

The Graham County Board of Commissioners held a public meeting Monday, February 10, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. to have an open discussion on the possible sites for the Justice Center in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board was present.

1. Chair Smith called the meeting to order and stated that this is an open meeting to discuss the possible sites for the Justice Center.
2. Chair Smith thanked the public for attending the meeting and gave a background of why the board is in the position of building a new Justice Center. Chair Smith stated that the board wanted public opinion on where they felt the best location would be.
3. Vice-Chairman Cody stated that the prices have skyrocketed, and the board needed to decide what the best path is for the taxpayers. Vice-Chairman Cody wants to do the project in phases so the impact to the taxes is kept as low as possible. Vice-Chairman Cody stated that the board did plan to renovate the existing courthouse and move administration back into the courthouse after the Justice Center is built. Vice-Chairman Cody stated that the county wanted something that would last but not a Taj-Mahal.
4. Member Natasha Williams stated that the board must do some things now instead of later and they do have viable options but wanted the public's input to make the best choice that will have the least impact on our tax rate.
5. Member Connie Orr stated that she wanted to know what the public wanted and with the good Lord's help they must fulfill the requirement to build the Justice Center, something that they have been ordered by a judge to do. Member Orr stated that they have looked at several properties and they want what is best for most of the citizens and asks that everyone feel free to speak and give their opinions.
6. Chair Smith thanked everyone for attending and stated that her vote would be what is best for the taxpayers and stated that she wanted to know which site the public wanted to choose. Chair Smith asks Project Manager Jason Marino to give the pros and cons of the sites.
7. PM Marino gave a brief overview of the (14) sites that the county has looked at and those were:
 - a. Ford Street
 - b. West Fort Hill
 - c. Stanley Plant
 - d. South Main
 - e. East Main
 - f. Tallulah Road #1
 - g. Tallulah Road #2
 - h. P and J Property
 - i. Tallulah Road – Phillips
 - j. Knight Street
 - k. Knight Street Alternative
8. The board discussed the properties and the land sites. Sheriff Hoxit asks if the P and J Property that the county owns would be an option or are their plans for that development. Thomas Menard, Recreation Director, stated that he has been clearing up a new AG Center but if the board decides to go on another route, he will go in that direction. Sheriff Hoxit stated that the county already owns that property. Commissioner Williams stated that there are plans for that.
9. Robert Adams stated the county has youth practices for all sports in this area and it needs to be left for the kids. Mr. Adams stated that we do not need to take away our kids and our future and a courthouse at this location would not be good. Commissioner Orr stated that the board is making comments and seeking the best options. Commissioner Orr stated that the county renovated the P and J Building for our DHHS Building at this location as well.
10. Amy Holder stated that the board discussed the land and the intent of the property that Thomas Menard has been working on. Ms. Holder stated that he has cleared up the property for an AG Center and Multi-Use Field and this can be used for birthday parties, weddings, receptions, etc. Ms. Holder stated that there is a wet spring where the multi-use field would be, and the Fitness Center is proposed to be across the road from the AG Center. Ms. Holder stated that all this work for recreation expansion would be for nothing and our 4H Kids need places to go that are safe and if the Justice Center is put on this property, they will not feel safe.

11. Thomas Menard stated that if he had to choose today, he would say no to the P and J Property for the Justice Center.
12. Sheriff Hoxit stated that at the end of the day we must buy property and feels that the parents needed to be asked how they feel about the center being located near where the kids practice.
13. Robert Adams stated that we want the Justice Center, and we need one, but we have needs for our kids and this site is perfect for a horse arena. Mr. Adams stated that he is not against people who mess up, but our kids deserve a place to go, and our taxes are going up anyway and he understands things going up but asks that the board purchase the Stanley building.
14. Randy Collins stated that his office has petitioned for one half million dollars for a multi-facet facility which will draw people from other communities to come here. Mr. Collins stated that other counties have AG Centers, and they host a lot of stuff, and he realizes that we do need a Justice Center but not on this property.
15. A gentleman stated that he was told the Stanley ground was bad and 90% of it had to be hauled off for two or three months.
16. JJ Odom asks if the Phillips Family agreed to sell the airport property to the county with the owner financing for and kids' needs.
17. PM Marino stated that the Adams/Cody site is a nice-looking site, and the site construction is up to 3 ¼ million.
18. PM Marino stated that the Collins Property on Old Tallulah Road is too steep, and the construction cost is \$10M.
19. PM Marino stated that the West Fort Hill site has a steep grade, and a retaining wall will be necessary that will exceed eighty feet.
20. PM Marino stated that the Cody Property on Old Tallulah Road lays well but is in the flood zone, but the ingress/egress is on a very narrow road.
21. PM Marino stated that the P and J Property is county owned, and the board can save money with parking. PM Marino stated that the site construction costs are around \$2M.
22. Robert Adams stated that he thought the county had plans for the P and J Property for our kids and we do not want anything to do with the court system being near this property. Commissioner Orr stated that the county renovated the building and our DHHS is located at this property as well. Robert Adams stated that we sure did not need our DSS kids looking at a jail where their parents may be.
23. Amy Holder stated that the board had previous discussion on the intent of the P and J Property.
24. Thomas Menard, Recreation Director, stated that he has been clearing the bottom portion of the property for an AG Center that can be used for revivals, wedding events, along with a multi-use field that can allow for cheerleading practices, etc. Director Menard stated that the Fitness Center will be located directly across the road, and we are in the middle of an active grant for the event center. Director Menard stated that the property is to expand recreation, and we are a small county, but we will be helping our kids especially these kids that do not play sports. Director Menard stated that they will have a safe place to go and have fun, lots of kids in the county cannot afford to go to the beach and if we obtain the airport property our kids will have the safest place to go in the entire county. Director Menard stated that his vote is not to the Justice Center being located at this property.
25. Sheriff Brad Hoxit stated that at the end of the day my gut is the buy property, but he questions as a parent how you feel about having practices near the Justice Center, this would be a very safe place to go with the Sheriff's Department located on this property. Sheriff Hoxit stated that this is not a bad site, and they would only be using one part of the property.
26. Amber Benton stated that the DHHS would have to pass the Justice Center and the kids in their custody would have to see this building every time they pass, and it will remind them of the bad times.
27. Director Menard stated that he has been working very hard on the grading for this site but at the end of the day, whatever the commissioners decide, he will do.
28. Robert Adams stated that we want and need a Justice Center, but we need something for our kids and this site is perfect for a horse arena. Robert Adams stated that his kids did not deserve to pass by a jail to go play. Mr. Adams stated that the taxes are going up anyway and he thinks the county should take the Stanley property. Mr. Adams stated that he would help them, he has equipment and so do others in this county, they need to use residents to clear up these properties. Mr. Adams stated that they have already applied for grants for the AG Center, and this leaves Thomas Menard in a tough spot.
29. Randy Collins stated that they have petitioned for a one half million-dollar grant for a multi-faceted facility, and they can host rodeos, and other great things for the community. Mr. Collins stated that we do need a Justice Center.

