

Regular Meeting – August 15, 2023

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, August 15, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC for their regular monthly meeting. All the board was present. Also, present Interim County Manager/Clerk to the Board Kim Crisp and Finance Director Stacy Carpenter.

1. Chairman Nelms called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Nelms asks Commissioner Cody to give the Invocation.
3. Chairman Nelms asks Commissioner Orr to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Chairman Nelms asks for approval of the agenda. Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
5. Chairman Nelms asks for approval of the Budget Meetings May 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 24<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the minutes as stated. Commissioner Eller seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
6. Chairman Nelms asks Glenda Odom to speak regarding her property taxes. Ms. Odom stated that she had never come to a meeting before to complain about her taxes but this year they owe \$12,000.00 and last year her taxes were \$6,300.00. Ms. Odom stated that she began looking at other businesses such as Café De Olla and their increase was 28% but hers doubled and this is not good for businesses in Graham County. Ms. Odom stated that she knows that the board is under court order to build a courthouse, but this is ridiculous. Ms. Odom stated that these increases are not feasible for selling even if she wanted to sell. Ms. Odom thanked the board for listening to her and wanted some justification for why they were increased so drastically. Commissioner Nelms stated that they will get with the appraiser and will call a special meeting if needed for explanation.
7. Chairman Nelms asks Liz Velazquez to speak. Ms. Velazquez stated that she owned the Heart Center (the old Mountain View School property), and she was here for the same reason as Ms. Odom. Ms. Velazquez stated that her taxes tripled and went from \$4000.00 to \$12,000. Ms. Velazquez stated that she met with our tax assessor and was told that there was nothing they could do. Ms. Velazquez stated that an increase from \$4000.00 to \$12,000.00 is beyond people's means and asks that her property be reassessed. Chairman Nelms stated that he will get with Chris Farris, our appraiser and our Tax Assessor, Brandy Cook for more information and if needed, the board will call a special meeting.
8. Chairman Nelms stated that there was also a letter from Claude White Jr. concerning his property taxes as well and asked that the board review this letter.
9. Chairman Nelms asks Dave Artiss to speak. Mr. Artiss stated that his taxes went up as well by 60% and his understanding of properties under revaluation was that when the valuation changed, the Board of Commissioners could lower the mil rate giving a zero net change in actual property taxes. Mr. Artiss asks the Board of Commissioners to investigate this. Mr. Artiss asks if the total income received to the county before the Reval is a public record. Chairman Nelms stated that yes, it is public record. Mr. Artiss stated that it shouldn't matter about the building shape because these are quite expensive, and he understands that they have a major capital Project with the Justice Center/Jail and asked that the board keep their Justice Center Uptown. Mr. Artiss stated that they could put a Sally port underneath a two-story building where the jail inmates could come in, and then they could be housed directly across the street from the old courthouse if they needed an extra courtroom. Mr. Artiss said energy is a concern and we should be concerned with climate change and go green with the most efficient, energy cost building and he is sure that many grants are out there to help with this expense. Mr. Artiss stated that the cost of energy is 80% higher now. Mr. Artiss stated that most concerns are over the location and most people want it at the courthouse square. Mr. Artiss stated he still believes that you can go down the slope, down the hill, to Ford St. and there is no reason to worry about the wastewater because it would be gravity flow to the creek. Mr. Artiss asked the board to consider his requests.
10. Chairman Nelms asks Sanitation Director Gavin Colvard to speak. Director Colvard stated that our new Kenworth trucks will be here on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Director Colvard stated that he received a complaint about the Brooks Cove Dumpster site and this site will need to be cleaned up but not in the summer months due to snakes. Director Colvard stated that he is aware that the bears are dragging the garbage from the cans and realizes that the board cannot control that situation. Interim County Manager Crisp stated that Travel and Tourism Director Daniel Allison asks that this area be cleaned for an upcoming car commercial. Commissioner Orr stated that they were delighted that this area was chosen to showcase this commercial in Graham County and realizes that this can be a challenge to clean up in the summer months and Orr asks if the Forest Service helped with any of the cleanup. Director Covered stated no, that is entirely up to the county.

Commissioner Eller stated that we have a contract with Forest Service regarding the dumpster sites and they do plan to clean up the sites, but they cannot control the damage caused by the bears. The board asked that Director Colvard get more information on the commercial and see if we can get some type of equipment to borrow like we did last time for the clean up prior to the commercial being done.

