion of recreation program, as part of the county plan to support reduction of drug abuse in the county.
 - d. Restored appropriations to community organizations back to pre-covid levels.
 - e. Increased appropriation to regional library by \$15,000.00 to meet state match.
 - f. Expenditures reflect grant funding for the paramedicine program.
 - g. Transit services expenditures expected to increase \$238,000.00; all state and federal grants funded.
 - h. Public Safety expenditures increased \$735,000.00 over pre-covid levels which is county funded.
 - i. Health and Human Services expenditures increased \$496,331.00 of which 80% is funded by state and federal dollars and will include \$227,785.00 American Rescue Plan Act which is state and federal funded with county match.
 - j. Cultural and recreation increased \$88,000.00 due to unfunded mandates from NCA&T Extension cost share to better fund expansion of recreation services in the county.
 - k. County cut other areas of the budget to help compensate for the increases.
11. Manager Marino stated that the Graham County Cancer Support Group had requested an appropriation of \$5,000.00.
12. Manager Marino asks for public comment. Patricia Orr stated that she would like to see the approval of the EMS employees' hours and pay scale and is this addressed in this budget. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that salaries are addressed in every budget cycle. Director Garland stated that she has noted in some social media there was some question on the compensation of the EMS employees. Director Garland stated that Graham County is different from our sister counties because we work a different shift. Director Garland stated that the neighbor counties work 24 hours on shift with 72 hours off whereas Graham County work 48 hours on shift and 96 hours off. Director Garland stated that this was brought before the board two budget cycles ago to change the schedule and she spent several meetings with staff along with the commissioners holding special meetings to discuss the schedules. Director Garland stated that to do the shift as other counties we would need to hire four more staff members which increased the budget by \$500,000.00 and at that point the board of commissioners was willing to proceed but they met with some challenges in that some of the staff was for the change and others were not. Director Garland stated that some medics have side businesses and/or other jobs so the proposal never occurred. Director Garland stated that the board would have to raise the tax rate by five cents to pay the extra personnel required for the new shift, but they were willing to change the hours but could not get a complete agreement with the staff. Director Garland stated that she hopes that the county can use some of the COVID monies to encourage interest among the young people to apply. Director Garland stated that when you look at the pay rate you need to look at the W-2 wages for a true comparison. Director Garland stated that she is committed to working with public safety. Manager Marino stated that these meetings took place pre-covid and our average Medics make \$52,000.00 - \$54,000.00 and the EMT Basics make \$41,000.00 - \$47,000.00. Director Garland stated that she did comparables two years ago with our sister counties and they know that you cannot put a price tag on saving someone's life, but she wanted the public to know. Director Garland stated that there were two medics that did not want the schedule change and the board had asked for a full consensus. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that we will be in a bad crisis when our medics start retiring out and no new people are interested in this field. Commissioner Cody stated you get people to register for the EMS class, but they drop out. Manager Marino stated that they are looking at several options, getting with our local community college, our school or having a career day to gain interest because the county is very concerned over public safety. Ms. Orr stated that if there is anything that the community could help, she would be glad to volunteer. Director Garland stated that one thing that the community can do is buy local because our sales tax is made by Graham County sales, and she has repeatedly told Cherokee County to give us a portion of their sales tax because half

of the county shops at Walmart. Director Garland stated that Cherokee County receives \$8M in sales tax while Graham County receives \$2M and she is thankful for the GREAT Organization on their campaign to buy local. Director Garland stated that when people buy local this puts revenue into our budget, and this can help fund public safety.

13. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for further public comment. No further comment.
14. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to close the public hearing and reopen the regular meeting. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
15. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to give a \$5,000.00 appropriation to the Graham Cancer Support Group. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to give the appropriation as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
16. Vice-Chairman Eller asks if the board is ready to adopt the FY 2021-2022 Graham County Budget with the additional \$5,000.00 appropriation. Commissioner Cody made the motion to adopt the budget as presented. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
17. Vice-Chairman Eller asks NCDOT Highway Commissioner Dirk Cody to speak. Mr. Cody stated that he was here to discuss renaming the new road and bridge that goes into the school after Wayne Carringer and J.L. Phillips and stated that the families had made the request to NCDOT. Mr. Cody stated that the road would be named after Wayne Carringer and the bridge would be named after J.L. Phillips. Vice-Chairman Eller asks about the fees. Mr. Cody stated that the families agreed to pay the fees associated and asks for the board to support this request and adopt a resolution as such. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to adopt the resolution to name the road after Wayne Carringer as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to adopt the resolution to name the bridge after J.L. Phillips as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous. The families of Wayne Carringer and J.L. Phillips thanked the board.
18. Vice-Chairman Eller asks John Colwell to speak. Mr. Colwell stated that he appreciated the use of the Ag-Extension Building for the placement of a Ronnie Milsap Mural and stated that it should be completed by June 21st. Mr. Colwell stated that they received \$10,000.00 from an Art Mural Grant and they asked each T&T Board for a \$10,000.00 allocation. Mr. Colwell asks that the board appropriate \$2500.00 annually to Revved Up to continue putting up murals, parks, walking trails and more. Mr. Colwell stated that their goal is to clean up Main Street. Mr. Colwell stated that GREAT is building a pavilion next to the VFW Building and the plans are for a 7000 square foot pavilion. Mr. Colwell stated that they also honored our Cherokee Women with a Mural, and they will be placing a Mountain Scene Mural on the Lovelace Building. Mr. Colwell stated that they are making great strides in doing things and is very optimistic in working with the county and hopes that the county can help with their request.
19. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Wanda Hill, Senior Center Director to speak. Director Hill stated that she has received notice of another grant that she can apply for in the amount of \$12,963.06 with no county match and asks permission to apply. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to apply for the grant as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
20. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Manager Marino to give the manager / project manager reporting. Manager Marino stated that the transfer station assessment was received from Jay Zimmerman, Regulatory Compliance and provided the report to the board for review.
21. Manager Marino stated that the Elementary School Gym initial report indicated foundation soils are generally low to moderate consistency and very moist to wet, the wood floor is expanding from excessive moisture; roof gutter downspouts directing water to the foundation could be a contributor; fluctuation in surface water levels, humidity in the building, floor slab moisture emission due to an ineffective or nonexistent moisture vapor barrier under the slab is a factor. Manager Marino stated that the sonar report will be upcoming as well as an assessment of the concrete and masonry as to the extent of the damage and recommended remediation. Manager Marino stated that the estimated costs at this point are around \$10,000.00. Commissioner Wiggins stated that the walls are bucking as well as the windows and attention will have to be given to the exterior brick.
22. Manager Marino stated that the new sanitation truck that was struck by lightning is having the VECU and ECU modules replaced. Manager Marino stated that is the only issues to date. Commissioner Wiggins asks how much did the truck cost. Director Garland stated that the truck was \$273,000.00.
23. Manager Marino stated that the Graham County Senior Center is working with representatives from the State and the Health Department for a plan of when the Senior Citizens can return to

the center. Manager Marino stated that the Seniors returned to the outside of the center on June 4th and they continue to utilize social distancing.

