

**Presentation of Special Needs Petition for
Special Need Determination for an ESRD dialysis facility with five stations,
Proposed *2017 State Medical Facilities Plan***

Raleigh, July 28, 2016

Presented by:

Nancy Lane

on behalf of

Graham County Board of Commissioners

Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Lane, and I am here at the request of the Graham County Board of Commissioners. The young person assigned to this task left for another job without transferring his responsibilities and the county was unable to rearrange schedules to make the 16-18 hour round trip to the remaining public hearings. Graham County is in Western North Carolina, on the Tennessee border, within the Appalachian Mountain chain where travel between counties can be difficult. Graham County has roughly nine thousand residents during the offseason and approximately twelve thousand during the six peak months of the year.

The Graham County Board of Commissioners is requesting that the *2017 State Medical Facilities Plan* include an adjusted need determination for a new End-Stage Renal Dialysis facility in Graham County with a minimum of five stations.

The reason for the request is access. In terms of total health, Graham County ranks 88th among the 100 North Carolina counties. The county ranks 96 out of the 100 counties in Years of Potential Life Lost before age 75 per 100,000 residents. Graham County is a rural county that faces many of the same health risks as other rural communities in North Carolina. However, Graham County's terrain adds particular challenges for a person who needs renal dialysis three days a week. Graham's Appalachian mountain location is great for the economy during the summer months, but devastating for travel during winter months. Long winding roads, steep banks, together with frequent ice, snow, rough terrain near many homes, and unpredictable weather patterns make for a deadly equation in the winter. This is

difficult for any person who must travel for healthcare services, but particularly difficult for a person on dialysis, who must travel 1.5 hours or more each way three days a week . For example, any resident of Robbinsville, Graham County, the county seat, must travel 74 miles, roundtrip, to the dialysis facility in Cherokee, North Carolina or 68 miles, roundtrip, to the facility in Murphy, North Carolina. The terrain and two lane roads make the trip close to an hour each way. Those are the two closest facilities; the other two in Waynesville or Sylva, North Carolina involve over a 100-mile roundtrip.

There are no dialysis stations in Graham County. Even with help from the Graham County Transportation program, the ordeal of a day spent going to and from dialysis and recovering from the process discourages many. When I was interviewing people last winter regarding health care issues, everyone mentioned dialysis: the nursing home, the emergency department, the Cherokee Tribal Council members, economic development board members, and others. The resources required to drive to distant ESRD dialysis facilities on a weekly basis is cumbersome enough for those caring for a friend or family member with ESRD, but imagine being a patient and having to make the drive while nauseous or in pain. With 14 people on station dialysis today, this is no longer a reasonable solution.

The semi-annual dialysis plan shows a deficit of three stations in Graham County. County transportation regularly carries five or six persons outside the county for dialysis every day. The Plan does not show need until the deficit reaches 10. The Plan assumes that 33 percent are on home dialysis. Graham residents have so many co-morbidities that only 12 percent, or two today, are on home dialysis.

Graham has no hospital and no urgent care. However, an eight-year planning effort has produced both space and a provider willing to open an urgent care facility in Robbinsville in cooperation with the County. Architect and county inspectors have reviewed that facility and determined that it could accommodate five or six dialysis stations easily. The combined service would offer substantial economies of scale. Robbinsville is the most densely populated area of Graham County.

Graham residents are determined and resourceful. They are tackling their top three health priorities: urgent care was first, dialysis was second and substance abuse treatment and counseling was next. Solutions for urgent care and substance abuse care are underway.

The County has initiated discussions with DaVita, one of the dialysis companies. It understands that one nephrology group in Asheville serves the whole western region. Officials are reaching out to others as well. A Georgia company serves North Carolina and Graham has been referred to them. Graham looks to Atlanta for some services now. With a need in the Plan, Graham can add to the appeal of the idea. Graham has learned that being proactive generates solutions. Graham County officials have also been in contact with a Georgia based group who are capable of providing nephrology coverage with a North Carolina licensed nephrologist. Graham County is also home to qualified nurses who would be delighted to end their long commute to work every day in order to provide the necessary coverage. Graham invites you to come any time, either to ride the Tail of the Dragon, the internationally famous 11-mile mountain road with 318 curves, to camp in its acres of national and state parks, to fish, or just to enjoy a little time off the grid. You will meet amazing and determined people who are committed to their county. Graham asks that you support it in this next step of reasonable health care access.

Thank you. I will be happy to entertain questions.



Tail of the Dragon

Date: July 22, 2016

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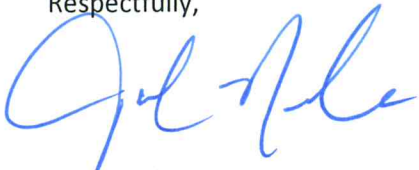
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From: Jacob Nelms, Chairman of the Graham County Board of Commissioners

Graham County gives full authority to Nancy Lane and her representatives to speak to anyone she deems necessary about the needs for a dialysis center in Graham County, North Carolina. She is also empowered to relay the steps Graham County has taken in procuring space for a dialysis center and any further information that she feels is pertinent to the situation.

Respectfully,



Jacob Nelms,

Graham County Commissioner, Board Chair

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