11. Commissioner Cody stated that he had gone to the cemetery building for a meeting and the culvert that is in between Dispatch, Transit and the Cemetery Building needs to be fixed. Commissioner Cody stated that he is afraid that someone is going to run their car off into this culvert and we would be responsible.
12. Commissioner Orr stated that they have (13) lots located on Moose Branch for sale by the Rural Development Authority and the name of the development is Azalea Hills. Commissioner Orr stated that this was made possible by donations and from grants. Commissioner Orr stated that they are selling lots (15, 16, and 17) and they are not all flat, but the sizes range from 1/3 acre to 1 3/4 acre with paved driveways and guardrails are being put up. Commissioner Orr stated that the area is going to be bush hogged and reseeded and they're in the process of getting all that wrapped up. Commissioner Orr stated that the Rural Development Authority meets on Wednesday's, and they will be getting an ordinance of the covenants to be recorded.
13. Chairman Nelms asks Stacy Carpenter, Finance Director, to give the financial report. Director Carpenter stated that the county ended the month of June with a \$6,477,088.38 cash balance and as of the end of July, we have \$6,268,940.10. Director Carpenter gave the totals for the Special accounts and those are:
  - a. Capital projects \$3,274,404.18.
  - b. School capital project \$119,156.90.
  - c. American Rescue Plan Act \$849,415.24.
  - d. SCIF grant for the courthouse \$4,925,368.02.

Director Carpenter stated the earnings on the NCMT accounts are \$29,809.11 year to date.

14. Director Carpenter stated that our current year tax collected is \$809,691.94 and our prior year tax collected is \$26,051.76 for a total of \$835,745.30. Director Carpenter stated that our DMV had not come in at this time and she would report at the next meeting. Director Carpenter stated that our tax collection rate is 9.07% and we ended the year with a 97.06% collection rate.
15. Director Carpenter stated that the revenues for the month of July were \$330,715.02 and the expenditures were \$1,708,168.32 for a deficit of \$1,377,453.30.
16. Director Carpenter stated that our sales tax collection was \$247,728.55. Director Carpenter stated that our quarter cent collection for the school portion is \$123,881.44 and we have seen a growth of 7.2%. Director Carpenter stated that the transferred amount to the Capital projects fund is \$1,014,823.53 and we have \$65,159.94 that will be transferred into the account giving the total balance \$3,339,564.12 in our capital projects account.
17. Chairman Nelms asked for the project manager report. Manager Crisp stated that she had presented the project list for the board's review and if you have any questions to please let them know.
18. Chairman Nelms asks for public comment. Nathan Stewart, a resident of Graham County, stated that this Board of Commissioners was nothing but robbers and thieves, robbing people and his wife has breast cancer, and they can't pay taxes and doctor bills and it's a disgrace to raise the taxes at the level they are. Mr. Stewart stated that the Democrat Party never stooped this low and it's not fair and this board can beat this, and you know you can. Mr. Stewart stated that he deeded his property over to his daughter, but he has a life estate and just because his property is beside Snowbird Creek is no reason for the taxes to go up in the amount that they did. Chairman Nelms stated that they will be scheduling a special meeting to discuss the reevaluation. Chairman Nelms stated that there is a very specific way that they must do the revaluation by law and if there is something that can be done, they will do it but if not, they are bound by statutes. by the North Carolina Department of Revenue. Chairman Nelms stated that some taxes went up and some taxes went down. Commissioner Orr stated that there are state laws on how we tax the land, and we must follow that law on the appraisals but if there are reasons why the taxes could be decreased, they will be glad to help. Mr. Stewart stated that he's worked all his life and the people of Graham County have worked hard all their life and he's a 72-year-old man that's been done wrong. Chairman Nelms stated that if they can do something, they will change it, but they must do it by the law. Director Carpenter stated that they collected 97.07% in taxes last year and have an outstanding balance of overdue taxes of \$600,000.00. Chairman Nelms stated that we are bound by law every four years to have a revaluation and it is outrageous at the prices some of the properties are being sold for, but this board loves this county, and we do the best that we can for our citizens. Jack Gross, a member of the audience asked that the board go to the legislature in North Carolina and ask for a homestead act. Mr. Gross stated that people are spending unreal amounts of money purchasing our properties but with the homestead act this would lock in the value where you could only increase by 3% per year for full-time residents. Mr.

Gross stated that we have good representatives in North Carolina at this time and he understands that this has hurt businesses, and this has hurt people, but the board is in a no-win situation, and he has done his research and what the board is saying is the truth. Connie Gross stated that she appreciated the board, and they are in a tough situation. Miss Gross stated that Graham County Commissioners are wonderful, and they do listen.

