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HAMMOND

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East Carolina as pivotal in my development," he said.

When he enrolled at ECU, he was told he was one of 61 black students on campus. It would be a full three years before he shared the classroom with another black student.

Soon after arriving, Hammond and with nine other students, two of them black, were selected to be a part of the North Carolina Fellows Program, which encouraged students to become involved in campus leadership.

This program led him to become involved with groups, such as SOULS (Society of United Liberal Students). He eventually became involved in the Student Government Association, serving as secretary of external affairs. He also and became involved in the student judiciary, serving as assistant attorney general and a public defender for students.

His senior year, he was elected as ECU's first black senior class president.

One of the trails he helped blaze was for Alpha Phi Alpha to have the first black Greek chapter on campus.

"There were no [black] chapters at any of the predominately white schools in North Carolina, so we were a trailblazer for the whole state," Hammond said.



SYCAMORE HILL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Hammond preaches at Sycamore Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Greenville.

"However, it took over 13 months from the time we started to the chapter coming to fruition," he added.

"At the onset of integration, ECU implemented a policy that if you were receiving any kind of financial aid, you could not pledge a Greek organization."

That was a way of keeping black students out.

"The black students understood what that was about — it was about ensur-

ing that we did not come to campus and attempt to join the white fraternities and white sororities," he continued.

"I'm sure, like many students on campus, probably all the black students on campus were receiving some kind of financial aid. So, Dr. Andrew Best had to go through a series of meetings with President (Leo) Jenkins and the Trustees to finally get that rule revoked

— so that we could actually institute the chapter," he said. "This February marks 50 years the chapter was started."

Hammond had plans to attend law school in the fall after receiving his degree in history and political science in 1973. He said he was offered a job with the Campus Union and by the time he received a letter of acceptance to law school, he was too broke to go.

"I had a job offer to start June 1. At the end of June, I did what most poor people do — I went out and bought a new car, a new wardrobe and bought all the things I had not had. In a matter of about 24 hours, I was in debt. I was too far in debt to even think about going to law school."

Reflecting back over his life, he thinks it was divine intervention.

"I don't think God ever intended for me to go to law school. Ultimately ministry would be my calling," he said. "I started work at ECU in June of 1973, and I worked on campus until December of 1991."

In 1974 he married Ellen Patrick. The two have two children and are grandparents.

Hammond began working in the College Union as an undergraduate, then became program director, assistant director, and eventually associate director in Mendenhall Student Center. He also directed Minority Arts Programming for the

Minority Arts Committee in the 1970s.

"When I took the job at ECU I was probably was one of the first black professionals hired on staff," he said. "Though my job was specifically with students, I was sort of an ombudsman for the campus. Because black students came to me, and it was an opportunity for me to practice ministry as a counselor. At that time, we didn't have many black faces that students could turn to," he said.

Meanwhile, he continued his education, earning a master's in education in 1983, and a certificate of advanced studies from ECU in 1985. Later, he received a master of divinity degree from Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh. All the while, he preached at various churches and served bi-vocationally.

All the time working at ECU, he said he could not shake a gnawing feeling that he should be in ministry full-time. In 1991 he was asked to pastor full-time at Union Missionary Baptist Church in Durham.

"That was kind of an interesting experience for me," he said. "I went from being a part-time pastor in a rural setting to a full-time pastor in an urban setting," he said.

The church had about 1,000 when he accepted the position. Under his leadership, the church grew to over 8,000.

Union Baptist also part-

nered with University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School to start Global Scholars Academy, a K-8 school dedicated to providing education for at-risk youth in Durham's poorest communities.

He also served as the pastor-mentor at Duke University Divinity School.

In 2015, he returned to Pitt County in a move that surprised even him.

"I should have said at the outset, I never felt the need to leave Pitt County. But once I left, I did not feel the need to come back," he said.

That feeling began to change when he was asked to come back to Greenville to serve as interim pastor at Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church.

"The idea of coming back began to crystalize," he said. "During that period of time, I began to feel a sense of need to come back and that this was the place I would end up," he said.

"So it was an opportunity for me to apply the gifts and skill set that I had, and ultimately those were the gifts that were used extensively in ministry. In a sense, I have come full circle," said Hammond, who also served at Sycamore Hill Missionary Baptist.

