

Grayson County Board of Supervisors  
Budget Work Session  
March 2, 2023 – 3:00 p.m.

Supervisor Hash called the meeting to order.

Supervisor Fant made the motion to approve the agenda; duly seconded by Supervisor Ivey.  
Motion carried 5-0.

Michelle Pridgen, Director, Grayson LandCare, gave the following presentation and highlights of all their projects:

- Independence Elementary School Garden continues to grow with support of principal Lauren Raper who added a hydroponic unit to the existing indoor tower/raised bed gardens. Indoor gardens are placed at the entrance to the school allowing all students/visitors to see them upon entry. Students won a blue ribbon in the Grayson County Fair with a school grown pumpkin.
- Food Independence – provided an average of 276 boxes to 252 households totaling 559 people per month with an increase to 350-400 boxes for the holidays. This represents about 10,000-12,000 pounds of food provided through drive-thru distribution at the pantry and 2 community-based delivery programs for home-bound and isolated households. The award of a Twin County Community Foundation grant to purchase additional local food will help meet the 50% increase in demand over 2021, in spite of higher food costs and reduced corporate food donations.
- Free Market – averaged 54 visitors a day, with 10 bringing used items and 43 taking items. Monthly donations of ~\$400 help pay for utilities; and they served agency clients needing household goods, using COVID funds to purchase new bedding, pillows, and towels. They continue to build the inventory of medical equipment and lend it to those in need. A new partnership with Walmart to receive excessed items diverts a large amount of material from the landfill. The free Christmas Shop offers community members, especially children, a free chance to find gifts for family and friends.
- Farmers Market – opened the first Friday in May with 31 vendors – 10 new ones. Had 3 young vendors and the CATE Culinary class also sold at the Market. The GCHS Ag classes helped with the Cider Pressing. Independence Elementary School students participated in the Kids Day and had a display of their projects. The Market celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> year, averaging 23 vendors and 150 customers per Market and hosted a full slate of events/festivals for the first time since 2019.
- The Permaculture Group continued to expand the garden at Church of the Good Shepherd – growing and donating sweet potatoes, winter squash and field peas to Food Independence and other institutions. They also donated plants to 2 new public gardens.
- The Grayson County Seed Library, a joint project with the Wythe-Grayson Library in Independence, hosted 2 workshops and prepared/distributed over 300 seed packets.

- Grayson LandCare celebrated 15 years of serving the community during the annual meeting and service auction held at Cox's Chapel Community Center. \$7,000 in memberships and bids was raised with over 80 members and friends attending.
- Farmers Market is aligning with specific areas of the Grayson County Comprehensive Plan in education, the economy agriculture/forestry, public services, health/wellness and tourism. In addition, 148 volunteers donated 4,780 hours in 2022 – per the Independent Sector Resources, volunteer hours are currently valued at \$29.95 which totals \$143,161. Each dollar of the \$5,000 received from the County in 2022 is effectively multiplied 228 times in the community.
- Plans for 2023 funding include:
  - \$2,000 to support Food Independence to meet the increasing need for food assistance as SNAP benefits are decreased with continued pressure from inflation
  - \$1,000 to the Permaculture Garden to host workshops for the community
  - \$1,000 to the school garden for additional outdoor growing beds, tools/gloves suited for small hands
  - \$500 for supplies for the River Cleanup and a new litter initiative
  - \$350 to the Independence Farmers Market to host cooking demonstrations at the Market
  - Engage in joint advertising campaigns with Tourism and transition to a mobile friendly online sale platform
  - \$150 to the Free Market for new household items for distribution to community partners and to purchase a scale for use in estimating weight of items diverted from the landfill
- Partnering with Department of Social Services and women's shelter
- Farmers Market is a program under Grayson LandCare – other organizations operate under their 501C3 status – Timber Framers operated under Grayson LandCare –
- Farmers Market presented a fixed price contract to the Town of Independence based on the government rate per diem for 3 meals per day for approximately 60 Timber Framers workers plus staff (70 total) and the \$33,000 was a fixed price offered to the Town; provided meals at the GATE Center; purchased some hard goods to do some cooking with. The agreement with Town was what funds was left over would go to them – there is still an outstanding charge for a bronze plaque listing each person who contributed; \$5,000 for 4 chefs; had approximately \$10,000 left over. Contract with Timber Framers would show what they are responsible for – Farmers Market was involved in Farmers Feeding Framers with the Town. Mr. Walters, Town Manager, signed the contract.
- GATE Center commercial kitchen is unique to Virginia – Virginia has very broad laws so her vendors can fix from their own kitchens – local food promotion grants are out now and because the vendors don't really have a need to use the commercial kitchen – would like to do an incentive to promote the usage of the commercial kitchen - the local food promotion grants could possibly help with this
- Requesting \$5,000 in funding for FY24

