

County 'bans the box,' picks courthouse architect

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Forsyth County Commissioners voted to "Ban the Box" by removing the question about criminal records from county job applications during its Thursday, April 12, meeting.

Commissioners received letters requesting the change to its job applications from a coalition of about 100 people from various churches, nonprofits and civic organizations coordinated by the All God's Children Ministry Team at Knollwood Baptist Church.

The resolution, which received unanimous approval, authorized the creation of a Fair Chance Employment Policy to ensure those with criminal convictions that are not related to the job they're applying for get fair consideration. Language from an earlier proposed resolution that said the county encourages private employers to do the same thing, which Commissioner Gloria Whisenhunt was uncomfortable with, was not present in the final version.

County staff are formatting the Fair Chance policy and



Anderson



Watts

the criminal record question has already been removed from the county's applications, except for applications for Sheriff's Office positions that are required by state law to ask that question. The county will still do a criminal background check for every application.

Fair Chance Employment activists were pleased. Lisa Sykes, a project leader with All God's Children, said their efforts were successful. Former Chamber of Commerce

President Gayle Anderson was glad to see the county join the City of Winston-Salem in the "Ban the Box" movement.

"Now that the city and the county have both taken this action, we hope this will encourage employers in the private sector ... to do the same thing," said Anderson.

In another item, commissioners voted to pick CJMW Architecture, P.A. to provide architectural and engineering services for the new courthouse that will be built next to the County Government Center on Chestnut Street. CJMW was among five firms that bid for the project and was selected by a committee of courthouse stakeholders as the most qualified. The proposed fee for the firm's services will not exceed \$7.35 million. Design should be completed by Fall 2019 on the project with construction expected to be complete by late 2021.

Commissioners also approved \$115 million in Limited Obligation Bonds for construction of the new court facilities.

"This gets this project off and running," said County Manager Dudley Watts.



File Photo
Smith Reynolds Airport, located on Liberty Street, was the beneficiary of a deal between the city and the county that recently fell through.

City-County airport deal is off

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A deal between the city and county to support the Smith Reynolds Airport is now off, once again opening up the possibility of the airport being de-annexed.

In 2015, Forsyth County, which owns the airport, asked the City of Winston-Salem for an exemption for stormwater fees on runways and taxiways, arguing the money is better spent on the airport's capital needs. When the measure didn't make it past committee, some county commissioners wanted to pursue de-annexing the airport out of the city so it wouldn't have to pay any city fees and taxes.

In 2016, the city and county struck an agreement that they'd both give the airport up to \$150,000 a year for eight years, contingent on the money being approved annually and Smith Reynolds remaining a part of the city. This first payment was made for the 2016-2017 fiscal year, but the county still asked local lawmakers for legislation exempting government entities from stormwater fees.

Commissioner Ted Kaplan suggested starting small with a law just exempting runways and taxiways and N.C. Rep. Debra Conrad agreed. That law passed the General Assembly last year and went into effect on Jan. 1 for all public and military airports in the state.

The city said this reduced the airport's stormwater fees

by \$46,176.36 and late last year the City Council approved reducing the agreement by about that much, so it would give the airport up to \$100,000 a year.

The Forsyth County Airport Commission, a citizens' commission that runs the airport, voted against accepting the change and the county commissioners concurred, deciding to not even vote on the measure when it came up in a briefing last week, meaning the airport will not receive the \$100,000 offered by the city or any matching county funds.

County Commissioner Tad Kaplan, who serves on the Airport Commission, said the city unilaterally changed the deal. He said the city's resolution on the agreement did not mention stormwater fees and was instead contingent on the airport staying in the city. He said without the deal, the county is open to pursue de-annexing the airport, which will require action from the General Assembly.

"We had a problem, so the city wanted to help with the airport's capital projects so we came to an agreement," said Kaplan. "They decided to change it on their own, so

here we are."

However, the city sees things differently. City Manager Lee Garrity and Assistant City Manager Derwick Paige both said they felt it was implicit in the deal that the airport pay its full stormwater fees.

"We didn't change the deal, they didn't pay stormwater fees of \$46,000, so as a result, we reduced our contribution," said Paige.

Airport Commission Chair Scott Piper said that he didn't feel that paying full stormwater fees was implied in the deal and felt the city abruptly walked away from the agreement by cutting its support by a third. He said the airport had planned its budget around the full amount and, without the deal, the airport is leaving its options open on de-annexation.

County commissioners also expressed their displeasure last week. Don Martin called it "unacceptable," which Dave Plyler agreed with. Fleming El-Amin said he was disappointed in the city. Everett Witherspoon said the airport was the only thing going on economically in that area of the city, but that city taxes and fees made it uncompetitive with other airports in the state that aren't part of a city, such as Piedmont Triad International Airport in Guilford County. Witherspoon called de-annexation "extreme," but was willing to listen to the Airport Commission on the matter.



Kaplan



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The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Chronicle Media Group, LLC, 1300 E. Fifth St., Winston Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
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