

City panel endorses airport deal

BY WESLEY YOUNG
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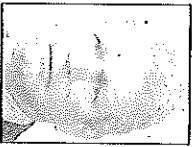
Winston-Salem and Forsyth County are close to an agreement that would provide more support for Smith Reynolds Airport and forestall further talk about de-annexation and other contentious issues.

The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the agreement Monday, and the Winston-Salem City Council's finance committee endorsed the proposal on Monday and sent it to the full council for a vote on May 16.

Robert Clark, who chairs the city's finance committee, hailed the agreement as a chance to help the airport thrive, shortly before

his committee gave the proposal unanimous approval.

"We have an airport that survives, and that's what it is doing, it survives," Clark said. "I do think our airport can thrive. It can be a place where planes come in and are serviced."



Clark

County commissioners, trying to make the airport more competitive, have talked about de-annexation or relief from city stormwater fees, and Clark offered a compromise recently that would have partially de-annexed the airport.

The proposal that came out of negotiations between the

city and county looks different from Clark's idea, but it provides \$2.4 million in extra support for the airport. The city and county will each contribute \$1.2 million over eight years by paying out \$150,000 each.

One of the conditions the city is attaching to the deal is that the airport has to stay in the city limits. When Clark first brought forward his idea, some in the city worried about the precedent of even limited de-annexation.

City officials said that the airport has identified \$25 million in capital improvements that it needs to carry out over the next four years. The contributions from the city and county can go towards meetings those expenses. The county approved the

agreement with no discussion on Monday.

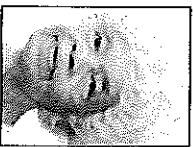
Scott Piper, the chairman of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, came to the city's finance committee meeting and called the pending agreement signs of "an exciting time" for the airport.

"We have a lot of work to do to attract new folks to bring aircraft in and bring business in," Piper told the city leaders.

City staffers, in a report to the council, said there are 1,620 jobs directly associated with the airport through 20 employees. As well, the city estimates that another 2,000 jobs are indirectly created by the airport in the local economy.

With improvements, the city officials said, the airport can

be a "port" for local businesses that would help attract new employers.



Burke

Council Member Vivian Burke didn't oppose the agreement but said the airport does need to do a better job working with the people who live nearby and have to put up with air show noise and other concerns. "I would hope that the airport authority would be more sensitive to the citizens in the area," Burke said.

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