24. Manager Marino stated that the Judge has approved the use of the court room for the trial scheduled to begin the week of July 12th utilizing the Lovelace Building for Jury deliberations. Manager Marino stated that the trial has the potential to last two weeks, in the event, the trial goes into the week of July 19th an alternate location would be needed which would be the community room.
25. Manager Marino stated that on the project manager's side the RDA Moose Branch Subdivision Project #GCRP-20-0026 contracts were signed this week and they are scheduling a preconstruction meeting. Manager Marino stated that they were able to secure funding for (13) lots for affordable housing. Commissioner Wiggins stated that this project started in 2014 and stated that he was very pleased that RDA could get the money to provide housing for low to moderate income people.
26. Manager Marino stated that the new Cemetery and Recreation buildings are scheduled to arrive in September, and they awarded the site work to Lovin Contracting for mid-July. Manager Marino stated that the concrete placement is scheduled for early August.
27. Manager Marino stated that the Election Board renovation project was awarded to WNC Contracting and the pre-construction meeting is scheduled for June 21st. Manager Marino stated that there would be a remodel of the Admin/Finance bathroom during this time as well.
28. Manager Marino stated that he is working on the ad to solicit for A&E Firm qualifications on the new Justice Center Project. Manager Marino stated that NC Senator Corbin and NC Representative Gillespie have requested \$30M for a Graham County Justice Center which would help tremendously.
29. Manager Marino stated that the contract on the Middle School 6th Grade addition and renovation project was awarded to Western Builders and construction is currently underway with 12% complete.
30. Manager Marino stated that the Little Snowbird Creek Bank remediation design was awarded to LDSI Engineers for \$13,500.00 and they held the initial site visit on June 10th. Manager Marino stated that the Little Snowbird Creek Clear and Snap are attempting to award an additional 11,000 feet of work to LDSI in the amount of \$16,000.00 for a total project cost of \$29,500.00 and the initial site visit was held on June 10th.
31. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Finance Director Becky Garland to give the monthly finance report. Director Garland stated that we ended the month with a \$9,679,631.87 cash balance which is ahead \$442,219.06 from this time last year. Director Garland stated that the amount seems large, but the Local Government Commission asks that we always reserve four months of revenue in case of disasters, so the actual spendable cash balance is much less. Director Garland stated that \$218,144.42 was added to our Capital Projects; \$114,171.16 was added to the School Capital Projects and an estimated \$113,000.00 reversion toward the capital project and \$819,782.50 was added to the American Rescue Plan account.
32. Director Garland stated that our current tax collection for May is \$27,716.98; prior year \$9,511.67 and DMV \$51,751.00. Director Garland stated that our year to date collected is \$7,164,877.33 for real and \$559,880.35 for DMV which puts us ahead from this time last year by \$179,683.72 for real and \$60,998.52 for DMV. Director Garland stated that our tax collection rate is 97.01% for the month and 97.05% for the partial month of June. Director Garland commended the tax office for their diligence and hard work in collections.
33. Director Garland stated that the revenues for the month was \$810,988.55 and our expenditures were \$1,136,130.30 for a deficit for \$325,141.75. Director Garland stated that our year-to-date revenues is \$16,000,585.19 and our expenditures is \$14,433,239.22 for a surplus of \$1,567,345.97 which is ahead \$974,884.18 from this time last year.
34. Director Garland stated that our sales tax collection was \$248,425.79 which is ahead \$65,844.64 from last month. Director Garland stated that we have a growth variance for the year of 18%. Director Garland stated that our quarter cent sales tax collected since inception is \$472,273.23 with \$346,081.25 transferred to the Capital Projects fund and \$126,191.98 will be added to the capital projects fund.
35. Director Garland stated that back taxes collected since 2013 are \$633,335.82 and our total back taxes due is \$566,519.81. Director Garland stated that the tax office has been very diligent with foreclosures. Director Garland stated that the more taxes collected the more the mil rate can be held down.
36. Director Garland stated that our budget should be at 8% and we are currently at 16% and commended the departments for their diligence of staying within the budget.

