

**PITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
June 8, 1999**

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners met in a public hearing on Tuesday, June 8, 1999, at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Auditorium, 1717 West 5th Street, Pitt County Office Building, Greenville, North Carolina, with the following commissioners present:

Eugene James, Chairman
Glenn Bowen, Commissioner
Charles P. Gaskins, Commissioner
David Hammond, Commissioner
Thomas H. Johnson, Commissioner
Mark W. Owens, Jr., Commissioner
Jeffrey E. Savage, Vice Chairman
M. Theresa Shank, Commissioner
Beth B. Ward, Commissioner

Also present were:

Thomas B. Robinson, County Manager
JoAnne Burgdorff, County Attorney
Susan J. Banks, Clerk to the Board
Arlen Holt, PIO and Cable Coordinator
John K. Bulow, Assistant Manager
Melonie Bryan, Director of Financial Services

Call to Order and welcome by Chairman James.

The Invocation was given by Commissioner Savage.
The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Johnson.

Chairman James called for approval of the agenda.

UPON MOTION by Commissioner Hammond, seconded by Commissioner Shank, the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

Manager Comments

Mr. Robinson welcomed the citizens. He made overview comments concerning the proposed budget. He stated that the proposed budget has an increase of 4.03% over the current year's budget. With the proposed budget, the tax rate will remain at 68 cents. He noted the Board of Commissioners' priorities being quality of education, growth management, revenue generation and public transportation.

Other major initiatives included in the coming year's work program are as follows:

- Complete Phase I of courthouse project (annex construction)
- Complete Phase II courthouse plans, implement relocation plan, bid and begin renovation work on 1915 and 1965 structures
- Design and construct animal shelter at transfer station site and develop animal control ordinance and program for county
- Activate EMS Council to study need for paid EMS workers to supplement volunteer system and identify best way to cover cost
- Complete Y2K software and hardware updates
- Finalize Y2K emergency preparedness planning

- Divide ten largest voter precincts to improve elections and management and efficiency, and begin 10 year federal mandated update of election districts
- Conduct pay and classification study
- Perform a major update to County Personnel Ordinance
- Improve development of departmental goal and objective setting and benchmarking for results
- Work with Community College to refine their capital needs and identify sources of funding
- Work with Community College to identify land, sources of funding, and begin Phase I construction of firing range and defensive driving course
- Complete fiber optic network of all County buildings, and with City of Greenville, Greenville Utilities, East Carolina University, and Pitt County Memorial Hospital facilities.
- Identify site and perform design work for home for Pitt County Community Schools and Recreation program
- Increase IV-D child support collections through the hiring of five new case workers and a Sheriff's deputy
- Work with State and local Mental Health Area Program to improve program management, fiscal operations, and accountability
- Work with our Legislative delegation, the State and the County Commissioners' Association to increase State funding to area mental health program
- Implement County Page in *The Daily Reflector* and begin TV coverage of Board meetings

Mr. Robinson said that there is a 5.8% increase in the budget for education for current expense and this raises the per pupil allocation (PPA) from \$976 to \$917. He explained how the County currently funds the schools and also that the County provides free rent and utilities for school administration and free inspection of existing and new schools; services valued at over \$230,000 annually. He stated that the County will be appropriating \$48 million for schools over the next five years for capital outlay. One cent on the property tax equals \$550,000 and the Board of Commissioners would need to appropriate an additional 4 cents on the tax rate to fully fund their requests.

Chairman James opened the public hearing and stated to the public that there is a three minute time limit on each speaker. He asked the Commissioners to save their comments until later.

Speakers -

Donna Whitley - representing PTA Council. A vision for excellent education. 3 areas for increase are better teacher pay and environment; more programs for early childhood; more vocational and technical training.

Eric Everette - Dupont employee, chose to live in Greenville because of Pitt County schools. Rose High School is the best in the area, but other schools are lacking. Because of lack of funding on remediation, his wife volunteers to read to children in schools. Family members are teachers and he has seen effects of teacher supplements. Dupont tries to attract quality people. He stated that the educational bar needs to be raised because the children will need higher skills. The schools have exemplary performance but are still behind the national average. He requested the Board fund the \$3 million requested by the Schools.