- Budget work session – Goals & Objectives

Mr. Boyer noted that goals and objectives are important – priority is key – set good priorities. Need to (1) understand the situation, (2) determine goals and objectives, and (3) plan, prep, review and approve, (4) execute. Goals & objectives – communications (infrastructure), childcare and housing. Discussion took place regarding the goals & objectives to make sure staff is on the same page as the Board. Mrs. Gayheart noted we have spent out for police cars, 2 garbage trucks and mostly equipment type purchases – also a rapid response vehicle will be coming shortly – we can encumber and pay later if needed – we have approximately \$2M left in ARPA funds which have to be encumbered by the end of calendar year 2024 and spent by end of year 2026 – currently we have encumbered approximately \$1.2M; with \$1.2M left and out of that amount, \$1M would go toward communication infrastructure and \$200,000 for child care – total amount of ARPA funds is \$3.4M. Mr. Boyer handed out examples from other localities to get an idea on what would work for the Board (high level points) along with a tentative goals and objectives from staff – staff will take the Boards suggestions and work it up:

- Communications (Broadband (defined by speed – not by technology)(Emergency Communications) (Cellular/mobile/paging)
- Encourage Economic Growth (childcare)
- Encourage Community Development (housing
- Maintain the County’s fiscal wellbeing (fund balance)

Discussion took place regarding: paging capabilities as well as 5G data communications - Point lookout tower has issues – western end of county (area most difficult to communicate), additional infrastructure is needed to install additional equipment– need to think about investing in the infrastructure side – purchasing/renting land would be determined on the number of towers needed – actual need has to be determined – funding is out there for towers – our budget can’t solve the complete communications issues – need to keep in mind what we can do with our budget – point lookout tower needs to be addressed sooner rather than later – communication is a priority for the county – each year 2 cents on the levy is being put in the broadband “pot” (\$195,000 per penny) with the balance at approximately \$600,000 but some has been spent on expenditures – radio communications in the western ends inhibits the responders, they at least need a short term fix – 9-1-1 system has completed a study and it’s possible some things could be picked out to help Grayson – currently our county has a low debt – lay out priorities, figure in day-to-day operations, then look at revenues vs expenses, then funding decisions can be made – childcare is a concern but not a budgetary issue – look at incentives to attract childcare employers – CIP wellness center – \$100,000 grant the county received, we partnered with rooftop, we sub granted the money to them (mixed delivery), program started here in Independence, had to move because head start needed the complete building, so they moved to Galax, and now they have to move again - and it’s imperative another building is found our we’ll have to turn the money back in (10-15 children would be affected) – look at goals/priorities from last year to see if we are on track – need to get them more solidified – staff needs to come up with a draft such as incentives for volunteers for fire/rescue – keep taxes level – what services could be trimmed to keep taxes level – look at what we give to the different agencies and do

we have money left over to do other things - lottery money is being banked now even though we don't know how much we will receive – building security (very unsecure building) – list of new revenues the county will be receiving (opioid/tribal/ARPA, etc) – personal property tax on vehicles (actual numbers are not know yet) and possibly do away with the fee – school and future educational needs of the county (effort needs to be taken on this – CATE Center welding bays-possibly help them aside from normal school budget) – incentives for volunteers along with recruitment/retention (remove car fee ordinance would need to be rewritten) – grant dollars would need to be sustained – incentives are being worked on and would have to be maintained by the Emergency Services Commission – lack of housing for our seniors, need to help solve this problem (Sparta, NC has a new one, The Landing at Chestnut Creek) – Air BnB's are increasing in the area which takes a house off the market, may need to take another look at the tourism incentive program – the school is receiving approximately \$500,000 (grant) from the Department of Education, looking to ask for these funds be rolled over to next year – School asked for \$375,000 again this year, put \$780,000 above the ask into a capital improvement plan for school; take \$375,000 out of the \$500,000 they will receive and let the county put in \$1.1M in the CIP this year by a show of good faith, makes sense to offset additional money coming; will primarily spend the \$500,000 on staff wages and benefits – addition at Independence Elementary/Highlands School/Fries School – possibly look at Highlands School regarding childcare – attempt to address the whole need in the county and look at all sources.

Supervisor Ivey departed the meeting at 4:40 p.m.

Mrs. Gayheart reviewed the goals: communication (umbrella); broadband/cellular/paging – short term from that, work ahead of federal communications plan and pre-build sites for western end (understand needs of infrastructure); base budget on what is controlled and what to do with other dollars; security of the building (courthouse); look at doing away with the \$25 vehicle tax fee; establishing a work group discussion with the county and school personnel to determine future education; support CATE Center independently from the school system; recruitment/retention of volunteers and incentives.

Supervisor Hash noted that the next meeting would be the regular board meeting on March 9, 2023.

Discussion took place regarding real estate and personal property taxes and sharing the burden evenly.

Adjourn

Supervisor Fant made the motion to adjourn; duly seconded by Supervisor Belton. Motion carried 4-0.