"Sometimes when you are in a place, you don't realize how a place impacts you. You have to go another place in order to appreciate what you had," he added.

TAR RIVER

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people to watch for flood conditions as waterways continue rising and rain persists. Because the ground is still saturated from earlier rains, a flash flood watch remains in ef-

fect until tonight, the National Weather Service at Newport/Morehead City reported.

Pitt County is expected to receive between 1.5 inches to 2 inches of rain through today.

Roads and property near the river are prone to flooding including the

South Tar River Greenway, the city off-leash dog park, Town Common and parts of Mumford Road. The weather service advises that most of River Drive and the streets in Riverwalk Townhomes will likely flood.

It's expected water will surround homes when the

river reaches 20 feet. Portions of Pitt-Greenville Airport will also be inundated along with many acres of farmland.

The Greenville Public Works Department advised residents of River Drive, Benin Court and Derwent Court that sanitation crews are servicing

their neighborhoods today instead of Monday so city crews could avoid flooded streets.

Contentnea Creek at Hookerton is expected to exceed 16 feet, moderate flood stage, Saturday afternoon.

The weather service said at 16 feet property on Loop Road north of Hookerton

will be threatened by rising water. Several homes in northwest Greene County may be surrounded by water and N.C. 58 will likely be impassable heading into Wilson County.

People should never drive through flooded areas, the weather service said.

AUDIT

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Her report focused on the county's general fund, the portion of the budget associated with local tax revenue.

When fiscal year 2019-20 ended June 30, Pitt County's general fund revenue was \$154.65 million, a 4 percent increase over the previous fiscal year. Expenditures totaled \$147.62 million, a 6 percent increase over the previous fiscal year, she said.

Sixty-two percent of revenue was generated from property tax, 15 percent came from restricted intergovernmental revenues, 15 percent from other taxes and licenses, and other revenues made up 8 percent of the total.

Restricted intergovernmental revenues are state and federal dollars that must be allocated for certain expenses in social services and public health, Deputy County Manager/Chief Financial Officer Brian Barnett said.

On June 30, the county's available fund balance was

\$33.38 million, a \$4.47 million increase over the previous fiscal year.

Watts said the county's fund balance is now at 21.44 percent of the general fund budget. The previous year's fund balance was 19.61 percent.

"This will benefit the county when going for bond review," Barnett said in a later interview. "It is basically demonstrating the county's ability to live within its means, and the county's strong ability to pay any future debt payments, which can lead to lower interest payments, which save the county money in the long term."

Last month county staff recommended issuance of \$34 million in limited obligation bonds to pay for renovations at A.G. Cox Middle School and a solid waste compactor and to reimburse the county for its purchase of the Warren Farm Property for future economic development projects. It also would be used to refinance and get lower interest rates on earlier debt for the school system and Pitt Community College construction projects.

Refinancing the earlier debt is expected to save the county nearly \$109,000 yearly over an 11-year period, Barnett said in January.

Pitt County took in \$95.7 million in property tax during fiscal year 2019-20, a 7 percent increase that was due a 3.2-cent raise in the county tax rate, which brought it to 72.1-cents per \$100 valuation.

Revenue generated through other taxes and licenses was slightly more than \$23 million, Watts said,



CONTRIBUTED ILLUSTRATION/

An artist's rendering shows plans for renovating A.G. Cox Middle School in Winterville. Officials are discussing revisions to the plans.

at a 1 percent decrease.

While the last four months of the fiscal year, March-June, are when the coronavirus pandemic produced state-at-home orders in North Carolina, and saw dips in sale take revenues in April and May, it didn't negatively affect the county's budget, Barnett said because sale tax revenues between July 2019 and March exceeded expectations.

"We did not have to adjust budgets in the months of April and May of 2020 to

reflect lower sales tax revenues," Barnett said. "Sales taxes for fiscal year 2020 still exceeded budget, but did not exceed 2019 levels".

As for major expenditures in fiscal year 2019-21, \$48 million was allocated to education, both Pitt County Schools and Pitt Community College, a 3 percent increase.

