



CITY GETS GRANTS TO EXPAND GREENLIGHT

GREENLIGHT was finally able in 2021 to provide world-class Internet and other fiber services to some areas neighboring Wilson, thanks to grant funding.

“As has been made clear throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, broadband is essential infrastructure,”

said Greenlight Community Broadband General Manager Will Aycok. “Broadband access facilitates remote work, distance learning, and general participation in today’s digital world. This grant will provide highly-valued infrastructure to more areas of Wilson County, enabling more citizens and businesses to thrive in the post pandemic economy.”

In April the City of Wilson received \$1.2 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) to expand broadband access in Wilson County. The funding came from a CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to increase broadband capacity and bolster the region’s ability to withstand future economic disruptions. The grant was matched with \$300,000 in local investment.

The funding will allow Greenlight to expand within the corporate limits of several towns in Wilson County:

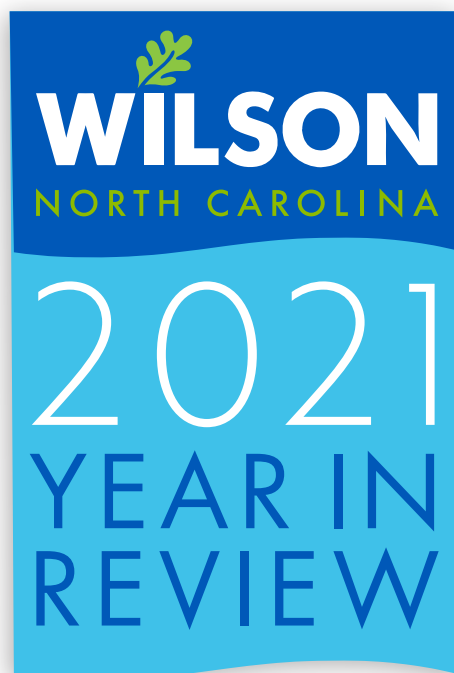
Black Creek, Lucama, Saratoga and Stantonsburg. The project must be complete within 24 months of the receipt of funding.

The City also received a \$180,000 Truist EPIC grant that allowed Greenlight to expand to nearly 200

households in eastern Wilson County. Not only was the grant instrumental in the network expansion, it also served as the proof of concept for the outreach and digital inclusion efforts that are a central to the mission of Greenlight’s GigEast Exchange effort.

This was further bolstered by receipt of a “Future of Work is Digital” grant from Microsoft in partnership with the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI). This grant will provide digital skill training to more than 20 local residents, and support many of them in internships with local businesses. This model exemplifies Greenlight’s mission to support the economic health of our community and enhance the quality of life of our citizens through utilization of technology.

Greenlight also received \$250,000 of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding that will expand the network to hundreds of additional customers in both western and eastern Wilson County.





EVENTS BEGIN SLOW RETURN TO NORMAL

COVID SHUT ALL CITY EVENTS for more than a year, forcing many gatherings online and conducted from the safety of our homes. But 2021 allowed us to gradually bring back our favorite traditions and in almost all cases, everyone was delighted to be back in person.

Check out the Facebook reviews for the 2021 Wilson Christmas Parade:



"Absolutely awesome"

"This was my first parade since I moved here. I loved it!"

"It was a wonderful parade, folks! Thanks for your hard work."

It was tricky to plan for 2021 events amid a constantly changing landscape of COVID numbers, vaccination rates, and CDC recommendations. Yet a desire for normalcy drove us to plan outdoor events, always following current precautions. The first event was National Night Out, held in August at Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park, which drew one of the best crowds we ever had for that event.

The N.C. Whirligig Festival returned in November and enjoyed good crowds despite chilly, blustery weather. That was followed by the Veterans Day service, the first in-person event held in two years by the Wilson Committee on Patriotism.

The Christmas parade was a real test, though. Would people want to take part? Would everyone feel safe to come? Would Santa show up? The answers were yes, yes and yes! The Dec. 4 parade drew a huge crowd along Nash Street and then drew rave reviews.

As 2022 dawned, plans were for more events to return including the outdoor movie series at the Whirligig Park.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Santa comes to town at the Christmas parade; a father and son celebrate Veteran's Day events, and a dance team shows off their talents.





BIDDLE NAMED POLICE CHIEF; STATON JOINS LEADERSHIP

THREE LONG-TIME MEMBERS of the city's leadership were able to retire in 2021, and two city departments have new leadership.