Glorestine Brown - PTA president at one of the schools. We are in support of the budget but concerned about teacher and principal supplements. She said they should be treated fairly. New additional funds are needed for remediation as well as for tutors, remediation teachers, etc.

Lee Armstrong - Human Resources Administrator at local company - Mr. Armstrong stated that from a business perspective, education is the number one priority. They need people who can come into the workforce with the proper skills. He congratulated the Board on education being

the number one priority. He asked that they work to find ways to fund this program. He said that we do not want to be just average in Pitt County but will rise to the top with good education.

Farah Lisa Whitley-Sebti - graduated from ECU, feels strongly about salary being offered to teachers. She said her favorite teacher in high school worked several jobs. Good teachers should be compensated and appreciated.

Donna Moore - employed with School system since January 1968. She said all things have been increased including staffing. She noted that there will continue to be a need for new teachers. She stated that young teachers are looking outside of Pitt County because of higher supplements in other areas. She stated that Pitt County needs an attractive package to recruit teachers. She said that Pitt County has the ability to fully fund the schools request.

Paul Hager - Elmhurst PTA representative - in favor of increasing budget for schools. He said that they are missing out on essentials at Elmhurst. He stated that he bought soap, ink, paper, books and other supplies this past year. He said that they deserve more money.

Larry Carnes - Parents for Public Schools and has two children in schools. He expressed his support of funding the entire \$3 million request for schools. He stated that quality funding was needed for quality education. He encouraged the Board to understand the needs in the community schools and to understand the long range plan for their schools. He stated his appreciation for the efforts of the Board. Mr. Carnes noted that the \$540,000 request seemed to be a direct response to the open table forum. He also asked for funding of the \$10 fees per student which causes disparity in the schools. He said it could mean better technology in schools and he supported increased funding for a Remediation Center. He asked the Board to grant \$2.9 million in its entirety.

Bill Brown - volunteer rescue, captain of Eastern Pines Rescue, expressed concern about the distribution of funds. He said that he understood that there is a proposal for a change in funding. He stated that there will be three rescue squads that will not get an increase which are Ayden, Bell Arthur and Eastern Pines because they all have a tax district. He said their citizens are taxpayers also and they should receive their fair share.

Ervin Hardee - Chairman of Eastern Pines Rescue Squad, stated that they have tried to keep the tax rate low with help of County funding. He asked that the Board not penalize the rescue squads that took initiative to get tax revenue for support.

Susan Foreman said that she agreed with the point of not aiming at mediocrity for the Schools. She said she believes that Pitt County's education, mental health, and health services should be the shining star in the east. She stated that she did not mind if her taxes were raised for improved education. She informed the Board that a publication called the Public School Forum has a study on funding public education. She said that the document stated that principal number one is to recognize that money does matter in education because you get what you pay for. She asked that the Board of Commissioners go to the School Board when there is a problem and maintain a good dialogue.

Reginald Watson - an educator, expressed his support for more funding for education. He stated the County should move from funding \$1 million to \$3 million. He stated that it was unfair the way top officials are paid versus the teachers. Teaching is becoming more dangerous. People are being discouraged from going into the profession. Pitt County should downsize and look into alternative funding. He recommended that an exploratory committee be created to look into additional funding for education and other areas. He also advocated funding for a race advisory council. He asked the Board to allocate a small stipend to do research on how other counties have handled this situation.

Wanda Pierce - mother of a 4th grade daughter in the exceptional children program. She said the children are not being challenged. She stated that the learning disability teachers do not have the supplies they need and consequently, the teachers could not meet the needs of the children. She said she took part in planning for her child's education, taking into account what the County could afford, but not what the child needs. She said every child has a legal right to quality education and it should be if proper funding had been available. She stated that as elected officials every child is your responsibility. She stated that by State law she could request reimbursement through the schools for her expenses incurred but hasn't, because the needs are so great in the schools. She requested the Board fund the full \$2.9 million.

