



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Washington County Commissioners Hear Update from Mayor Joe Grandy During Called, Emergency Session Emergency Workers Praised by Mayor, Commissioners

(Jonesborough, Tenn.) - With a State of Emergency in effect in Washington County, Tenn. due to the impact of Hurricane Helene on the region, the Washington County Commission met in emergency session Monday evening, September 30 at the George Jaynes Justice Center. Commissioners listened intently as Mayor Joe Grandy shared his story of how the hurricane unfolded in our region last Friday, September 27. He said that as of the meeting there were 17 unaccounted for individuals from Washington County and two persons confirmed dead.

Mayor Grandy Recap of Friday

Grandy said initially there were high winds and some trees down. The historic courthouse lost power at 11 am so he closed both it, the offices in Johnson City and the George Jaynes Justice Center.

He said the Nolichucky River reached flood stage. "It was 12 feet above normal and volume somewhere below 50,000 cubic feet of water. That is not atypical for that basin." He said that Friday morning they had not seen a lot of water rise and then, "All of a sudden, the river came up like a wall of water. The elevation went over 20 feet to 24 feet with velocity under 100,000 cubic feet per second; so twice what was expected."

Grandy declared a state of emergency in the county Friday afternoon and opened an emergency operations center (EOC). Then Governor Lee declared the state emergency. The next morning President Biden signed the federal emergency declaration enabling the county to receive both state and federal funds.

Grandy said TEMA engaged and teams went into action. Grandy thanked our emergency responders for their team effort. He called Evan Clyburn and Kat Latham "the

quarterbacks.” He thanked EMS Chief Dan Wheeley for his leadership not only of EMS but of swift water rescue teams.

He thanked the Sheriff’s Department, the Highway Department, Greg Matherly and the entire team at 9-1-1 who “received almost 1,000 calls on Friday alone, more than double the maximum of any previous day.” Almost all calls were answered within 15 seconds.

Grandy thanked the Johnson City Fire and Police, Schools Director Jerry Boyd and the school system where “schools became sanctuaries.” He thanked BrightRidge for working hard to restore power.

Grandy called Jonesborough Utilities Manager Kevin Brobeck, “talented and experienced,” as he handled the conservation of water.

Grandy recounted what it was like to learn that 7 bridge crossings were out. “I was shocked. There was no access to people on the other side; no power, no water, no access,” he said.

Grandy said community volunteers, including a construction company owner who brought bulldozers, backhoes and skid steers worked all night to rebuild Snapp bridge.

“The people were amazing. By Sunday morning, with the supervision of the Highway Dept. there was a road across there that provided another entrance.”

Grandy thanked Commissioner Marty Johnson who rallied his neighbors to help as bridge flaggers for the one lane bridge traffic.

He thanked the Mennonites and other volunteers for showing up and preparing food at South Central, even as many had been hard hit themselves.

He thanked Governor Lee, Sen. Blackburn, Sen. Hagerty and Congresswoman Harshbarger. “They have all been supportive. Representatives Tim Hicks and Rebecca Alexander, worked side by side.”

He said the United Way being fiduciary for this event. “United Way vowed to put 100% of dollars back in to people who have been impacted by the event.”

Emergency Workers Unified in Support of Community

Washington County/Johnson City EMS Chief Dan Wheeley said that search and rescue efforts started Thursday night in Bumpass Cove and Little Germany with “the moderate flood we were expecting. Then Friday at the event we deployed every resource...Johnson City has been by our side supporting us. We will continue search and rescue efforts. Debris piles have to be cleared and sifted through. They are wading through chest deep mud,” Wheeley said.

Washington County/ Johnson City Emergency Management Agency Director Evan Clyburn said a “coordinated effort to support search and rescue and recovery efforts” will be ongoing with the arrival of FEMA Tuesday. “The level of resiliency from those communities has been overwhelming,” Clyburn said. “The level of unity with first response agencies is unprecedented.”

To combat fatigue, teams are trading out 12-hour operational periods and resting at night.

"None of us expected the bridges to go away," said Limestone Fire Chief Tim Jaynes who walked the impacted area Monday, personally meeting with residents who have no means of communications.

Commissioner Marty Johnson, whose district was most impacted by the hurricane, thanked all of the emergency workers for their efforts.

Offices Closed October 4

County offices in both Jonesborough and Johnson City will be closed Friday, October 4 for electrical maintenance. They were originally scheduled to be closed for the now cancelled, Storytelling Festival.

The George Jaynes Justice Center, along with the highway and solid waste departments will be open.

All County committees will meet this month on October 10.

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WashingtonCounty to 38276.

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Photo Captions:

Washington County Commissioners heard an update from Mayor Grandy and Emergency workers during an emergency commission meeting September 30.

Photo 2:

Washington County Mayor Joe Grandy surveys the catastrophic damage near Bumpass Cove.