

City/County airport negotiations continue

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Forsyth County commissioners passed a resolution asking state lawmakers to exempt local governments from stormwater fees and the Airport Commission heard a new proposal from City Council Member Robert Clark on Monday, April 25.

Stormwater fees at the Smith Reynolds Airport, which is owned by the County, have been a source of tension between city and county governments for months. The airport asked the City to exempt its runways and taxiways from fees last year but the item is still in committee. According to airport officials, the \$118,000 it spends in annual stormwater fees could be used to leverage money from state and federal government for capital projects at the airport to attract more business.

The Airport Commission, which runs the airport, voted in March to ask the County to seek

de-annexation of the airport from the city as a solution to the problem. County Commissioners mentioned the idea to state lawmakers last week who urged them to find a local solution with the City instead.

Clark's airport compromise

Clark presented his own potential compromise to the Airport Commission during its monthly meeting. His proposal, which he had yet to run by his City Council colleagues, involved de-annexing just the runways, taxiways and a small plane parking area, while leaving buildings and the surrounding land in the city. This "split the baby in half" solution would cut stormwater fees in half and was meant to open dialog between the City and County.

"I do think it's important to preserve the relationship between the City and County," said Clark, who represents the West Ward and is the sole Republican on the council. The airport commis-

sioners welcomed the idea. "On the surface this is a very, very good opening," said County Commissioner Ted Kaplan, who sits on the Airport Commission.

Airport Commission Chair Scott Piper also felt the proposal was getting them close to where they wanted to be. However, airport commissioners said they felt it only addressed part of the problem. Other airports in the state, such as Piedmont International Airport near Greensboro, tend to be located outside city limits, thus planes don't pay city property tax. This makes leasing a hangar at Smith Reynolds much more expensive than its competitors. For example, plane owners pay 42 percent less property tax at PTL. Airport officials say they want to "level the playing field" so Smith Reynolds can compete. The City collects approximately \$294,000 annually in personal property taxes from Smith Reynolds tenants.

After the meeting, Kaplan met with Clark and

City Council Members DD Adams and Jeff MacIntosh, who were also in attendance, behind closed doors. Kaplan and Clark said afterwards they felt progress is being made on a possible agreement and that the matter is being worked on now by City and County staff to come up with a more concrete proposal to present to their colleagues.

Even if county commissioners and City Council approved it, any de-annexation would require legislation that would have to be passed by the General Assembly. Clark's proposal is just one of several on the table. The City has drafted a resolution for the City and County to each give up to \$100,000 a year in matching funds to help the airport secure state and federal funds for capital improvements. City Council public works committee is also considering stormwater credits for businesses that make structural improvements to reduce stormwater runoff.

County's stormwater fee request

During its Monday meeting, county commissioners argued that it's unfair for local governments to pay the city stormwater fees and passed a resolution asking state lawmakers to exempt governmental entities from stormwater fees, citing the airport and the local school system, which pays \$233,391.

The vote was 5-2 with County Commissioner Walter Marshall as one of the dissenters saying that all properties with impervious surface of more than 400 square feet, regardless of who owns them, are required to pay for federally mandated stormwater management.

"We're asking the State to do something it doesn't have the power to do," he said.

Stormwater fees on impervious surfaces, charged by the acre for businesses, are used by the City to fund stormwater management, a program

required by the Federal Clean Water Act in larger cities to protect bodies of water from pollution that can come from stormwater runoff. Stormwater fees are a common way cities fund the program, though some cities add the cost onto its property taxes instead.

County Commissioner Everett Witherspoon was the other "no" vote. He wondered how such exemptions might affect the budgets of stormwater programs in other cities. Though he felt the airport is paying too much in fees compared to its revenue, the fees are only a fraction of the percentage of the school system's and the county's budget.

"We have the ability to pay," said Witherspoon.

County Commissioner Don Martin, a former local school superintendent, countered that even if it was a small part of the budget, the school system could still find better uses for the money.

UNC system president checks out WSSU

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Margaret Spellings' tour of the all the institutions in the University of North Carolina (UNC) system stopped on the campus of Winston-Salem State University earlier this week.

Spellings visit was part of a 100-day listening tour where the newly appointed president intends to visit all 16 public universities, the NC School of Science and Mathematics, the NC Research Campus in Annapolis and UNC Health Care.

WSSU was the fifteenth stop on Spellings' list of public universities. She is scheduled to return to Winston-Salem on Friday, April 29, to visit the N.C. School of the Arts.

Prior to joining the state's university system, Spellings served as the U.S. Secretary of Education and White House domestic policy advisor. During that time she helped launch No Child Left Behind, which has since been replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which was signed by President Barack Obama last year.

Spellings has also served as the president of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, worked with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Education Advisory Board.

During her nine-hour tour of WSSU on Tuesday, April 26, complete with performances by the marching band, Spellings sat down with a number of students to discuss the future of the UNC system. She men-

tioned most students are concerned about the affordability of education.

On a number of stops on the tour, students have made it clear that they are not happy with the UNC Board of Governors' decision to appoint Spellings president because of her involvement with Apollo Group, a company that collects student loan debts. Apollo Group also oversees the University of Phoenix, a for-profit institution.

When asked how she plans to address the students' concerns, Spellings said, "I plan to take these issues to the N.C. Legislature and push for more resources here and at every other institution in the system."

"That's my job. To be their advocate," she said.

While on her listening tour, Spellings also met with Chancellor Elwood Robinson and the WSSU Board of Trustees. Robinson said Spellings was very attentive during her many discussions throughout the day.

"Everyone she met with today, she gave her full attention," he said. "We want to thank her for spending that time with us today."

When asked what she has learned from her tour of the institutions in the UNC System, Spellings said, "I have learned how different each university in this system is."

"Each one has a unique character, leader and even community," she continued. "That's the strength of this system."

More than

534,000

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS *and* GRANTS

make for a lot of

PROUD STUDENTS.

And even prouder parents.

Since 2006, the North Carolina Education Lottery has raised over \$4 billion for education. That's an average of \$1.4 million a day. Here's to our 10th anniversary and to all the bright futures across the state.

Must be 18 to play. Problem Gambling Helpline: 877-718-5543.