Scott Biddle, a 29-year veteran of the Wilson Police Department, was sworn into office as the department's chief in June. He replaced Thomas Hopkins, who had held the job for 11 years before retirement.

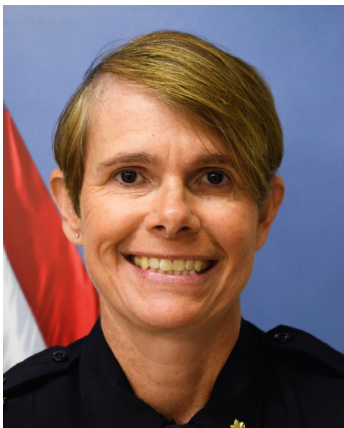
Wilson City Manager Grant Goings called Chief Biddle "not only a great leader within the Wilson Police Department, he's an outstanding citizen of our community. ... His passion for the Wilson Police Department and our City is contagious. He will be a great Chief and an outstanding mentor to the future leaders of our department."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Police Chief Scott Biddle gets sworn in; Amy Staton, Wilson's new chief financial officer; Majors Benny Boykin and Kendra Howell

Biddle built his team by promoting two veteran officers, Benny Boykin and Kendra Howell, to the rank of major. Boykin and Howell brought a combined 52 years of experience to their new positions, which ranks right below chief. Howell is the first female major in the department's history.

Also, the city hired Amy Staton as the new chief financial officer. She had more than 25 years of local government experience, including serving as the finance director for the city of Rocky Mount for 14 years. She replaced Kim Hands, who had worked for the city since 2007 and retired after almost a decade as the chief financial officer.

Finally, 2021 also capped the career of Deputy City Manager Harry Tyson, who had worked for the city for more than 32 years. He had held several roles including serving as the police chief for six years and as deputy city manager since 2010.



FACE OF DOWNTOWN CONTINUES TO CHANGE

WHEN 2020 ENDED, Historic Downtown Wilson was most changed by what was missing – the BB&T Towers, a landmark for decades. As 2021 ended, that vacant spot has been replaced with a beautiful new Foundation YMCA and a city-owned parking garage under construction.

The Y is on schedule to open this year. It will include all the typical YMCA features including a large swimming pool. It will also house an afterschool network for middle school youth that was financed by the Healthcare Foundation of Wilson.

The Wilson City Council had voted in January 2021 to spend slightly more than \$15 million on the nearly 700-space parking deck. It is intended to serve a nearby Truist facility, the Foundation Y, and future retail and residential development.

NSV Development will be building a large-scale residential/retail mixed-use development fronting Pine and Nash Streets with that work possibly starting by late 2022.

“We believe the impact of this block will be tremendous, a community-changing development of a scale unseen by cities of Wilson’s size,” said Grant Goings, Wilson City Manager.

These improvements were part of record-setting investment in the area.

The city had more than \$57 million in public/private investment in fiscal year 2020-21, the second straight year that the city has topped all North Carolina Main Street Center communities. The city was recognized at the N.C. Main Street Manager’s Meeting in August 2021.

Another part of the changes downtown were the conversions of Tarboro Street and Pine Street from one-way streets to two-way streets. The long-planned project, which began in April, both improved traffic flow and made merchants happier. The roads were also resurfaced, which made everyone happier.





WILSON PARKS AND REC GETS PERFECT SCORE ON ACCREDITATION

WILSON PARKS & RECREATION accomplished a many-years goal of Parks and Recreation Director David Lee when it earned national accreditation in 2021, becoming the third city program to achieve elite status on a national level.

But the parks department went even further than dreamt, earning a perfect score from the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), which is part of the National Recreation Park Association (NRPA).

"We are thrilled to finally receive our CAPRA national award," Lee said "It took a lot of time and hard work by our staff to reach national accreditation status. ... When you add the fact we got a perfect score of 154 out of 154 standards, it makes the accomplishment that much more impressive. All the credit goes to our staff. They were just awesome during this whole process."

Nationally, only 192 parks and recreation agencies have earned the status, less than 1% of all agencies. Only 14 other communities in North Carolina have reached the accreditation.

City staff had to prepare information about how they met national standards related to the management and administration of lands, facilities, resources, programs, safety, communications, and services. This was done with written materials as well as a virtual video visit that

showcased city properties. An evaluation team was able to ask questions and ultimately gave the Wilson team a perfect scorecard.