37. Director Garland stated that some question what their property tax is used for and gave a breakdown of the expenditures.
- a. 19.48% general government
 - b. 32.17% public safety
 - c. 01.26% economic development
 - d. 26.27% health and human services
 - e. 03.01% cultural and recreation
 - f. 04.35% transportation
 - g. 07.97% education, including debt service
 - h. 00.81% contributions to other agencies
 - i. 04.42% transfers to other funds
 - j. 00.27% contingency
38. Director Garland stated that she did have year end budget amendments for the boards approval and those are:
- a. Budget Amendment #23 to amend for additional LIEAP funds in the amount of \$9,932.00 which was approved at the DSS Board Meeting.
 - b. Budget Amendment #24 to make final year end amendments to redistribute funding between departments for a total of \$429,400.00.
 - c. Budget Amendment #1 for the Revaluation fund for additional contracted services for appeals and consultant fees.
 - d. Budget Amendment #1 for 911 Fund for approved capital outlay expenditures of \$70,000.00
 - e. Budget Amendment #1 for DSS to convert agency funds to special revenue as per GASB for \$370,000.00.
- Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to approve the budget amendments as stated by Director Garland. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
39. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for public comment. Vice-Chairman Eller asks John Colwell to speak. Mr. Colwell stated that the Town of Robbinsville had set a tentative date for the dedication of the Ronnie Milsap Mural for September 11th and wanted to know if the board wanted to coordinate this dedication with the renaming a portion of Highway 129N to Ronnie Milsap Highway dedication. Mr. Colwell stated that this will be the 20th anniversary of 911 so he was not sure on a dedication on this date. The board agreed to have discussion.
40. Vice-Chairman Eller asks Hank Dinschel to speak. Ms. Dinschel stated that she had a couple of things; first to thank Kim Crisp for all her help and further stated that she had asked the commissioners some questions in an email, and she understands that Keith Eller does not do email but wanted to know why Jacob Nelms had not responded back to her. Ms. Dinschel stated that she supports our EMS and one way to get more funds into the county is to sell alcohol. Ms. Dinschel stated that we are always encouraged to shop locally but we cannot get alcohol at a decent price in the county, and by the way, there is alcohol already in the county. Ms. Dinschel stated that this is a logical solution and stocking Ingles will allow for more sales by tourists which will also increase our sales tax revenue as well. Ms. Dinschel stated that people talk to her and there is a big problem with our school board with the mask mandate and had asked that they stop making our children wear masks to school, which has been proven, to be unhealthy and the only mask that truly protects is a N95 and these students do not use those. Ms. Dinschel stated that she has done her studies and she attended the school board meeting where staff was made to mask up but the board, our superintendent and assistant superintendent did not have masks so why is that okay when they are making our kids wear masks and the kids get no choice or no say in the matter. Ms. Dinschel stated that she is very passionate for our children and asks that the board of commissioners help her, she stated that God sent her to talk to the school board and she got no where so she is begging this board to help her with this issue.
41. Vice-Chairman Eller stated that we would now go to the discussion items and asks Manager Marino to present the items to the board. Manager Marino stated that the board needed to approve the Order of Collection for Tajuana Ledwell, Tax Collector and Aimee Johnson, Deputy Tax Collector for tax year 2021-2022. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the order of collection as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
42. Manager Marino stated that the board had been asked to reappoint Sue Lewis, Wanda (Johnnie) Brooms and Janice Stewart to the Jury Commission. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to reappoint as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

43. Manager Marino stated that the board had been asked to reappoint Brian Johnson, Jason Marino and Edd Satterfield to the RDA Board. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to reappoint as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
44. Manager Marino stated that the board had been asked to reappoint Meredith Jenkins to the Travel and Tourism Board. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
45. Manager Marino asks that the board approve the Board Poll taken on June 2nd to purchase the turbo kit for our garbage truck. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to approve the poll as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
46. Manager Marino stated that the county offices would be closed Friday, July 2nd and Monday, July 5th for the Independence Holiday.
47. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for new or old business. No new or old business.
48. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to go into closed session under G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1)(3)(5)(6) for privilege or confidential information, attorney-client privilege, personnel, and contracts. Commissioner Nelms made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
49. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
50. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to adopt the Resolution to Adopt the Interlocal Agreement and to Join the NCACC Risk Management Pool for FY 2021-2022 accepting the quote for the Workers Compensation Insurance at \$109,850.00 and to accept the quote from NCACC for our Commercial Property Liability Insurance for 111,147.00 with the additional premium increases for:
 - a. an increase limit on Crime to \$500,000.00 for \$968.00.
 - b. to accept \$3,000,000.00 excess of \$2,000,000.00 underlying for \$13,445.00
 - c. to purchase prior acts coverage of public officials and employment practices for \$3,067.00.
 - d. to receive a longevity credit of \$6,125.00 to participate in both pools.Commissioner Wiggins made the motion as stated. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
51. Vice-Chairman Eller asks if the board wanted to make an appropriation to REVVED Up. Commissioner Wiggins stated that he has no objection to the request and made the motion to give an appropriation of \$2500.00 per year beginning Fiscal Year 2021-2022. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
52. Vice-Chairman Eller asks for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Wiggins made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Nelms seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Connie Orr, Chair

Keith Eller, Vice-Chairman

Lynn Cody, Member

Jacob Nelms, Member

Dale Wiggins, Member

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board

