

3/14/2013

4/2013

NEWS

Smith Reynolds files appeal to keep tower

olds files ep tower

BY FRAN DANIEL

Winston-Salem Journal

Potentially dangerous traffic with two runways, military and emergency relief, millions in infrastructure investments and designation as a national asset were among the reasons cited by officials in their appeal to keep Smith Reynolds Airport's tower open.

Officials made Wednesday's deadline to appeal the Federal Aviation Administration's decision to close the air traffic control tower because of budget cuts from the federal sequester.

"It's important to us that we do everything we can to make sure that the tower remains in operation at Smith Reynolds, and that's what we're going to do," said Thomas McKim, the chairman of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County.

The airport commission made its case for the tower to remain open in a seven-page letter signed by McKim and Airport Director Mark Davidson to the FAA.

Airport officials focused on a designation by the FAA last May that listed Smith Reynolds as one of the top general aviation airports in the country in a report titled "General Aviation Airports: A National Asset."

Airport officials said the closing of the Smith Reynolds tower will negatively

affect "the national interest in that it will impair the airport's ability to serve its role as a national airport."

They gave several other reasons that the airport should have a tower, including potentially challenging and dangerous traffic operations because of two runways. They cited military and emergency relief activity at the airport, and substantial investment by the FAA, including millions of dollars for a runway safety area project.

The FAA plans to close more than 170 contract towers throughout the country as part of its plans to reduce costs by about \$600 million for the remainder of 2013. The airport towers are scheduled to close April 7. The agency will finalize its closings list by Monday.

Smith Reynolds' tower is operated by five contract employees who would lose their jobs if it closes.

McKim said there should be proportionate reductions across the board in all programs for agencies that are being asked to reduce expenditures as part of the sequester process.

"What the FAA is doing is they are concentrating 75 percent of their reduction in just this contract tower program," he said. "It seems that rather than squeezing a little bit of savings incrementally out of a lot of different places, they are taking a meat cleaver

to a very important program that provides service to a lot of people at a lot of airports all over the country, with Smith Reynolds being one of them."

Late Wednesday, a bipartisan group of senators introduced an amendment to the Senate Continuing Resolution aimed at protecting the contract tower program.

"I am strongly opposed to the FAA's plan to target air traffic control towers across the country, including the towers included in the Contract Tower Program," said Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., a sponsor of the amendment.

The Airport Commission of Forsyth County's appeal has 14 letters of support, including statements from Mayor Allen Joines, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, the Piedmont Triad Partnership, Piedmont Flight Training, Rockingham County Airport Authority, pilots and the manager of the tower at Smith Reynolds.

"Closing the tower at Smith Reynolds could jeopardize aviation safety and efficiency and will definitely have a negative economic impact because of its effect on our two large growing aircraft maintenance companies in Winston-Salem," Joines said in his letter.

fdaniel@wsjournal.com (336)727-7366

inter- pair the serve its rport." al oth- airport ver, in- y chal- gerous because hey cit- ergency airport, invest- includ- ollars for rea proj-

to close contract out the its plans by about the re- . The air- scheduled he agency osings list

ds' tower is re contract would lose oses.

ere should ate reduc- e board in or agencies asked to re- res as part r process.

AA is doing ncentrating their reduc- his contract m," he said. t rather than tle bit of sav- ntally out of a t places, they

meat cleaver

to a very important program that provides service to a lot of people at a lot of airports all over the country, with Smith Reynolds being one of them."

Late Wednesday, a bipartisan group of senators introduced an amendment to the Senate Continuing Resolution aimed at protecting the contract tower program.

"I am strongly opposed to the FAA's plan to target air traffic control towers across the country, including the towers included in the Contract Tower Program," said Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., a sponsor of the amendment.

The Airport Commission of Forsyth County's appeal has 14 letters of support, including statements from Mayor Allen Joines, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, the Piedmont Triad Partnership, Piedmont Flight Training, Rockingham County Airport Authority, pilots and the manager of the tower at Smith Reynolds.

"Closing the tower at Smith Reynolds could jeopardize aviation safety and efficiency and will definitely have a negative economic impact because of its effect on our two large growing aircraft maintenance companies in Winston-Salem," Joines said in his letter.

fdaniel@wsjournal.com (336)727-7366

Area News

Husband, wife face

funded from the 2012 Capital Projects Fund. The pilot is a test of one possible