

# Aviation campus worth strong consideration

As they take up a fall bond referendum, Forsyth County commissioners should give strong consideration to Forsyth Technical Community College's proposal to build a \$16-million aviation campus at Smith Reynolds Airport.

Forsyth Tech would use it to provide training that people need for jobs at companies around the airport, the Journal's John Hinton reported Thursday.

Forsyth Tech President Gary Green has proposed that the money for the project come from the \$65 million bond referendum that the commissioners are considering putting on the November ballot. With the funds, Forsyth Tech would likely build or renovate a hangar across the street from the airport and use it as the base for an associate-degree program in aviation technology. The school could also open an aviation-electronics program that would train people to work on the electronics in planes.

The Federal Aviation Administration would certify those training programs, Green told the Journal. "There are great opportunities to grow jobs around the airport and in our region," he said. "Some employers need an ongoing workforce of skilled technicians. That's our mission, to provide these type of workers with these opportunities."

Airport officials are on board with the plans. "Our existing tenants are always seeking qualified people in metal work, aircraft mechanics and avionics," Mark Davidson, the airport's director, told the Journal. "We think it will revitalize and help Smith Reynolds Airport."

Scott Piper, the chairman of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, agreed with Davidson. The commission oversees operations at the airport.

"This is very necessary," Scott Piper, the chairman of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, told the Journal. "It will provide educational opportunities and jobs to the area."

The proposal makes sense. The airport would surely serve not only to help instruct the Forsyth Tech students, but also to employ budding aviation technologists.

Possible employers include North State Aviation, B/E Aerospace Inc. Aero 8 Inc. and Signature Flight Support, airport officials told the Journal.

If county commissioners agree to Forsyth Tech's proposal and voters approve the bond, construction could begin within two to three years. The aviation campus could be open by 2019, the Journal reported.

The Smith Reynolds Airport has received overdue notice in recent times after being underutilized for years. It may never again be as busy with flights as it was a couple of generations ago. But with proposals like this, it may be about to come into its own as a jobs hub.

The airport is also pursuing seven infrastructure projects that the county has agreed to support that would improve and expand on its current facilities. The county has reserved up to \$1.5 million to go with \$22.95 million in projected federal and state funding, the Journal reported.

We hope county commissioners will give serious consideration to Forsyth Tech's proposal. That, along with the other improvements, will attract more tenants and create more jobs in a time when the companies at the airport now struggle to find skilled help.