Public safety was allocated \$36.8 million, a 4 percent increase.

Human services, public health and social services, was allocated \$39 million, a 1 percent increase.

Watts thanked Barnett, his staff and finance officials in other departments, saying they had been "wonderful" and delivered requested information in a timely fashion.

"We really enjoy Pitt County and hope to continue that working relationship," Watts said.

In other business on Monday, the commissioners also approved the following items:

■ Renaming the western section of Cheek Farm Road as Averette Farm Road.

■ Rezoning three parcels totaling 1.55 acres located on

the southeastern corner of the intersection of U.S. 264 East and Grimesland Bridge Road from rural residential to general commercial.

■ Rezoning nearly 2.2 acres of property located on the southern side of Worthington Road, west of its intersection with N.C. 43 South in the Hollywood Crossroads area from rural residential to general commercial.

■ Approved adding a clinical social worker position to the Pitt County Public Health Department's Baby Love Plus program. Elliott said no county funds were needed because the position is financed through state dollars.

■ Approved the request to purchase a new compactor for the solid waste and recycling department's transfer station for \$1.25 million, which is \$173,451 above the estimated cost.

■ Approved a budget amendment allowing the county to transfer \$904,956 from CARES Act funds to pay eligible salary expenses.

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GUC

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be installed using 8,000 of GUC's utility poles and the other million feet will be installed below ground.

Worrell said MetroNet's goal is to install 100,000 feet of cable a week.

MetroNet wants to use a process called "one touch make ready" which allows a third-party contractor to make spacing adjustments to existing communication lines so a new line can be added and safety guidelines maintained. In some instances it may require erecting new poles.

"Of course, as you can imagine, the other communication providers are resistant to that," Worrell said.

Four communication

companies currently use GUC poles; Centurylink, Suddenlink, Fibertech/Mobility and Spectrum/Time Warner.

Greenville also uses the poles for its municipal and public safety communications infrastructure as does the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

GUC wants to enact standards that will allow a third-party contractor to adjust and install lines under GUC's supervision, Worrell said. Part of that supervision will require approving the engineering designs and safety procedures for the project.

GUC General Manager/CEO Tony Cannon said that, given the size of the project and MetroNet's timeline, there are plans to rehire retired GUC em-

ployees to act as temporary construction inspectors, engineering personnel, utility locators and construction contractors to get poles ready. Cannon said retired employees are the best choice because they already are familiar with the system.

MetroNet plans to begin construction in April. Executives said last month that the company will begin connecting to customers in late August.

Construction update

GUC is upgrading its water treatment plant capacity from 22.5 million gallons daily to 32 million gallons daily.

"It is a very complex project out there, and what makes this project a little more challenging than most

is we have to continue to produce a consumable good for our customers," Cannon said.

The \$55-million project was partially funded with a \$40 million state loan at a 1.11% interest rate.

The project is divided between two contracts. The first involved building a 3 million-gallon ground storage tank which has been completed and is in service, said David Springer, assistant director of water resources.

The second contract, focused on upgrading the treatment plant, is underway.

"There is a lot of work going on in a relatively small area right next to our existing facilities," Springer said. Multiple utilities had to be moved to install

a new filter system. That included shutting down the plant to install a 30-inch water line.

Underground piping is installed and preparations are underway to pour the base slab of the super pulsator, a structure where chemicals are added and solids settle to the bottom of the pond. When completed, 10 million gallons of water will be treated daily, Springer said. Work is also underway on a clearwell pump station which will pump treated water into the ground storage tank.

A bulk chemical storage building is being built on the other side of the treatment plant.

"The bottom line is this project is on schedule and within budget. The contractor continues to make very

good progress despite all the wet weather we've been having," Springer said.

The completion date is October 2023.

Pay raise

GUC's board unanimously approved reinstating pay raises for its employees.

GUC put its market-rate adjustments and merit pay increases on hold when the new fiscal year began July 1 because of concerns about COVID-19's effects on revenue, Cannon said.

GUC's finances are in a good place, he said, so he recommended the board adopt a 2% increase that will follow the plan that the Greenville City Council adopted earlier this month: a 0.5% market-rate adjustment and 1.5% merit pay increase.