The accreditation team was honored at the October 2021 Wilson City Council meeting. They included Troy Blaser, Lesia Davis, Dale Edmonds, Jonson Ellison, Richard Frazier (accreditation manager), Fern Jones, David Lee, Brian Massey, Kelsey Newsome, Braxton Patterson, and Jordan Phillips.

The city's police and fire departments are also nationally accredited. The process includes a initial application and then periodic reevaluation.



WILSON HAS THOUSANDS

of visitors each year, both coming here for events and passing through. Now they have dozens of wayfinding signs to steer them in the right directions. City staff worked with tourism and transportation officials to design signs installed in early 2021, including at the city's gateways.

NEARLY \$1M WILL PUSH GREENWAY FORWARD

FOR YEARS, Wilson officials have envisioned a greenway that would follow Hominy Creek through the heart of Wilson, connecting all parts of the city with each other and all of us with nature.

In November 2021, the Hominy Creek Greenway took a huge step toward reality when the U.S. Department of Transportation announced a \$950,000 grant for the greenway's design and planning.

The first section of the greenway is open and runs from Williams Day Camp to the Wilson Recreation Center on Sunset Road. This grant will allow the city to design a 3.8-mile section that would extend the greenway through Historic Downtown Wilson and possibly to U.S. 301.

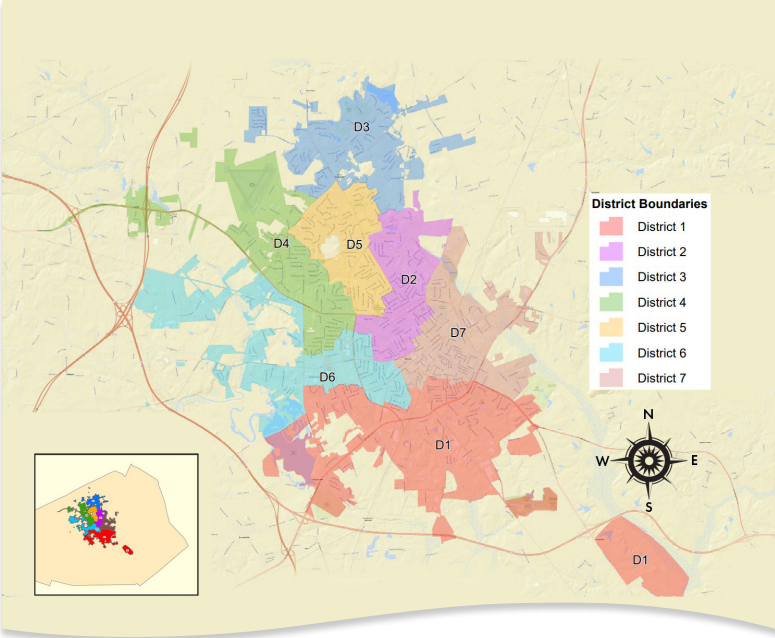
Residents have been asking for a greenway for more than a decade. Parks and recreation surveys have consistently found people want more varied ways to walk. Every walkway that has opened has quickly earned raves and heavy foot traffic.

But a greenway along Hominy Creek, also called Hominy Swamp, accomplishes a second objective.

Wilson grew along the banks of Hominy Swamp Creek, which runs nearly 10 miles through the center of the city. Its water once was strong enough to power a grist mill. But the growth was damaging as storms washed erosion, debris and pollution into the creek. The water quality was so poor that it wouldn't support any type of life. The creek also flooded during many storms.

The city has been working for years to reduce flooding and improve water quality in the creek. The greenway would include water retention areas that would help alleviate flooding. The walkways would include educational materials and encourage people to be better stewards of their natural areas.

The plan will allow the city to begin seeking grants for construction.



CITY COUNCIL COMPLETES REDISTRICTING

THE WILSON CITY COUNCIL redrew its districts in November 2021, which allows the city to plan its next elections this year and for a decade to come.

The 2020 Census had found the city's seven districts were out of balance. Federal law requires each district have roughly the same number of residents, as a protection of the "one-person, one-vote" requirements in the U.S. Constitution. The Census found the 3rd and 4th districts had gained the most population since 2010.

City Council began a process of redrawing the maps in September and looked at four alternates before voting unanimously for the "3A plan." The plan increase the area of the 1st, 2nd and 7th districts and made changes to the others.

Those districts will be used soon. Filing will open this spring for Districts 3, 5, 6 and 7, and the council members elected will serve until December 2025.

Elections in districts 1, 2 and 4 will be held in November 2023, as well as the next race for mayor. Those seats will be for four years.

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