19. Chairman Nelms stated that the board would now go into the discussion items. Chairman Nelms asked for approval of the releases in the amount of \$9982.98 and the discoveries of \$7684.27. Commissioner Eller made the motion to approve the releases and discoveries as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. The vote was unanimous.
20. Chairman Nelms stated that the board needed to approve the following polls.
  - a. The football stadium payment to John Ralph of \$8000.00 and to Asheville Fencing for \$22,000.
  - b. Accept the proposal from Native Forms Architectural for the Senior Center Kitchen.
  - c. Approve the HVAC unit for the Sheriff department.
  - d. Supply the school tech fees in the amount of \$11,865.00.
  - e. Approve to hire KBeasley for Deputy HR Director.Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve the polls as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
21. Chairman Nelms asks if the board wants to rebid the 2014 Van that did not receive the minimum bid of \$5000.00. Manager Crisp stated that the recommendation by the Transit Director Juanita Colvard was to lower the bid to \$4000.00. Commissioner Orr made the motion to lower the bid to \$4000.00 and rebid the 2014 Van. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
22. Chairman Nelms asks for the motion to rebid the commercial bay doors with the agreed upon price. Commissioner Eller made the motion to rebid the doors with the adjusted price. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
23. Chairman Nelms asks for a motion to reappoint Connie Gross to the library board. Commissioner Williams made the motion to reappoint. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
24. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to approve the amendment to the personnel policy on meal reimbursements. Manager Crisp stated that meals have gone up drastically since the personnel policy was written and asked that they be changed to the following rates: breakfast \$10, lunch \$15 and dinner \$25. Commissioner Orr made the motion to make the changes as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
25. Chairman Nelms asked for discussion on crypto mining and asks if the board wanted to hold a public hearing. The board agreed to table this discussion at this time.
26. Chairman Nelms asked for approval of the North Carolina Department of Transportation Letter regarding Corridor K. Commissioner Orr made the motion to approve of the letter. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
27. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to reappoint the following Health Advisory Board members: Jill Raymer, Meggan Smith, Aaron Stewart, and Katie Lynch. Commissioner Cody made the motion to reappoint the Health Advisory Board members as stated, Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
28. Chairman Nelms asks for the reappointment of the Road Naming Board Members Debbie Beasley and Marshall McClung. Commissioner Orr made the motion to reappoint as stated. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
29. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to reappoint Brian Stevens to the Transportation Advisory Board. Commissioner Orr made the motion to reappoint as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
30. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to appoint Donna Stevens to the Transportation Advisory Board as the Interim Health Director. Commissioner Williams made the motion to appoint as stated. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.
31. Chairman Nelms stated that the offices would be closed for Labor Day holiday on Monday, September 4th, but essential services would remain opened.
32. Chairman Nelms stated that the board are invited to the Appreciation by Athletic Programs on Friday, August the 18th at 5:30 p.m. at the Graham County School Central Office.
33. Chairman Nelms stated that the new organizational chart has been changed for Graham County and asked that the board review those changes.
34. Chairman Nelms stated that the NCACC Conference will be held August 24th through the 26th. Manager Crisp asks if any of the board members are going are planning to go. Chairman Nelms stated that he would attend.
35. Chairman Nelms asked for new or old business. No new or old business was discussed.
36. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to go into closed session under General Statutes 143-31811(a)(1)(3)(5)(6) for privileged or confidential information, attorney-client, privilege,

personnel, and contracts. Commissioner Eller made the motion to go into closed session as stated. Commissioner Cody seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.

37. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to go back into open session. Commissioner Orr made the motion to return to open session. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.

38. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to close three dumpster sites in three months. Chairman Nelms stated the sites that would remain open are:

- a. Hwy 28
- b. Recycling Center
- c. East Buffalo

Chairman Nelms stated that these sites will be gated and manned as of January 1, 2024.

Commissioner Williams made the motion to approve the plan as presented. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote called. Commissioner Nelms, Williams, Orr, and Cody, voted yes.

Commissioner Eller voted no. Motion carried four to one.

39. Chairman Nelms asked for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Williams made the motion. Commissioner Orr seconded this motion. Vote was unanimous.

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Jacob Nelms, Chairman

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Natasha Williams, Vice-Chair

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Lynn Cody, Member

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Keith Eller, Member

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Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST:

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Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board