

## General Assembly

# Airport, runoff fees top issues

Forsyth commissioners  
discuss their concerns  
with state legislators

BY MEGHANNE EVANS  
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State legislators who met with Forsyth County commissioners on Thursday did not rule out the possibility of considering some type of legislation for Smith Reynolds Airport in the future, but they also want to see if county and city leaders can reach some agreement.

On Thursday morning, county commissioners hosted their annual joint meeting with the county's state legislators.

Forsyth County commissioners have been discussing possible ways to get the airport relief from city fees or taxes.

Commissioner Ted Kaplan presented for feedback proposals for legislators to consider de-annexing Smith Reynolds Airport from Winston-Salem and to exempt government property from municipal stormwater fees.

County commissioners have not formally voted on any resolutions yet, but a majority favor the efforts, Kaplan said.

The board is not unanimous, though. Commissioners Walter Marshall and Everette Witherspoon got into a back-and-forth debate Thursday over stormwater fees the city charges the airport.

State Sens. Paul Lowe and Joyce Krawiec and state Reps. Julia Howard, Donny Lambeth and Evelyn Terry attended



Kaplan



Krawiec

## Issues

From Page A1

Thursday's meeting and listened to commissioners' concerns.

The Airport Commission of Forsyth County, an independent unit of the county that operates Smith Reynolds Airport, voted last month to ask the county to explore de-annexation, which supporters say would help make the airport more competitive. Tenants currently pay personal-property taxes to both the city and county.

The city, which stands to lose revenue, opposes de-annexation.

Airport officials have been trying since last year to get the Winston-Salem City Council to exempt airport runways and taxiways from city stormwater fees. The Airport Commission pays about \$120,000 in stormwater fees to the city each year, which airport officials say is about 20 percent of the Airport Commission's net budget and could be used on needed capital projects.

City leaders are still dis-

cussing options and have crafted a proposal to present up to \$100,000 a year for seven to 10 years to help the Airport Commission get access to federal grant funds to complete much-needed capital projects.

Dave Plyler, chairman of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, said afterward that some city and county officials plan to meet Tuesday to continue discussing the issue.

Lambeth told commissioners Thursday that legislators have great relations with the city as well. He told commissioners it would be better if they could work it out with the city, but if they can't, then come to the legislative delegation.

Lambeth said after the meeting that there are not a lot of opportunities in the upcoming short session to deal with legislation that has not already been introduced, but that he would try to get staffers to research what other cities and counties are doing regarding airports and stormwater fees.

Lowe said if taxation was a major issue at the air-

port, maybe they could try to work on some kind of tax credit if corporate-jet owners park their planes at Smith Reynolds.

Earlier in the meeting, he told commissioners that he hopes the city and county can come together and find some solutions, adding, "The last place you need to bring your problem, right now, is to Raleigh."

Krawiec said afterward that she would study the issue. She said if commissioners can work out a deal that is suitable for the city and county it would make her happy, but that she also sees the need to make the airport more competitive.

State Rep. Debra Conrad, who considered filing de-annexation legislation last year, could not attend the meeting Thursday.

"We're hoping that discussions between the county commissioners and the city council are productive, because the money is an issue," Conrad said Thursday afternoon.

Getting a local bill filed during the short session would require all of Forsyth

County's delegation to be on board, she said.

Members of the delegation will probably meet to discuss where they stand on the issue when they return to Raleigh, she said. She said county officials do need to continue to talk to the city first to see if they can resolve it without state action.

The most heated point of Thursday's meeting came when Marshall and Witherspoon discussed stormwater fees.

Marshall said he does not favor exempting people from paying stormwater fees and is concerned about the environment. The city uses stormwater fees for its stormwater management program.

Witherspoon argued that any stormwater issues would be taken care of regardless and that taking 20 percent of the airport's net income through stormwater fees is damaging to the airport.

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