

Stormwater fees up for discussion

Broader exemptions would include all government buildings

BY MEGHANN EVANS
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Forsyth County leaders have been discussing possible ways to get Smith Reynolds Airport relief from city stormwater runoff fees, but a broader idea is also up for discussion.

Forsyth County commissioners will talk with the county's state legislators at 11 a.m. today during an annual meeting to share local concerns and ideas.

The list of topics that commissioners have proposed for discussion includes "Exempt local governments from stormwater fees imposed by local municipalities."

The issue of city stormwater fees has been a big part of county commissioners' debates in recent weeks in connection with Smith Reynolds.

But commissioners Ted Kaplan and Don Martin also have highlighted the stormwater fee impact on schools.

They want to gauge whether legislators are in-

terested in exempting government facilities statewide from paying stormwater fees.

Martin said all they are doing is talking to legislators, and maybe it will prompt more discussion between the city and county.

The board of commissioners has not taken a vote on the issue.

Commissioner Walter Marshall has argued that reducing stormwater fees

could have a negative impact on the environment.

Lee Garrity, Winston-Salem's city manager, said the city would be opposed to the proposal to exempt local governments.

According to information provided to commissioners, properties tied to Forsyth County government generated about \$408,634 in stormwater fees in 2014-15.

That included \$120,101 from the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, \$233,391 from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, and \$55,142 from Forsyth County.

The fees support the city's efforts to manage stormwater — the rain or melted snow that runs off of surfaces such as parking lots and into nearby streams and water sources.

Garrity said the stormwater fee is fairly applied to all property, minus roads and sidewalks, based on the amount of impervious surface.

The city stormwater program is a separate enterprise fund, Garrity said, so even properties owned by the city are billed.

Airport officials last year asked the Winston-Salem City Council to exempt airport runways and taxiways from the stormwater fee calculation, but the request has remained in a city committee.

Officials with the Airport Commission, an independent unit of the county that operates the airport, say the airport could use that money for local matching funds to leverage federal dollars for needed capital

projects.

Last month, the Airport Commission voted in favor of exploring de-annexation from Winston-Salem, and county commissioners have been discussing whether to make that request to state legislators.

City officials have crafted a proposal to provide up to \$100,000 a year for seven to 10 years to help the Airport Commission complete some of its capital projects which could go to the city council in May, depending on how discussions with the county progress.

The proposal would require a county match, and the airport would have to remain in the city limits.



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