De-annexation or relief for airport

By Meganne Evans
Winston-Salem Journal

Northampton County administration officials are preparing resolutions for county commissioners to consider if the Board of County Commissioners, following discussions at Thursday's commissioners briefing.

Last Thursday's commissioners briefing included a lengthy discussion that featured everything from a primer on stormwater fees to talk of county-city relations. Some commissioners criticized city officials for not already acting on the airport's request for a stormwater fee reduction.

The Airport Commission asked the Winston-Salem City Council to exempt airport runways and taxways from the stormwater fee, saying they are public thoroughfares, but the request has been in committee since last fall and has not made it to the full council.

According to the Airport Commission, the city collects about $118,000 in stormwater fees from the Airport Commission, which is equivalent to about 20 percent of the airport's annual net income.

Kaplan said he does not understand the problem they are having with the city regarding stormwater fees. He said the county last year voted to loan the Airport Commission $1.5 million for projects such as moving a taxiway that is too close to a runway.

Kaplan said the stormwater fee has impacted the airport's ability to do those projects without a county loan and could impact jobs.

Commissioner Everett Witherspoon said the city should be giving the airport $118,000, not taking it away. He said the airport is an economic engine creating jobs in eastern Winston-Salem.

"We hear all about economic development in East Winston. We need to look after our area. And then you have a business that runs off property and ultimately to nearby streams and rivers, picking up pollutants along the way."

Commissioner Walter Marshall, who lives near the airport, expressed concerns March 24 about the request to reduce stormwater fees and wanted to make sure that any changes would not have a negative effect on the environment.

Marshall said he thinks the city and county can work together to provide some financial assistance to the airport without pursuing de-annexation.

"The city recognizes the strong economic impact of Smith Reynolds Airport," City Manager Lee Garrity wrote in an email Friday. "I believe the city will be looking at options to partner with the county to increase economic development efforts related to the airport."

"I would expect to see serious discussion at upcoming city council meetings."

mvans@wsjournal.com
(336) 727-7204
@mangWSJ

From Page A1

fees, and aircraft would no longer be subject to city personal-property taxes.

The Airport Commission, an independent unit of the county which operates Smith Reynolds, voted March 23 to explore de-annexation. Mark Davidson, the airport's director, took that recommendation to commissioners.

County Commissioner Ted Kaplan, who also sits on the Airport Commission, raised the de-annexation idea at county commissioner meetings a year ago. He said that Smith Reynolds is at a competitive disadvantage with other airports, because aircraft are subject to both city and county taxes. The city collects about $294,000 in personal-property taxes from airport tenants each year, according to documents from the Airport Commission.

Commissioners will continue the discussion at