Keith Cooper - supported the "Walk for the Hungry" funding. Mr. Cooper said that Mr. Robinson refused to fund this "Walk to Feed the Hungry" citizens of Pitt County in this proposed budget. He asked how the Manager could refuse to fund this great need. He commented on funding of the Jackie Robinson league and also supported the full funding of the \$3 million for the schools.

Olivia Kay Clyde - volunteer parent in schools for 14 years. Ms. Clyde said she has assisted teachers, given materials and loaned materials; urged the Board to fund the request for schools. She said the motto at E.B. Aycock is "if it is going to be, it is up to me."

Nancy Colville stated she had been to the budget workshops and complimented the Board and Manager for the factual information they provided. She stated that it was unfortunate that the people present have not attended regular meetings of the Board because they have not heard the whole picture. She said these people need to take their complaints to the School Board. She stated she was in support of the teachers receiving raises but opposed to the superintendent and principals getting the same thing. She stated she was opposed to raising taxes. She said there are a lot of elderly people in this community that would be strained if their taxes were raised. She stated that if the school board has \$2 million in reserve, why not use it for some of the problems in funding that they have brought up tonight.

Mary Snow Harris, SPCA of Pitt County, said this issue needs to be considered and she said she was impressed with the research which has been done. She noted the euthanizing of animals going on in this County. She said the citizens are not aware but there is a desperate need for a new animal shelter. She encouraged the County to continue working with the SPCA and Humane Society to establish the new animal shelter. She stated that Mr. Robinson and Mr. Bulow have done a lot of work already on this project.

Ephraim Smith - Chairman, Pitt County Board of Education - thanked the people who came in support of education. He said that there has been more dialogue this year between the two Boards and hopes that it continues. He spoke of concern about not many graduates going into farming. He said if the County is going to move students to a higher level it is going to demand more money from the local side. He said they need to improve the public schools. He stated that the Board of Commissioners has worked on funding the facilities and maintenance and need to make the initial investment in the students.

Rita McLawhorn - two children at Chicod School, said she had a niece that is in the exceptional children's program which has third, fourth and fifth grade students in one class and they did not learn anything. She stated they needed more money to educate these students.

Chairman James closed the public hearing at 7:55 p.m.

Commissioner Comments

Chairman James stated that the State of North Carolina is to pay the public school teachers. He said he attended and taught public schools as well as his children and grandchildren have attended public schools. It is the State's duty and responsibility to get teachers where they

should be financially. He stated if the State would fund the teachers better then there would be more local funds to hire the additional teachers.

Commissioner Bowen stated that he had received cards from people but they did not give their names and phone numbers. He encouraged the people attending to go and attend the Board of Education meetings because that is where the funds are decided on once the County makes the appropriation. He said he had asked the Board of Education members if they would promise the funds would go to the school teachers but not one would make that promise.

Commissioner Hammond thanked everyone for attending and stated that the whole is the sum of all the parts. The State has done a lot for teachers salaries. The Governor led that fight and should be applauded in funding teachers salaries. He said he would like to see the County continue to support the Community College and discussed his daughter who graduated from college and cannot not find a job in Pitt County that had anything to do with her degree. Commissioner Hammond said he supported the local option sales tax, but that it failed in the Legislature because it did not have the people's support. He said there may be waste in government but there is not enough to make up all the needs for which funding has been requested. We all have to coexist in this County. He said he hoped to see a time when every request will receive something from this Board. He also noted that the current plan would penalize some of the rescue squads. He wanted this funding proposal to be revisited.

Commissioner Ward said that as a County Commissioner, past educator, parent of three children raised through the Pitt County schools, said she had said the same thing over the past twenty-two years. She said there are many people pulling on the coattails for funding in this County. She said that when you have looked at every angle, and have heard every time the Board of Commissioners has met, that education is the priority, then the people should realize that the maximum funding feasible will be done for the schools.

Vice Chairman Savage expressed a citizen's concern from Farmville, Ms. Slakes about the schools funding.

The meeting was recessed at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Banks, CMC
Clerk to the Board