30. JJ Odom stated that the board needed to offer Stanley \$40,000.00 per acre and then the county will have a place, and our kids can keep the P and J Property. Mr. Odom stated that Stanley has water and sewer already. Chair Smith stated that we did make an offer on Stanley property and hope that we can purchase it.
31. JJ Odom stated that he talked to Sheriff Hoxit and told him that the P and J Property needed to be kept for the kids, community group functions and stated that he wanted the kids up there.
32. Director Menard stated that he is there all the time and if the Justice Center were to be built on the P and J Property the State would have to build a new road.
33. Tammy Holloway, Clerk of Superior Court stated that we needed to keep the HUB of the county in the town limits, and we have the prettiest building, and we love our community. Clerk Holloway stated that she spoke with Judge Sellers and Judge Davis, and they know that we cannot afford a facility the size of Haywood County, but we need to try and keep the location in the town. Clerk Holloway stated that if we take the business out of town our town will die.
34. Nikki Stewart stated that she looked up information regarding our economy and our county is 53% poverty and this was an eye opener for her because of the cost that will be associated with this Justice Center. Ms. Stewart stated that the Justice Center and the AG Center are both needed but the one can benefit our kids over the other and asks that we step back and ask if we can put a price on our kids and asks for a show of hands who is for or against the Justice Center being located at the P and J property. Ms. Stewart stated that our jobs are super important, but this country has nothing for kids to do that are not involved in sports and it is not the kids' fault so please do not take this away from them.
35. Clerk Holloway asks about the Ward property on the bypass.
36. One member of the audience stated that in Texas they used tents for jails and think we should do that.
37. Commissioner Orr stated that we need to build soon.
38. Clerk Holloway asks if the school was completely out of the question, can we negotiate, can we do anything to get the school to reconsider.
39. Chair Smith stated that we will look at all the options.
40. Amber Benton stated that the board needed to take the Tallulah site off the table and try to use some part of downtown.
41. Chair Smith stated that they have been looking at every possible site in Town.
42. Amber Benton stated that growth and connectivity face lots of challenges here and we need an attraction to draw people to our community.
43. Director Smith stated that she wanted this meeting to allow our residents to ask questions, our children need a safe place to play, and she is trying to locate the most cost-efficient location.
44. Robert Adams stated that his kids are the most important thing to him in this whole world and they are more important than paying extra taxes.
45. Most of the people were saying to keep the center in Town.
46. Cody George, Chief Deputy stated that we need a (75) bed jail, the county paid over \$336,000.00 for inmates housing last year and we could bring in revenue if we have our own jail. Chief George stated that he has total respect for keeping the kids in mind.
47. Sheriff Hoxit stated that he is 100% for kids but also for a jail to replace the 100-year-old one that we now have. Sheriff Hoxit stated that he did not agree with not using the P and J property.
48. Chair Smith made a motion to take the P and J Property off the table for anything other than recreation expansion. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.
49. Commissioner Williams stated that the P and J Property is not a fit for the Justice Center and believes that it is feasible for recreation expansion, and she would like to see a poll done to hear from the people on the remaining sites.
50. Editor Kevin Hensley asks that PM Marino send to the overhead slides, and he will be glad to do the poll in the paper.
51. Commissioner Orr made the motion to adjourn. Commissioner Williams seconded this motion. Vote unanimous.

Signature page for Public Hearing February 10, 2025

Meggan Smith, Chair, Graham County Commissioner

Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Natasha Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board